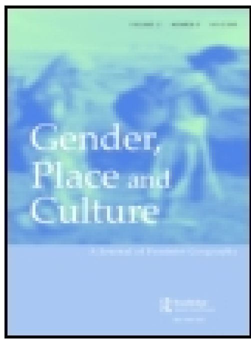

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Colonial Geography and Masculinity in Eric Dutton's Kenya Mountain

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ABSTRACT *Eric Dutton's Kenya Mountain, (1929) tells the story of an unsuccessful attempt to climb Mount Kenya in the 1920s. In this article, the author concentrates on a close, contextualized reading of the book as a contribution to critical feminist geographical understanding of colonial discourse at a later point in the colonial timeline than has been commonly analyzed in studies of British colonial geographies and travel literature. Dutton's discursive tactics in the text reveal the inextricable relations between a gendered and enframed sense of landscape and colonial rule. The book also is a window onto the ambivalences and contradictions within British colonial ideology in Africa in the interwar years. In particular, Dutton's struggle with hegemonic masculinity and his complex relationships with the African men on the climb are interrogated as manifestations of broader ambiguities in Britain's African empire. These points of emphasis in this reading of the book emerge from recent feminist and progressive analyses of gender, colonial geography and adventure writing.*

Introduction

> The particular conditions of adventure to the Englishman in the nineteenth century were new. Security and wealth had led it into the form of a game, a conflict without anger or mutual killing or wounding.... Mountaineering was among the finest of these games.... It had danger, exhilaration, novelty, discovery, competition. To all this in mountaineering there is added landscape. The sense of landscape developed in modern England to a degree it had never reached in our ancestors. (Belloc, 1929, p. xi)

In his introduction to Eric Dutton's 1929 book, *Kenya Mountain*, Hilaire Belloc tried to connect Dutton to the pantheon of manly imperial heroes and to address why mountaineering turned into a national pastime for the English in the nineteenth century. One emphasis in the opening quotation, the 'sense of landscape,' became intrinsic to British ideals of colonial order in Africa in the twentieth century. There came to be a way 'Africa should look,' as Neumann (1998, p. 1) has put it in his analysis of British ideas of an African wilderness.

Belloc stressed the heroic, epic, masculine glamor of mountaineering as among his metaphoric game's achievements. He also chastised mountaineers of the 1920s for taking on the 'evil' of 'mechanical complexity, technique,' and specialized vocabulary, since 'a game grown professional and out of reach ceases to be a game' (Belloc, 1929, pp. xi–xii). This idea of a 'game grown professional' encapsulates the gradual transformation of both

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the geographical order and performance of masculinities within British colonialism in Africa from the 1880s through to the 1930s. Instead of a daring leap into the unknown, Britain's African empire was becoming a game grown professional, as colonial states expanded in size and reach, even while struggling against poor economic performances. Rather than men torn from pages of ripping yarns, what the Empire needed most by then were good clerks and accountants, and what it seemed to have were what Eric Dutton called 'faddling and lackadaisical administrators' (Oldham papers 1932) who were 'beset by locusts and bureaucracy' (Lugard papers 1931). The gap was growing between a glorious Empire upon which the sun never set and what Dutton called 'a paralysis in administration and development which is obvious to anybody who thinks at all of what we owe to ourselves and to our charges' (Oldham papers 1936). A similar gap grew between a hegemonic ideal of adventurous manliness and the reality of mundane office work that dominated the colonial service.

In Eric Dutton's 34 year colonial career, he engaged with and corresponded intimately with the intellectual vanguard of British imperialism in Africa as these gaps appeared and enlarged. Dutton served in secretarial posts in five different British colonies in eastern and southern Africa from 1918 to 1952, and he published four geographically oriented books on Africa (Dutton, 1925, 1929, 1935, and 1944). Given this career record, in which writing played such a central part—private correspondences, official secretariat memoranda, unpublished memoirs, and published works—Dutton makes an invaluable window onto actual practices of colonial discourse, the structure of things said in the name of the Empire. Like the works of more well-known British geographers in Africa, Dutton's writings present him as 'both accomplice in, and critic of, the business of imperialism' (Kroller, in Blunt, 1994, p. 52). Dutton's published works, though, came later on in the colonial timeline in Africa than that which is often analyzed in geography-related studies of colonial discourse, in which explorers, adventurers, or travelers from the nineteenth century have been the centers of attention (Pratt 1992; Blunt, 1994; McEwan, 1996; Phillips, 1997, 1999; Duncan & Gregory, 1999).

In this article, I interrogate Dutton's most well-known book, *Kenya Mountain*. The book narrates Dutton's unsuccessful attempt in 1926, with J. D. Melhuish and more than a dozen Kenyan porters, to reach the summit of Mount Kenya. Dutton had spent the decade prior to this climb recovering from horrific wounds inflicted at Gallipoli in the First World War. As a consequence, the physical challenges of his experience and his great dependence upon the porters for his survival make for a profound subtext to the story that feeds into uncertainties about colonialism in Kenya.

This attempt to climb Kenya's tallest peak might appear at first glance to be a quintessential means of fulfilling the 'male fantasy of conquest' often associated with colonial geographers (McClintock, 1995, p. 27). Had the climbers been successful, they would have accomplished only the second recorded ascent. The 'first'—a term of mountaineering jargon for an initial recorded ascent—is credited to the geographer, Halford Mackinder, at the turn of the century (Kearns, 1997). Mackinder's feat in 1899 came just after Britain had claimed Kenya and begun a two-decade stretch of pacifying separate movements of violent resistance in a half-dozen Kenyan regions (Mwanzi, 1990, pp. 73–75). Mackinder's ascent was a defining example of how the 'violent masculinist discourses linking science, empire, and exploration' (Sparke, 1996, p. 216) came together in colonial mountaineering. The journey was full of forced marches, sheer brutality, pillaging of settlements for food—mirroring the pacification campaigns going on around it. Dutton's party would appear, on the surface at least, to have been self-consciously following in Mackinder's footsteps. *Kenya Mountain* (1929, p. 107) even includes an entire

chapter recounting 'Mackinder's Ascent' as 'a long drawn-out trial of skill and endurance, gloriously brought to success.' Indeed, throughout the book, beyond simply trying to 'conquer' the peak, Dutton's spatial sense of colonialism suggests how frequently a 'sense of landscape' and the power to produce it went hand in hand in masculinist ideological justifications of imperial rule well after pacification and conquest had ended.

On the other hand, one can read throughout the book the ambivalence of colonial power in Kenya, as in much of Africa in the interwar years (1919–39). *Kenya Mountain* does not provide the 'panoramic vision' that Blunt (1994, p. 66) and others associate with male mountaineering stories as a key part of the ' "monarch-of-all-I-survey" genre of travel writing.' Obviously, there can be no full panorama if the party fails to reach the summit. But the failure of the 'conquest' is only part of the book's ambivalent nature. It has very little 'danger, exhilaration, novelty, discovery, [or] competition,' which Hilaire Belloc (1929, p. xi) suggested were essential elements of the mountaineering game. The context of its writing and complexities of the author produce something quite other than a straightforwardly hegemonic masculinist imperial conquest narrative. Read broadly—meaning on a general level—*Kenya Mountain* might seem a piece of 'male megalomania' (McClintock, 1995, p. 24) and imperial adventure. Read more closely—meaning reading within the historical-geographical context of its production and with appreciation for author positionality—the book speaks to important nuances of analysis that are of great relevance to feminist historical geographies of colonialism. Historical-geographical specificity and authorship/authority matter a great deal to a gendered, critical approach to colonial discourse. This means producing what Duncan & Gregory (1999, p. 3) term 'a principled recovery of the complex subject positions of both men and women' who authored these geographies whilst articulating the 'physical means through which they engaged them' (1999, p. 5) within a particular moment in time.

In this case, the 1920s and 1930s produced grave uncertainties about the imperial endeavor at home and abroad for Britain, and the question of Kenya's future became one of these uncertainties of a 'game grown professional.' An ambivalent 'hybrid and syncretic … yet unequal exchange' took place in British colonial discourse between British authors and African peoples in writing about and articulating Africa's geography in these decades when colonial administrations were in place and apparently in charge (Barnett, 1998, p. 240). The relationships between Dutton and his Kenyan companions in *Kenya Mountain* make this exchange apparent. Moreover, Dutton was one of hundreds of male British war veterans in Africa who suffered from war-related disabilities that both impaired their physical capacities and affected the ways in which they were seen and treated by other men. Dutton's 'physical means through which' he 'engaged' the landscape of Mount Kenya (to appropriate Duncan & Gregory's phrase) become bodily manifestations of the changing character of colonial geographies in British Africa between the wars.

Colonial Enframing, Muscular Christianity, and Post-exploration Geographies

The 'siting, surveying, mapping, naming, and ultimately possessing' of colonial territory by Europeans in Africa as elsewhere depended upon geographical science (Dirks, 1992, p. 6. See also Young, 1995, p. 172; Bassett, 1994). Literary studies have recognized that 'imperialist structures of attitude and reference' depended upon 'the way in which structures of location and geographical reference appear in the cultural languages of literature' (Said, 1995, p. 30). Feminist geographers have made considerable contribu-

tions to recent critiques of the spatial imagination of British imperialism in Africa via critical, gendered analyses of both exploration geography and the practical implications of imperialism's spatiality for colonial rule once the exploration was done (Mills, 1991; Blunt & Rose, 1994; Nast, 1994; Blunt, 1994; McEwan, 1996).

It is to expansion of the latter vein of inquiry that I seek to contribute. After all, once the possessing, pacifying and (re)naming of the landscape was done in the era of exploration geography, the spatial tactics of British colonialism in Africa broadened and deepened (Hetherington, 1978; Jarosz, 1992). There has been only a limited amount of critical work in feminist geography focused on geography literature or travel writings in Africa during the period of established colonial rule on the continent in the twentieth century. This seems a vital gap to be filled, since the post-pacification era and the years of the 'second colonial occupation' (Lonsdale & Low, in Freund, 1998, p. 170) are decades in which colonial rule did much to alter African geographies in ways both subtle and grand.

After the First World War closed the Scramble for Africa, up until at least the 1960s, British authors churned out books that sought a popular audience on African geographical topics. Many authors of such works were paid employees of colonial administrations, writing about the people with whom and places in which they lived and worked. Many, but by no means all, of these authors of this form of colonial geography were men for whom the 'colonial tour' was a kind of rite of passage or assertion of belonging (for just a few examples, see Pearce, 1920; Crofton, 1953; Dundas, 1955).

The post-exploration colonial geographies of the interwar years became part of a reorientation of ways of seeing Africa, its political and ecological landscape, in a more controlled frame, on a less fantastical map. They were a part of the sense of landscape that had grown professional. Mitchell (1988, pp. 45–62) identifies several conceptual themes for understanding the professional spatial strategies of British colonialism's 'enframing' order that sought to develop that sense of landscape, and at least one of Mitchell's themes is applicable to the colonial landscapes that these interwar works explored. This involved altering African 'orders without frameworks' into 'segmented plans,' in Mitchell's (1988, p. 44) words. As colonial administrations asserted their power into wider corners of the colonies and established a coherent order, it became steadily apparent that race, class, and gender segmentation was intrinsic to the plan of that order. To Mitchell (1988, p. 44), this was an essential part of colonialism's effort to separate 'container' (the colonizing power) and 'contained' (the African community). In practice, these plans of a carefully segmented order almost never worked, and the containers often became confused by the interwar period.

One clear case of this confusion came in the 'White Highlands' of Kenya. Here, thousands of square miles were mapped out and officially 'alienated' (as in 'taken away') from African peoples by the Crown and parceled out to a small white settler population in the 1910s and 1920s. This 'island of white' (Kennedy, 1987) was exceedingly marginal economically. On paper, on maps, white 'container' and African 'contained' may have been carefully segmented. In reality, settler occupation of the land depended upon hundreds of thousands of African workers and peasants that laws identified as 'squatters' or 'invaders' in the White Highlands, but without whom the white farms would not have survived.

One aim is to assess Dutton's *Kenya Mountain* as part of the enframing order in the British colonies of the interwar years. I attempt to show how he sought, in *Kenya Mountain*, to shape orders without frameworks into segmented plans, and differentiate container from contained. This emerges in repeated assertions of differentiation—white and black,

'our people' and 'them', gentrified elite ideas and those of lower and middle classes, English manly virtues and Kenyan emasculated and feminized males. This mundane enframing and segmenting order has close links to the megalomaniacal masculinist geographies of the exploration era, in effect professionalizing it, giving it 'mechanical complexity' and 'technique', to paraphrase Belloc (1929).

Yet, *Kenya Mountain* points toward the cracks in this frame that had appeared by the interwar years. Probably the greatest uncertainty of *Kenya Mountain* centers on the performance of masculinity, in the contradictions between militaristic and athletic ideals of manliness that still dominated discourse and the 'roles as clerks and shop-assistants' afforded to most men in the colonial service after exploration and pacification was over (Nash, 1996, p. 433). Militaristic ideas of manliness went hand in fist with the Scramble for Africa and British colonial enterprises there until the First World War (Berg, 1998, p. 117). Bristow (1991, p. 135) and Dixon (1995, p. 1) point to 'thrustingly masculinist … ripping yarns'—British narratives of African adventure in the late nineteenth centuries—as guides to this male ideal. Christian ideology imparted to early twentieth-century British imperial masculine ideals, in equal parts, the 'muscularity' that Berg, Bristow or Dixon suggest, *and* gentlemanliness: 'the ideal of Christian manliness imagined a "gentleman" equally at home in the public as well as the private sphere. A "manly sensibility" —integrating robust manliness with refinement and tempering moral authority with a solicitous regard for dependents—would guide his conduct' (Dawson, 1994, p. 65). There were even considerable efforts to develop this 'muscular Christianity' in African men living under British rule (Oldham, 1924; Oldham & Gibson, 1931; Bale & Sang, 1996).

Yet, even this ideal was in practice highly unstable and variable, and it became more so after the Great War. Colonial rule in many areas, particularly in Africa, was 'haunted by a sense of insecurity' (Thomas, 1994, p. 15) by the interwar period. This insecurity extended to the 'preferred forms of masculinity' (Dawson, 1994, p. 1). Phillips's (1997, p. 5) detailed reading of the ebb and flow of masculinities in British adventure stories shows that the manliness on display in these stories is 'not deterministic or static,' but decidedly plural. But Phillips (1997, pp. 86–87) also notes that 'the geography of adventure spills over into … "real" gendered subjects and spaces inspiring merchants, investors, travelers, settlers, and others' (Phillips, 1997, pp. 86–87). It is vital to connect the analysis of discourse to its material implications for and context in the colonial enterprise. One practical set of implications has to do with the connections that texts by colonial officials made to what Dutton (1983, p. 119) often called 'the practical tasks of building in brick and mortar'—building the colonial order, and then the growing sense that this order was not doing very well. Another concerned the highly varied physical capacity to perform the hegemonic idea of colonial masculinity, as *Kenya Mountain* amply demonstrates.

Dutton, Kenya, and *Kenya Mountain*

Eric Dutton was born in Yorkshire in 1895, youngest of nine children in a middle-class parson's family. Like all four older brothers, he entered military service after studies at Hurstpierpoint and Oxford. Dutton's first military experience came at age 21 in 1916 at Gallipoli, where he suffered severe injuries in both his legs and his spine soon after arrival. Although he was one of the few officers or enlisted men of the North Yorkshire regiment to survive, he never regained full use of his legs and never lived without severe pain (Steel & Hart 1994; Myers, 1998). After a half dozen surgeries, long convalescence

at home, and a brief attempt at a clerkship in Basutoland, Robert Coryndon, then Governor of Uganda, hired Dutton as his private secretary. Dutton served Coryndon from 1920 to 1922 in Uganda and then moved with him to his new post in Kenya (Dutton, 1983; Huxley, 1983).

Kenya was 'the acid test of empire' (Youe, 1986, p. 160) for Britain during Dutton's service to Coryndon (1922–25) and then the next Governor, Edward Grigg (1925–30). Youe uses the phrase 'acid test' because this small colony became central to searching analyses and debates over race, colonial authority, and imperialist objectives that drew in both Houses of Parliament and prominent politicians or intellectuals in Britain, requiring them to show their 'colors,' like the paper strips in an acid test. This test focused on a White Paper delivered to the Government by the Duke of Devonshire in 1923 as a policy prescription for Kenya's future. The Devonshire White Paper declared that 'African Paramountcy' should be the principle underlying all policy in Kenya (i.e. that African peoples' interests should be held as 'paramount'), thereby incensing the colony's white settlers who expected 'self-government' similar to Rhodesia (Kamoche, 1981; Berman, 1990; Shaw, 1995). The White Paper also sought to end legal segregation between Indians and whites in Nairobi. This was seen by many settlers as accommodation to the colony's growing South Asian community, whom many leaders, like Secretary of State Winston Churchill, felt essential to the growth of commerce in Kenya (Coryndon papers 1922).

The debates over 'The Indian Question,' 'African Paramountcy,' and self-government for a 'White Man's Country' (Huxley, 1967) lasted throughout the remaining years of British rule in Kenya but were at fever pitch during Dutton's service there (1922–30). Particularly via debates over land control, geography was a prominent element in this crucial time (Mackenzie, 1998). Whether representing the Governor in meetings, writing speeches, or arranging logistics, Dutton negotiated with, corresponded with, alienated or befriended the high and mighty. Frederick Lugard (Lugard papers 1928–42), former Governor of several African colonies, and Joseph Oldham (Oldham papers 1925–38), head of the International Missionary Society, exchanged long and intimate letters with Dutton. Margery Perham (1970), Elspeth Huxley (1983), and Herbert Baker (1944) were among his closest associates. In *Kenya Mountain*, he showed his own colors on the acid test, clearly writing with these new friends in mind as readers (he sent personal copies to all of those mentioned), addressing questions of race, space, landscape, power, or manliness nearly as often as mountaineering adventure.

Dutton served governors favorably disposed toward settler colonialism, and he often publicly portrayed himself as an apologist for their interests (Youe, 1986; Berman, 1990). But he could be—and was—steered away from the apologist-for-settlerdom role on other occasions. Most significantly, Dutton's paternal mentor in life (his own father having died when he was 15), Joseph Oldham, was one of the leading voices in London opposing white settler self-rule for Kenya. Their remarkable 14-year correspondence includes Dutton's admission in regard to Oldham's letters that 'they might almost be love letters, I read them so many times' (Oldham papers 1929). For his part, despite profound political disagreements, Oldham (Oldham papers 1930) replied to Dutton with open admiration:

> You try to face life as it is with great courage and do not shrink from responsibility.... If your becoming Governor of Kenya depended on my vote it would be given in your favor.... I must congratulate you on *Kenya Mountain*.

> It is a really great bit of work. I am to blame for not having discovered sooner that I was enjoying the friendship of so great a master of English style.

Kenya Mountain, quirky and uneven as it is, is nonetheless an enlightening and rewarding reading of the mastery of 'English style.' It may be read for its tactics in the debate over Kenya and for its uses of colonialism's masculinist spatial discourse in that debate. Yet, it also can be seen as a disabled man's attempt to capture essential aspects of a different sort of 'English style' and to develop some understanding of his Kenyan porters. This style of masculinity, in Dutton's hands, included not merely a simple soldierly heroism or racist imperialism, but self-effacement, upper-lip stiffness, love of gardens, ridiculousness, Christian gentlemanliness, and diffident humor. The book also harbors ambivalence about the climb, and a sense of the interdependent relationship with the Kenyan porters that make for an antidote to a more masculinist English style.

The narrative of *Kenya Mountain* is simple. The climbing party goes up the mountain. They don't make it to the summit. They come back down. It is not so much in the facts of going almost up and then coming down into which I want to dig. Instead, I extract from the story the rhetorical devices and representations Dutton relies upon in relation to conceptions of landscape and an enframing, segmenting order under colonial rule in Africa, versus the ambivalence toward that rule and its hegemonic masculine identity.

Colonial Geographies, Masculinities, and *Kenya Mountain*

On the surface, Dutton's mountaineering in Kenya, and his writing about it, linked him firmly to the Empire's manly geographical-imperial traditions. British mountaineers, like Mackinder at the turn of the century, 'were the true guardians of the patriotic flame' (Schama, 1995, p. 503). They often saw themselves and were seen by others as upholders of the 'imagined sense of British imperial power' (Hansen, 1995, p. 304) throughout their masculine conquests and 'firsts' (Kearns, 1997). East Africa's highlands, from the snows of Kilimanjaro to the trout streams of the Aberdares, had become central spaces around which the wagons of white prestige were circled, and onto which the masculinist spatial visions of colonial power were projected. The highlands also provided the landscapes in which an adventurous manliness ideal of the interwar Empire was to be created and recreated.

The mountainous landscape was also an escape route, though, as the first page of *Kenya Mountain* shows:

> I suppose that to all of us the mere idea of escaping from our humdrum surroundings is happiness itself; and in the Highlands of Kenya, the itch to escape is no less insistent than in England.... In February, there can be no better place to get away from than Nairobi. There may one day arise a citizen who will proclaim to the world his pride in Nairobi. It is possible. What is not? But in 1926 … it had the look of a mining camp … littered with refuse; the streets were cumbered with a jumble of architectural abuses, the roads were execrable.... Colonial towns have ever been fated to a ramshackle adolescence. Maybe one day Nairobi will be laid out with tarred roads, with avenues of flowering trees, flanked by noble buildings; with open spaces and stately squares; a cathedral worthy of faith and country; museums and galleries of art; theatres and public offices.... A town plan ambitious enough to turn Nairobi into a thing of beauty has been slowly worked out, and much has already been done. But until that plan has borne fruit Nairobi must remain what she was

> then, a slatternly creature, unfit to queen it over so lovely a country. (Dutton, 1929, pp. 1–2).

Dutton begins *Kenya Mountain* not with an escape from Europe to a 'land that never was' (Simpson, 1937), but with a rather gendered escape from the 'humdrum surroundings' of 'unlovely Nairobi.' The very first page introduces readers to Dutton's vision of a colonial landscape, a new Nairobi he actively helped plan out in the 1920s that would remove a 'ramshackle adolescence' (an order without framework) and replace it with a segmented plan (tarred roads, avenues of flowering trees, noble buildings, stately squares, and racial segregation). Colonial rule was inseparable from, indelibly tied into, this spatial project, with its feminization of the landscape (Nairobi was a 'she,' 'slatternly' and not very 'queenly') being an intrinsic element of its compartmentalization. As Blunt & Rose (1994, p. 10) put it, 'the feminization of colonized landscapes can illustrate the positionality inherent in viewing/reading landscapes [because] … the desire for colonial control was often expressed in terms of sexual control' (see also White, 1990). But until the plan for controlling 'her' came to fruition, Dutton needed to escape Nairobi's 'execrable' condition, in order to find himself in the landscape as 'Africa should look' (Neumann, 1998, p. 1).

It is many pages before we come anywhere near Mount Kenya. Dutton follows his chapter-long escape from Nairobi with a chapter-long plunge into the luscious garden home of a wealthy settler in Kenya's White Highlands and a plunge into the heart of the colony's controversy. He defends the 'charm and downrightness' of settlers and paints them as 'victims of a mass of information of bewildering inaccuracy.' He immediately veers the other way, though, to poke fun at the settlers for their argumentative, anti-government rhetoric, weary of hearing them say ' "This government of *yours* … is rotten to the core"…. Somehow or other I always feel a certain pride in the assumption that *I*, and *I alone*, must be held responsible for the Government of the country, even if only for the seamy side of it' (1929, pp. 14–15). Even as he defends settlers' rights for anti-settler readers, he reminds the settler readers of what a mess *their* capital city is and what *his* government is doing to make its space into a 'thing of beauty' worthy of 'faith and country.'

The third chapter is devoted to the gathering of porters for the journey, a dozen Mwimbi men chosen from among 'old friends' from previous trips to the mountain (Dutton, 1929, p. 23). The men ranged in age from Baranya, the young son of a local chief, to Kinanjui wa Mtuwambungu:

> 'whose deep and beer-sodden voice dominated all…. He is well past middle age, his senile body withered and puny beside his fellows … yet his energy is prodigious, and his Puck-like humour brings laughter to the weariest heart…. We rely greatly on his leadership and common sense'. (Dutton, 1929, p. 23)

Taken together, these first 25 pages of *Kenya Mountain* establish several ways by which the book captures the discourse of interwar colonial geographies, the Kenyan context and 'the territoriality of subject constitution' (Kearns, 1997, p. 456; Gregory, 1994). The first of these is in Dutton's deployment of masculinist colonial discourse of spatial control, of enframing, from the first page's description of Nairobi. The next chapters, on the other hand, show how the context of interwar Kenya shapes the narrative toward a contribution to political debates at the time, that ultimately highlights the ambivalent, hybrid, and interdependent character of the encounter with colonized people, an encounter which comes to actually dominate the book. The remainder of this article tackles each of these two aspects in turn.

Enframing

The centrality of space and landscape continues in *Kenya Mountain* long after the narrative leaves base camp, as Dutton unveils his sense of African landscapes, and the meanings of the colonial order for these. The first thing he takes in, closer to the mountain, is the trope of awe. The 'imposing wilderness,' to borrow from Neumann's (1998) title, takes its place in Dutton's (1929, pp. 35 and 39) consciousness in *Kenya Mountain*: 'And who shall describe the glories of an African dawn? Surely all that mighty and triumphant beauty transcends the powers of the pen.... A feeling of littleness among vast, silent, incalculable surroundings ... steals from your confidence and even peace of mind.'

This rhetoric of awe has several purposes. This is the anti-historicism of imperialist discourse written directly into the geography (Duncan, 1993, p. 49). As Noyes (1992, p. 182) put it, 'Colonial discourse must construct a boundless, featureless, homogenous space which may serve as the stage upon which colonial desire may produce its fantasies.' The 'vast, silent and incalculable surroundings' of the Mount Kenya region were in fact densely populated and heavily farmed or foraged. The empty land myth of white settlers was needed to justify land alienation in the White Highlands (Sorrenson, 1968). In *Kenya Mountain*, on the drive up to their starting point, Dutton contrasts the 'country finely cultivated by our own people' with the 'delightful' but 'haphazard cultivation of the native, ... modest to the point of pathos' (Dutton, 1929, pp. 18–19). Such comparisons are part of the colonial 'world-as-exhibition' Mitchell (1988, p. 167) describes, 'a world divided absolutely in two' wherein the colonialist needs the 'native,' 'natural' 'Other' as a foil to establish the appearance of civilized order in a segmented plan. Without the 'pathos,' or the 'incalculable surroundings,' there would be no justification for colonialism to enter the Highlands to 'finely cultivate' or 'calculate' them.

The point of colonial rule to Dutton is to make order out of the chaos: the creation of segmented plans out of orders without frameworks. Cartography, more than any other science, served the cause of 'an appearance of order' (Mitchell, 1988, p. 163), since 'putting regions on a map ... exercised power in a pure subtle form—as the power to name, to describe, to classify' (Fabian, 1986, p. 24). Map-making and toponymy had an 'overwhelming fascination' for Dutton. In *Kenya Mountain*, three porters—Kinanjui, Gitchini, and Mtumasara—collaborated with Dutton in affixing place names on the features encountered all along the mountain's slopes. Many of these names remain. The megalomaniacal geography of this power to name was quite evident to Dutton himself: 'The thought of settling for all time the course of a river, the position of a peak, or how a valley runs, has enticed us to undertake weary marches and squander whole days from out of our small store,' he wrote (1929, p. 81). These weary marches have, ultimately, a deep connection to his view of the whole journey. Dutton sought to mark the mountain for the Empire with its spatial code, its sense of landscape. To name, describe, and classify was to possess the place within the hegemony of a spatial 'system' (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 11).

Dutton's reflection on the party's failure to reach the summit suggests that the climb was the ultimate creation of order out of chaos. The key was not really domination. Instead, what mattered was the *appearance* of domination:

> 'Gitchini and the rest of them were more disappointed in us than we were in ourselves. It is astounding how much the native expects of the white man. He has the most implicit trust in the white man's powers. How long he will continue in that belief lies with our governors.... The prestige of the white man was born in the strength and the courage and the fair-mindedness of our

> people … The moment that prestige is seriously impaired, the signal for the decline of the empire will have been sounded.… Here are a few natives on this giant peak; yet they turn to us in faith and loyalty, confident that we shall look to their safety and comfort. Surely this is a very fine thing, and a true tribute to that prestige upon which all depends.' (Dutton, 1929, p. 96)

Here, Dutton recognized that he had taken on the role of upholder of the patriotic flame, and that his failure to reach the summit struck a blow against the all-important prestige of the empire. Yet, he grandly tried to twist this failure into a soliloquy on the righteousness of colonial rule, and a warning to those who would undermine it. This undermining came most forcefully in what he called the 'faddling and lackadaisical' administration he served, that to his eyes failed to uphold the segmented nature of the spatial plan.

The fatal flaw of African paramountcy, to Dutton, was its hint of social equity. Such equity ran counter to the enframing order and clear lines of segmentation. As he put it in *Kenya Mountain* (1929, pp. 138–139), 'it was idle to teach the native to ape the European and to fill him with troubling notions of equality. There would be time enough for that.' Before that time of equality, the 'prestige upon which all depends' required a coded hierarchical segmentation of social space on racial and gender lines. Writing to Lugard (papers 1932) about the 'problem of our race' in a correspondence about *Kenya Mountain* and Lugard's intended revised edition of *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (1922), Dutton railed against 'sentimental negrophilists like [Kenya's] Norman Leys' because they 'made a *sane* and *friendly* attitude to natives sometimes hard to achieve.' Sanity and friendliness were equally important, yet equally under threat, apparently, because 'negrophilists' had confused African men with a 'dream … of equality before the law' (Lugard papers 1932). He worried aloud in this letter that the real consequence of that dream of equality was that African men might then claim 'the privilege of going into a white man's house, becoming the social equal of the white man, and especially of the white man's women-folk' (Lugard papers 1932). The segmentation in Dutton's mind was one where races and genders knew their hierarchically-ordered place and stayed to it. Dutton's, and the Empire's, sanity and friendliness were undermined by a confusion of identities in that unequal segmentation that got more and more muddled over time. 'The blunt truth is,' he confided to Lugard (Lugard papers 1932, italics mine), 'that the native was a better man *as a man* before we touched him.' A decade or so later, Dutton concluded his book, *Lillibullero* (1944, but written largely in Northern Kenya in 1933), by implying that the whole enterprise of colonialism was a Quixotic building of 'castles in Spain.'

The Secret Spring which Links the Thoughts of Men

Many of the tactics of colonial discourse outlined by Kearns (1997) for manly turn-of-the-century mountaineering or adventure-geography writers like Halford Mackinder—objectivity, sentimentalism, and anti-historicism—become unsettled in Eric Dutton's hands in the 1920s, on this literally and symbolically failed attempt to scale Kenya's mountain. He is a keenly interested party in the narrative, not an objective or disinterested observer. Even if Hilaire Belloc tried to make Dutton into a sentimental hero, and Dutton himself turns to humor quite frequently, there is always a certain edge to his sentiment in *Kenya Mountain.* Rather than engaging consistently in anti-historicism, Dutton often appears distinctly aware of the historical context of his climb and the people with whom he is

climbing. The character of his relations with the Kenyan porters vacillates between the racist condescension which might be expected of a piece of masculinist enframing discourse, and a humane, intimate, and warm sense of friendship.

Kenya Mountain might be more about the struggle between adventure-boy masculinity and clerkship than about the climb itself. Dutton undoubtedly had his personal identity at stake in the climb: as Dirks (1992, p. 7) puts it, 'geography and identity seem always to have been closely related' in colonial journeys of 'discovery.' Yet, the central subjects with whom Dutton relates are African men, not colonial clerks like himself. Dutton's relationships with his porters are intriguing for his contradictory ideas about Africans, and how these contradictions play out in his self-identity. He begins *Kenya Mountain* with the broad brush of stereotypes. The physicality of the men is one of his obsessions (1929, p. 24): they have 'glorious, straight bodies, [are] lithe of limb and quick of foot.' They have 'happy and simple minds.' They are 'sulky' and have a 'passion for chatter and small talk' and a 'pathetic belief in all medicines.' The men 'came vaguely on our consciousness' (Dutton, 1929, p. 24) as the journey began. Yet, as the climb goes on, we read more complex renderings of the individual porters and of Mount Kenya cultures, so that there is actually great depth to Dutton's (1929, p. 24) initial hint about his companions: 'you might go far without finding their equals.' He sees the porters' 'unfailing courage,' and shares their exhilaration on reaching Mount Kenya's lesser peak, Point Lenana (the first recorded ascent of this peak by Africans). When his British climbing partner, Jack Melhuish, went ice skating on a small lake they subsequently named the 'curling pond,' Dutton marveled at Mtumasara, who donned skates to go out on the ice, 'his splendid figure quivering with the impulse to venture' (Dutton, 1929, p. 65). Later, Mtumasara is touchingly if patronizingly singled out for praise. He 'was an ordinary commoner. He would grow old among his people, his children would succeed him, he would live and he would die and be forgotten like any other member of his tribe. And yet he stood head and shoulders above them all: he had dignity, and courage, and courtesy, and sense' (Dutton, 1929, p. 147).

Dutton's relationships with the porters in the book, while racist and patronizing, clearly touch the hybrid colonial desires Young (1995) and others discuss. He marvels at the wonderful reception the porter Kamau receives when they return down to his village: 'this is the afflatus which Christians called being exalted in the glory of the Lord.' The toponymic assistance from Kinanjui, Gitchini, and Mtumasara led to several places on the mountain earning African names—Mugi mountain, Gitchini tarn, and the like. In spite of worries he expressed about Africans 'aping' Europeans, he took great pleasure in Gitchini leading a military drill that resulted, he wrote, in 'a pantomime of a line.' In the chapter comparing this adventure with that of Mackinder several decades before him, despite Dutton's applause for Mackinder's achievements, he appears relieved at how much improved his relations with the porters are. Mackinder, after all, 'on one occasion was compelled to hold a chief as hostage until food was produced by his people.' Dutton (1929, p. 116) sees his relationships as *friendships* that, while not based on equality, furthered the interests of imperial order perhaps a little bit and allowed for fun at the same time. At the end, he is 'sad indeed to say goodbye to Kinanjui,' the oldest of the porters, because 'somehow or other he had inveigled us into a feeling of warm friendship … full of human nature' (1929, p. 150).

There are numerous moments in the book when Dutton and Melhuish know how deeply they depend on their companions. There are also places where it is evident that African conceptions of landscape and the natural world have become infused with Dutton's own. Day after day of marching, Dutton (1929, p. 44) finds, is 'tedious and

exhausting … I remembered with regret that I had laughed at a Basuto tradition that their mountain fortress, Thaba Bosiu, the Hill of Night, was so called because, when the Zulus under Moselekatse found it impregnable, they said it had grown in the night. God knows, I shall never laugh at anything again.' This manner in which Dutton's colonialist sense of landscape was transformed by exchanges and encounters with African ideas followed him throughout his career and writings. When he returned to East Africa in 1942 after 13 years of service in Northern Rhodesia and Bermuda, he wrote to Lugard a succinct summation of this hybrid sense of landscape and belonging: 'We have at last arrived back to East Africa … All my early service was spent in these parts. I suppose I have come to regard them as my other home. Africa is a queer continent—once you get it in your blood, you can never get it out' (Lugard papers 1942).

As with Mtumasara or Kinanjui in the *Kenya Mountain* experiences, Dutton developed close bonds with those upon whom his life and safety depended, in contrast to his stated sense that *they* depended on *him* and his 'prestige.' One night, Kinanjui, with whom Dutton had worked previously on the mountain, regaled the others with stories of his service to the carrier corps in the First World War in East Africa. Kinanjui woke them later in the night whistling the regimental march tune of the King's African Rifles. Kinanjui—here and elsewhere in the book—haunted Dutton, with their similar memories of the grimy horrors of war. Near the end, Dutton describes a dance performed by Mbobua as the 'crowning touch' of their whole journey. 'He flew round and round again, until his skin shone and gleamed in the firelight. He danced on and on, as we breathlessly watched. We were dumbfounded at the beauty of his performance … that last dance had brought us more in touch with each other, had touched that secret spring which links the thoughts of men' (Dutton, 1929, p. 127). The secret spring, at least that night, had no color bar delimiting who could drink from it.

Although homoeroticism might be read into *Kenya Mountain* in passages like this one, another interpretation of his fascinations with the workings of men's bodies is that Dutton's body in fact did not work very well. It is most frequently the litheness, suppleness, ease of movement, or strength of glistening sweat by which Dutton is transfixed, largely, it seems to me, because of his own awkwardness, lameness, infirmity, and humiliation. He says little about his legs, but what he does say, anywhere, speaks volumes:

> 'On our expedition in 1924 we walked as far as the hut, more than twenty miles from [base camp], in one march. It was my first attempt at anything more than two miles for nine years, and I found it a heavy strain. I was hampered by an iron splint on one leg (as still in 1926) and then encumbered by having to walk with two sticks: it was past eight at night when I stumbled into camp, beaten and distressed … I must have fallen more than a score of times' (Dutton, 1929, p. 42)

In the second attempt—the one recounted in this book—after the party falls short of the highest peak by some 500 feet, at his insistence they head for Nithi Falls. Although he could by this point barely move, he is determined to go swimming in the glacial pool at the base of the falls, and all he manages to do is fall in the water.

For the rest of the descent, Melhuish determines Dutton must be carried. This required the porters to descend as far as the bamboo forests—very far down—to get wood to construct a *machila* (carrying chair). Having thrown his last crutches into Victoria Falls and steadfastly refused efforts to provide him with more, or with a *machila*, the whole episode humiliated Dutton (1983). He understood and even sympathized with

those among the porter team who grumbled and even attempted a general refusal to go down the mountain. While the rest were able to descend 'walking like kings,' Eric was stuck, appropriately enough, reading 'some book about map-making' as he was carried down (Dutton, 1929, pp. 144–145).

The book has more, subtle references to his infirmity and envy of others for their capacity to move freely, but Dutton's other books and correspondences show a broader pattern of how both he and others viewed his disability. His instant dislike of his second boss in Kenya, Edward Grigg, came from the moment he 'directed a doubtful look at my crutches. I had seen that look before' (Dutton, 1983, p. 106). While Dutton admitted 'my infirmity resulted in there being yawning gaps in my knowledge' (Dutton, 1983, p. 85), he deeply resented having the unspoken power of 'that look' determine what he could and could not do. Occasionally, his correspondents exclaimed that they were 'astonished at [his] vigor' (Coryndon papers 1924), but most either looked away or, it seems, turned to him again with 'that look.' His career stalled in the 1940s, just like the attempt on the summit of Mount Kenya stalled. In 1949, he wrote to Secretary of State Arthur Creech Jones (papers 1949) plainly begging for a governorship: 'now that there are rumoured to be several governorships falling vacant I hope that my claims will be favourably considered.' That they had not to date been considered, he told Jones, 'I am sure you will agree … might well tempt a man to consider he had got a life-size grievance—particularly a man who has achievements to his credit and has been four times decorated.' Jones himself did not reply, but his papers (1949) contain a letter from Gilbert McAllister on his behalf that alludes to 'certain difficulties with' any possible Governorship 'which he was not able to discuss with me,' despite 'Creech Jones' admiration for you and for your work.' It is hard to read this exchange of letters and not think that the 'certain difficulties,' at least to some degree, had 'that look' in them.

The varied capacity to perform the hegemonic version of masculinity, like Dutton's disability, was implicit in the workings of power, promotion and privilege within British Africa. Dutton's (1983, p. 112) own ambivalence about the ideal—he admitted that he was 'never a pre-eminently soldierlike figure at the best of times' even as he went off trying to climb mountains in leg irons—parallels an ambivalent attitude toward African men, and ultimately toward colonialism. His gaze toward African men in *Kenya Mountain* carries loathing and longing. His sense of colonial landscapes carried both a drive to create order out of chaos and a recognition that it was like building 'castles in Spain' to bother trying.

Conclusion

Eric Dutton, in published works like *Kenya Mountain* and in his correspondence, provides us with opportunities to look inside the discursive practice of British colonialism in Africa. To place this claim in its historical-geographical context, *Kenya Mountain* worked, as a text, to articulate the spatial order or enframing of British colonial rule in Kenya in the interwar years. Dutton was speaking from a position somewhere just below the summit of power in writing the book, as he sought to reorient his readers' ways of seeing the colony he served. Somewhere between a self-governing settler colony and an indirectly ruled African paramountcy territory, he believed, lay a Kenya in need of a segmented plan, from Nairobi to the top of Mount Kenya.

On his journey up (and down) the mountain, Dutton's objectivity, his sense of the righteousness and unquestionable prestige of colonial power, and his own masculinity, appeared unsettled and contradictory. Colonialist enframing had cracks in its frames like

this in the interwar years. He left the mountain to drive back to Nairobi after a transgressive sip of Kinanjui's 'native beer' that he found 'revolting' but nonetheless desirable (Dutton, 1929, p. 151), symbolizing the ambivalent relationships that developed with the African men on the trip. The 'English style' that Dutton's friend and mentor Joseph Oldham thought him a 'master' of was perhaps large enough to take in both a ripping yarn's manly man and the sort of jovial fop Dutton portrays himself to be. Yet, there he is, the one who has been warning his readers of the dangers of Africans aping Europeans, himself aping Africans on the last page of his tale.

There is much more that could be said about *Kenya Mountain*. Its photographs, for instance, are beautiful and profound evocations of the power in mountainous landscapes to which Belloc alludes. However, as an introduction to this text, I have tried to suggest that feminist and critical geographers can read it for insights into two key themes. It is both a valuable text for understanding the sense of landscape and drive for enframing in British colonialism in Kenya at that time, and also the ambivalence, uncertainty, and contradiction of colonial power and colonial masculinity. It is dangerous to extrapolate from this text to the British Empire in Africa writ large. Nonetheless, I suggest these two themes were common across the discourse of British colonialism in interwar Africa.

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