Sojourning: A Specific Wayfaring Metaphor Related to Environmental Ethics

"Journeys bring power and love back to you." (Rumi)

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Abstract—Current trends in traveling to wilderness areas, observing vanishing species and ecosystems, and participating in challenging activities draw their foundations from a historical context of adventurers and explorers, Grand Tours, and romantic solitary travelers. A metaphor of sojourning is presented that provides an interpretation of wilderness travel related to ethical action and political power structures. Initial discussion looks at four guideposts related to sojourning that include a sojourning mindset, a process of self-reflection, inclusion of all living entities, and political action. Portions of the manuscript set off by [ ] reflect the authors' reflections and experiences that support an integration of experience and theory related to sojourning.

As three travelers from North America, we are committed to protecting those lands labeled special places, wilderness, protected areas, and national parks. And yet, we are increasingly aware of the multiple meanings associated with these lands, the contradictory forces of benefit and harm they set in motion, and the emergence of paradoxical contexts requiring ethical action. We feel an urgency to elaborate alternative accounts, to learn to think differently about wilderness, to invent other frameworks, other images, and other modes of thought, especially in the light of the destruction of wilderness, the challenges that lay before us, and the possibility of collaborative successes. This paper represents our explorations into the meaning of these places, our ethical obligations to those places, and our struggles to enact our values. We are convinced that we must find varying ways to address the ethical issues related to the protection of wilderness and the relationship of humans to wilderness. The metaphor of sojourning has helped us look more critically at our own world views, actions, and ethics. We would like to focus on the present with awareness of the past and an eye to the future and creatively play with a sojourning metaphor that may hold us accountable for our heritage and lead us to new relationships and ethical actions. Is it possible, in the face of complexity and uncertainty, to construct theory and practices that are mindful? We hope so, but believe careful attention must be paid to the contexts in which seemingly isolated elements occur.

This paper is multilayered and emanates from our work separately and collectively. Perhaps as we stand along the edge, like a sojourner, who has lived among multiple places and peoples and can no longer claim one singular identity, we will sense the tensions, the paradoxes, the possibilities, and the ongoing rhythms necessary to live in multiple worlds and layers. The sojourning metaphor focuses on a dynamic nexus involving self, wilderness, movement, ethics related to people and places, and political action. From our perspective, sojourning is one metaphor related to sustaining wilderness and forms of movement that are respectful to...
other cultures as well as to wilderness (including, but not limited to, wilderness, national parks, oceans, atmospheres, wild animal parks, and marine parks). We draw upon insights from postmodern philosophy, critical and radical feminist theory, and literary criticism.

We argue that wilderness is not a simple designation of a physical space. The metaphors and descriptions of wilderness carry with them the history of early explorers’ search for “new lands” and “uninhabited regions.” These explorers often conceived of the “new” lands and people in their own images, and their journals left invisible the value, attributes, and spirit of the places and people they encountered. Many outdoor participants from Euro-North American traditions create similar patterns as they discuss their exploits and self-learning, but not the details and characteristics of the flowers, trees, animals, soils, and people within and around wilderness areas.

Wilderness, therefore, is a contested space. Wilderness is intimately connected with nation-building imagery, colonialistic practices, sociocultural forces, and oppressive structures. Orlie (1997) argues that all actions contain the seeds of benefit and harm. So, the wilderness movement has also spawned ripples of benefits related to ecosystem protection, animal rehabilitation, and cultural symbolism, while other ripples lessen agricultural lands, maintain dualistic relationships between humans and nature, or divide the “haves” from the “have-nots.”

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, sojourn implies a temporary stay in a particular location. A sojourner is a guest, temporary resident, visitor, or boarder who lives in a house, school, or college for the purpose of receiving instruction. A sojourner travels lightly, resides temporarily in an area, learns from others, and shares talents and energy. A sojourner has the time and inclination to connect viscerally with the world around him or her. Although sojourners may imply resources of time and money, sojourners also make deliberate decisions to travel lightly and to be dependent on their own resources on a daily basis. Sojourners can describe an individual with no set agenda except to learn where s/he is and about the people and places s/he visits, or sojourners can imply a mission or purpose associated with the travel. Therefore, sojourners include decisionmaking moments where the individual makes choices and demonstrates cultural perspective through actions taken. Sojourners are chosen as a metaphor to suggest a temporariness of location and to indicate even with a purpose, there is a willingness to learn and change.

Sojourners search for new understandings of self and answers to what Shweder and Bourne (1991) contend are basic existential questions for all individuals and societies, including:

1. What is the relationship between the individual to group, to society, and to the collective?
2. How do we address the ethical issues related to the “haves” and “have-nots”?
3. What is the meaning and relationship between nature and culture?
4. How do we decide to live in a specific way and why should we live this way and not some other way?

The last question, “Why should I live this way and not some other way?” is particularly important to the sojourning metaphor because it begins to examine the issue of whether an individual accepts the answers his or her society provides. Arguably, because of the economic wealth of the Western world, and in the case of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, the relatively short time these societies have had to develop “acceptable” answers, individuals residing in these countries may be both more able and more likely to travel to other societies in an attempt to discover alternative responses to these existential issues. Sojourners, therefore, seems to be closely aligned with exploration of the self through “Other.” (The use of the term “other” denotes people who are usually not included in, made visible by, or considered marginalized by the dominant Euro-North American world view. We have deliberately chosen this term to emphasize the baggage we, as Euro-North Americans, must continually address and the current power realities of today’s world.)

The exploration of self through “Other” is, however, a difficult one fraught with hidden traps; centuries of metaphors, analogies, and descriptions; and generations of philosophical and psychological baggage. The maintenance of an identity, yet permeable and open to the world surrounding the sojourner, is the main focus of the sojourning metaphor and provides the basis for ethical action. The concept of self or selves and subjectivity for a sojourner must be a concept that opens the individual or “limit-experience” to the world. (Limit-experience refers to the process of the limitlessness of the universe as it makes itself visible in discrete and specific phenomena such as people, animals, trees, and ecosystems (Orlie 1997)). The sojourner must know his or her story but be opened to the world and others writing upon the story and reinscribing the story.

The appeal of a sojourning metaphor is that it encompasses self-reflection that may disclose the value of movement as well as the potential for harm as played throughout the history of imperialistic and colonialistic travels. Beginning with ourselves, we are privileged in terms of choice and travel and choose sojourners as a vehicle for critique and accountability of our roles and responsibilities. Sojourners move from belonging to solitude, from solitude to belonging. Often, the sojourner moves in areas of silence, struggling to understand a new environment or culture.

[We had just moved and I had met no people my own age. I began to aimlessly wander out into the Sonoran Desert that surrounded my grandmother’s home. At first, it was a wasteland to me, and I could only focus on the friends I was missing. I don’t remember what first captured my attention. Whatever it was, I soon found myself asking my grandmother’s friends questions about the desert, reading the books they lent me, and spending hours focused on the desert around me. The trap-door spiders, the small sidewinders, and the barrel cacti became the primary focus of my long walks. I could spend hours tracking small animals, watching the lizards play, and identifying the different desert plants. The highlight of the summer was the one night, beneath a moon only half full, when a small coyote walked beneath the tree I was perched upon. There were no friends who would be interested in these experiences, and they soon were hidden in silence. Now, years later, I know that I physically change and relax when I go “home” to the Sonoran Desert.]
of another self. Although an individual can reveal who he or she is through words and deeds, in the end, what the individual is cannot be known. The act of sojourning, interacting and learning from others, allowing oneself to be changed by others and the world, and self-reflection are the intimate realities of a sojourner. What the sojourner is, is contingent, changing, and finally, simply an analytic distinction.

**Guideposts for Sojourning**

The following discussion centers around four guideposts that reflect the processes associated with the sojourning metaphor and may assist sojourners to move ethically within the world. These are not step-by-step procedures or instructions, but initial and tentative discussions of issues, values, dispositions, and compass points for a journey through the world in support of sustaining wilderness (in all its forms). Furthermore, the comments reflect our own experiences, travels, and self-critiques while exploring the relevance of a sojourning metaphor.

**Sojourners Are Willing to Move Through the World Attuned to Ethical Questions**

Sojourning begins with a mindset directed toward opening oneself to the world. As the sojourner makes decisions, he consistently addresses ethical implications of the decisions, such as: How will this impact the environment? What are the social justice issues involved in this decision? Nelson (1998) discovered it was not easy to travel ethically, because many of the very experiences she traveled for were destructive. So, visions of “trekking” through traditional villages and avoiding “tourist traps” gave way to more difficult and thoughtful movements related to where tourism endeavors support local economies, or events are implemented by local organizations. Nelson suggests that traveling off the tourist track can be ethically questioned because of the complexities of economics, the basic survival needs of communities, and the manipulation of tourism for “ecological benefits.” Therefore, sojourning requires time and space to develop intimate relationships and creates a recognition of plurality (for example, alternative ways of being without us) and natality (for example, energies for alternative ways of being within us). Changing who we are is not easy and takes considerable discipline, will, and patience. Silence can be the time to embrace the frameworks and “sense” of the changes or to decide on new paths of action.

[My pre-sojourning perspective of the relationship between humans and nature was largely shaped by two events: (a) the one week each summer I spent on my aunt and uncle’s farm while my father helped with the harvesting, and (b) the Sunday afternoons I spent at a more-than-rustic but less-than-modern cottage owned by the same aunt and uncle after they sold their farm. The former, not surprisingly, led me to view nature in terms of economic utility. For example, by altering the landscape, “nonproductive” land which was only good for waterfowl could be “re-claimed” so as to produce a cereal crop. Similarly, time at the cottage was both a time to rest, relax, and rejuvenate for the workday that followed, as well as the opportunity to demonstrate a certain status level; that is, as a member of the cottage class. It was not, in fact, until I was in my early twenties that I began to wonder about how other societies, and members of other societies, viewed nature. Once again, an alternative answer was found away from home, this time in New Zealand. It was therethat I first exposed to “tramping” or multi-day, self-supported excursions in natural areas. It was also therethat I came to view nature in an interdependent manner. This experience—and the discovery of another answer to the existential question of the relationship between culture and nature—was critical, I believe, in my decision to pursue nature-based leisure not only in my personal life, but in my academic life as well.]

Sojourning, therefore, is a form of movement that requires the individual to actively pursue ethical interpretations of the events and actions occurring in the world. The existential questions posed by Shweder and Bourne (1991) plus ethical questions related to environmental protection, the welfare of wildlife, and social justice are primary points of departure for silence, reflection, and interpretation for the sojourner.

**A Sojourner Is Willing and Committed to Processes of Self-Reflection that Support Growth and Accountability for One’s Place in the World**

Various scholars (Cuomo 1998; hooks 1994; Lugones 1990; Warren 1996) have argued that oppressive practices have common structures and are interconnected. The various forms of oppression cannot be easily separated, nor does ethical action in one area determine ethical action in another. It is not uncommon to see concern for the natural world coupled with misanthropic or otherwise harmful ideologies. (The primary and most extreme evidence to support this statement is the German Socialist Party, which supported protection of natural spaces while slaughtering millions of Jewish people [Cuomo 1998]. We would suggest that there are other more prevalent and less dramatic examples. For instance, many Euro-North Americans often support the existence of large parks and organized treks and safaris while ignoring the poverty of local economies or the waste in their daily lives.) The central issues at stake, within the sojourning metaphor and related to people from heritages connected with imperialism, colonialism, and socioeconomic power, are how to avoid the repetition of exclusions of previous travel practices (such as imperialistic or colonialistic movements) in the process of legitimating an alternative. How does the sojourner from dominant cultures avoid hegemonic recodification? How does a sojourner keep an open-ended view while asserting the political and the theoretical presence of another view of wilderness? The absolute answer is you cannot avoid the harms or create actions without both positive and negative consequences. The existential answer moves ethical sojourners to engage the world, carefully assess the phenomena, make thoughtful decisions and actions, and open oneself to the outcomes and ripples of the initiations. The process of self-reflection includes time and space for contemplation, systematically exploring ethical questions, obtaining knowledge about perspectives critical of one’s own world view, values, and decisions, and a disposition to changing oneself.
The energy for the sojourning and the hints of new directions comes from moving back and forth between intellectual critiques, personal experiences and reflections, perspectives different from the sojourner's, and knowledge of daily resistant practices against all forms of oppression.

[The roles between white and black, student and professor, EuroNorth American and African were fascinating to me during the trip up Mt. Kenya. Since I had a pack that was of a better design than most of the Kenyan students, I was probably carrying the heaviest and largest load, especially on the section above our base camp. Most of the other groups going up the mountain were white Europeans/North Americans, who all had hired Kenyan porters to carry their packs while they walked up with day-packs. The students in our group were at first upset that I was carrying the heaviest load, and offered repeatedly to carry my pack. But, maybe my carrying my own load and then some was part of an effort on my part to reverse some of the trespasses that whites had inflicted on Africans in the past, a way of reversing some of the power abuses of the past. Seeing the hired porters working at low pay hauling up packs for customers probably kindled a realization of history and cultural forces we as whites carry around with us.]

Sojourners Respect the Life of All Species

Cuomo (1998) suggests that flourishing is an appropriate concept to apply to the variety of entities in the world, including people, societies, animals, and ecosystemic processes. Flourishing occurs when our values and decisions do not center solely on our interests and contributes to the eudaimonia (or happiness, good life, living well, flourishing) of ourselves and others. Flourishing occurs in bodies and describes a process. It is achievable by individuals only in communities and aggregates; requires good consequences, integrity, self-directedness, deliberation, choice making, and some autonomy. Flourishing also captures something about who we want to be.

[I wasn't exactly afraid of the snakes, but I wasn't fond of them either. I believed snakes had no personality. I knew that "fact," even though I had never spent any time with a snake. The little baby Fox Snake's name was Chakra. She appeared one day in our interpretive centre. As I spent time watching Chakra, I became more intrigued. Fox Snakes are extremely active and curious; she was constantly moving about and exploring; every new item in her area was investigated thoroughly through moving over and around, "tasting" it, and eyeing it closely. I almost lost her among the bone collection when I decided she needed a larger area to explore. Over the months, I found that I could tell when she was more curious, more interested, or frightened of our student groups or individual interpreters. I have long since moved away from that area, but when I return I always visit her and ponder what it means to have a Fox Snake for a friend. I do not know if she would have been better in the wild, but I would have been poorer.]

The sojourner's commitment to flourishing requires him to look at all affected individuals, groups, species, and ecosystems. This is sometimes very difficult as primary values and concerns related to wilderness areas and addressing human poverty seem to conflict or undermine the actions connected to one or the other. However, all of our concepts of nature, wilderness, special areas, and parks are constructed upon the cultural contexts they originated from, and such frameworks hold the seeds of promise and harm.

[Our group spoke with the manager of the National Park. He told us that one of the major challenges he faces in managing this wilderness is that most visitors are white tourists. The residents of the local communities seldom visit the park. But their small garden plots are often visited by large park mammals who leave the park, feed on and trample their crops. The region bordering the park used to be quite wild and uninhabited. But, the growing population in the country has forced people to now be living and trying to farm adjacent to the park. This park-versus-local-residents conflict sparked lively discussions among our group around the campfire that evening, and gave me a clearer picture of the fragile existence of wilderness in developing countries. The discussion extended to issues of the size of families, the African tradition of large families to ensure family survival, how all this relates to population growth, and the need for economic growth and resource development. It also gave me some realities of the politics of hunger and bare existence in a cultural and human context. I made my argument for the existence of wilderness seem a bit hollow and idealistic at times, and made me more concerned about the cultural impacts.]

A sojourner's commitment to flourishing requires some understanding of the perspective of the "other." To engage the "other" requires a sojourner to distinguish between speaking for another, appropriating another's voice, and skills, such as Arendt's "visiting" (Honig 1995), Lugones's (1990) "playful traveling," or Willet's (1995) engagement of the proximate other. Arendt describes the precarious balance required to engage or understand another perspective: the sojourner must preserve his or her own thinking while incorporating the perspective of another's body, mind, and world view. Ethical thinking and action should not result in the obliteration of the sojourner as she seeks to think from the vantage of another, to respond to the perspectives born of another being, and to measure up to the relation of the sojourner to the other. Such a process often calls for changing who the sojourner is becoming. This thoughtful interaction offers the possibility of mixtures of selves, bodies, minds, and entities, thus transfiguring what they appear to be, as well as who they are becoming (Orlie 1997).

Sojourners Are Committed to Changing Themselves and Working Collaboratively to Change Groups, Systems, and Collectivities

Meaningful changes in perspective require material interaction and political action. The metaphor of sojourning requires sojourners to make alterations in their minds/bodies/spirits, how they live, and in the systems around them. As each individual, society, and collectivity answers the existential questions, they structure their political communities. A sojourner works to make visible the plurality of the answers. From a communal recognition of this commonality of existential questions and plurality of answers, new possibilities for respect, collaboration, and hope appear.

When sojourners become responsive to others' claims about their effects, sojourners may disrupt what they are predicted to be and redirect the world to more respectful
actions. Such responsible actions may evoke forgiveness of the associated harms within any action from lack of understanding or incomplete knowledge. Forgiveness is evinced by a commitment to act together, and by the valuable willingness of those who have reason to resent these sojourner’s presence to engage them nonetheless as political friends. Sojourning processes are structured around principles that emerge in the course of action and despite the oppressions that separate while bringing people together. Paradoxically, only enactments of principles that affirm their limits or partialities sustain the idea of universality and guard against affirming the partial as if it were universal. Harm or trespasses originate when individuals or societies conceive and live their partial understanding as if it were universal. To a degree, this habit is unavoidable; finite beings cannot encompass the infinite; and sojourners must affirm the limited or partiality if they are to love, and not despise, the world. The challenge, then, is to experience traces of the whole within the limits. At least sojourners must do so if they are to do justice to the trespasses entailed by their finitude.

[On the Mt. Kenya trip, I found myself at times thinking of the model of solitude so prevalent in American wilderness writers and philosophers. I often visit wilderness in the United States by myself seeking this solitude experience. The metaphor I often conjure up in my head is myself alone interacting with the wilderness. Wilderness is a place where I go to seek the peace of solitude I find so difficult to achieve in my other life. Solitude is not a viable model or metaphor in the African culture, and probably not in other developing, agrarian cultures. In developing, agrarian cultures like Kenya, the group or the community is all important. The country is too harsh for people alone. It is too dangerous. It is too difficult for one person alone to survive. And, most Kenyans do not have the economic standing to be able to afford the luxury of going it alone. The community, the family, are important to existence and to continuing the health of the community.]

Conclusion

We have attempted to explore the metaphor of sojourning while keeping in mind the cultural heritages and power structures inherent in our own positions. We suggest that the sojourning metaphor opens new areas for ethical and political discussions related to wilderness areas. In our explorations, sojourners divagate between official cacophonies of cultures, while struggling to resonate with the rhythms of daily life, ordinary people, and their own emerging selves. Sojourners flirt with a committed, but temporary, relationship to a more rooted community. They tentatively construct a radical non-belonging and outsidedness, as they connect with others. Sojourners must be able to recreate a home or place of living everywhere. Sojourners are able to choose to write cartographies or intellectual landscapes that provide frames of reference for bearings and places to set up a tent as they move between worlds, cultures, ecosystems, and beliefs. Each story or journal entry or momentary identification is like a camping site: it traces where the sojourner has been in the shifting landscape of wilderness, culture, individuals, society, and collectivity.

[I struggle with my own choices. Living and working at a university represents a move from a working-class background, and I choose research topics relevant to that heritage and contributions to peace and ecological health. I choose to travel to wilderness areas, align myself with ecosystems, and devote energy to silence, reflection, and ethical issues. I search for research projects and course topics related to protection of wilderness, peace, play, and cultural plurality. On the other hand, are these just rationalizations for someone who loves to travel, teach, read books, and write? What right do I have to consume the resources I do, enjoy the life I have when millions of people cannot even dream of my life?]

These thoughts circle back upon the existential questions related to individuals, society, collectivities, nature, and how one ought to live. Welch (1990) suggests that we respond to these questions ethically only through material interaction. She defines material interaction beyond dialogue to include working together toward survival, quality of life, and respectful, political engagement for all living beings and ecosystems. A sojourner, while moving into spaces on the edge, also constitutes herself within matrices and webs that enhance the capacity for reciprocal, intersubjective connections that sustain mutual critique and collaborative initiatives. We argue that sojourning helps to rethink the link between identity, movement, power, and wilderness. The metaphor of sojourning provides a new lens for understanding the limitless phenomena of wilderness. Sojourners should make the world uneasy for themselves and others, because they blur the boundaries and ask for reassessment of values and perspectives often left unexamined. Our description of sojourning is guided by Orlie’s (1997, p. 166) work about the potential of an ethical and politically active self: “To be so sensitized an instrument, one upon whom everything leaves a mark, with whom everything sets up a correspondence, is not simply to be an observer of life’s surface, but someone who must bring into evidence, even bring into being, moral substance.” Paradoxically, the responsibility demands incalculability and unpredictability, while the freedom requires that sojourners be responsive to the harms that invariably accompany what good sojourners strive to do. In short, to live ethically we must think and act politically (Orlie 1997).]

[Wilderness areas can often have symbolic meaning to people who live near them and to people who actually visit them. The students in this trek were especially interested in climbing Mt. Kenya because the mountain and its immediate area of forest and wild land had been a major symbol of the Kenyan independence movement in the 1950’s and 1960’s. Mt. Kenya was the major stronghold of the rebel movement that actually won independence from Great Britain. The revolutionary fighters hid and operated out of this remote wilderness area, and the mountain became a major symbol of freedom and strength for many black Kenyans. As we moved up the mountain, the students told me of their relatives who had lived for years on the remote slopes of the mountain during the revolution. When we reached the top of the peak, the students pulled out a Kenyan flag they had carried to the top for that purpose. They flew the flag from an ice ax and had their pictures taken as a group on the peak. They were the only black Kenyans on the peak that day, and some of the very few who actually climbed to the top. The symbolic meaning they gave to the mountain, and to their community climb to the top, was a fitting metaphor for the struggles against exploitation they and their culture have had to deal with for generations. It was an “ethics learning
experience" that this sojourner could only have had with that group in that place.]

References
