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LANDSCAPES SUBLIME: IMPERIALISM, THE WILDERNESS IDEAL AND THE HISTORY OF CONSERVATION IN TANZANIA

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Abstract

"LANDSCAPES SUBLIME: IMPERIALISM, THE WILDERNESS IDEAL AND THE HISTORY OF CONSERVATION IN TANZANIA"

The aim of this dissertation is to trace the implications that Western views of nature have had for the restructuring of African landscapes through the creation of game reserves and national parks, with a particular focus on Tanzania. I contend that wilderness spaces are the main repositories of a western imaginary that longs for those places where nature is prodigious and untamed, uncontaminated by development and devoid of people. The idealization of landscapes is derived from the aesthetic of the Romantic sublime with its dual impulse: the quest for escape from a fragmenting and morally corrupting capitalist society, and the search for the immutable and the transcendent in landscape 'untouched' by development. In Africa the physical manifestation of the wilderness landscape ideal came to be reflected in real space – the space of the East African national park. To produce a wild landscape in which animals roam free required the reproduction of a certain ideology of nature which may have been inaugurated during the colonial period, but which has been assimilated and even expanded by post-colonial regimes like Tanzania. Why is it, I ask, that the wilderness landscape ideal is so remarkably persistent in the post-colonial, post-socialist Tanzania of today? Taking the approach of scholars like Mitchell, I ask not just what landscape 'is or 'means' but what it does in this context.