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Angela Thompsell. *Hunting Africa: British Sport, African Knowledge and the Nature of Empire.* Britain and the World Series. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. 229 pp. $79.99, e-book, ISBN 978-1-137-49443-6.

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Angela Thompsell's *Hunting Africa* is relatively short at just over 150 pages of text, but as the multi-barreled title suggests, there is a lot going on within. The book touches on themes of gender, the social history of both African and colonial communities, the economics of hunting, and the image of Africa in British culture. These different themes coalesce around Thompsell's research into the experience of the hunt itself. While the book takes some effort to get into, readers will discover a lot to ponder in both its stories and Thompsell's arguments.

Thompsell takes aim at a broad, vague stereotype of empire, imperialists, and imperial historiography: the idea of a great white male hunter who represents European dominance of African people and landscape through his slaying of African animals. In eliding the Victorian stereotype with subsequent historical portrayals, Thompsell suggests that historians have been too quick to take for granted the convenient symbolic alignment of hunting, masculinity, and domination. In fact, she shows, hunters were neither inevitably dominant nor universally male. Hunts were both part of a traumatic realignment of African societies by wider colonial processes and necessarily part of negotiations between the colonizers and the colonized where hunters were often in a vulnerable, dependent position in relation to locals. The cultural meaning of hunting in Britain also changed significantly as access to Africa expanded.

In spite of the pun in its title, this book is much more about people than nature, culture than the environment. Thompsell uses a wide variety of sources. At the core of her evidence, however, are autobiographical accounts of hunts by the hunters (men and, strikingly, women) themselves. Thompsell argues that these accounts show that the lived reality and the economics of hunting contrasted with the stereotype of the dominant great white hunter. These accounts have two functions in the book, serving both as evidence of how hunts worked and as a subject of analysis as a mechanism for the reproduction of ideas about Africa for British readers. There is an innate tension in this analysis: the same sources serve to both depict and refute a European representation of Africa. As a result, Thompsell is constantly—and mostly successfully—reading these sources against the grain. Chapter 2, for example, effectively recovers the experiences and changing politics of the people on the other side of European hunts: African employees (guides and porters) and locals to the areas that hunters penetrated in their search for sport (for whom hunters

could be a boon or a disaster, depending on the circumstances). ***Hunting Africa*** brings together careful anthropological and historical scholarship to provide a backdrop for reading the text and subtext of hunting narratives.

In part because of the complexity of the sources and multiplicity of arguments, I found the book's structure and argument confusing until the fifth and last (barring the conclusion) chapter. This chapter brings together the cultural argument of the book and completes its chronological narrative by showing how African hunts became part of debates in Europe about civilization, nature, and degeneracy, even as more and more Europeans were able to make what was once a difficult adventure into a more comfortable tourist experience. By the early twentieth century the hunt had become the safari. Thompsell does a great job explaining how this reflected not just new forms of colonial access and infrastructure but also a broader change in the European geographical and political imagination.

I wanted more detail about many examples and more explanation of core arguments. Readers are frequently told that they should be "surprised" and asked to agree with statements like "of course" or "clearly" when the issues at hand are not necessarily surprising or clear. ***Hunting Africa*** was published by Palgrave Macmillan in conjunction with the British Scholar Society, which indicates that the audience is specialist historians of empire and gender, for whom the complexities of, for example, late Victorian/Edwardian representations of gender in the fourth chapter should not be surprising. The book also occasionally refers to anecdotal evidence (often for intriguing conclusions) that isn't spelled out in the text.

The most famous late Victorian British great white hunter probably wasn't Arthur Neumann. It was Allan Quatermain, H. Rider Haggard's immensely popular fictional creation, narrator of multiple novels and short stories. Thompsell seems to have deliberately excluded (with one exception) fiction writing as evidence; this is a shame, because Quatermain embodied many of the ambiguities that she discusses. "Civilization," says Quatermain in the opening passages of Haggard's sequel to ***King Solomon's Mines*** (1885), named after its narrator, "is savagery silver-gilt". [1] Among many other things, ***Hunting Africa*** helped me better understand the context and subtext of late Victorian adventure fiction. For scholars who are interested in the complexities of the colonial encounter in Africa, this is useful reading because of its synthesis and deft balancing of social and cultural analysis.

Note

[1]. H. Rider Haggard, ***Allan Quatermain*** (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1887), 13.

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