

# COLONIAL NATURE: HUNTING IN KAREN BLIXEN'S *OUT OF AFRICA*.

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History



**ABSTRACT:** This article examines the hunting practices in the British colonies, the significance of hunting and what the specific hunting style used, revealed about the imperial and colonial mindset of that time. Furthermore, this article examines the gendered and racial aspects of colonial life and hunting, as well as the personal hunting experiences of the Danish author Karen Blixen. This article argues that hunting in the British colonies was a significant part of colonial life and imperial control, as well as a great influence on the gender ideals and roles of this time. The personal experiences of Karen Blixen as settler, white, woman and hunter functions as an embodiment of the colonial and imperial views of this time and place.

**KEYWORDS:** colonial history, gender, whiteness, hunting



## Introduction

From 1913-1931 the Danish author Karen Blixen owned a farm in the British colony of Kenya. In her bestselling memoir “Out of Africa” she reminisces on her time in Africa and everything she experienced during this period of her life. One of the rather prominent themes of this memoir, is big game hunting and her own experiences hunting in Kenya.

“As the light reached him he turned his head and Denys shot. He fell out of the circle, but got up and into it again, he swung round towards us, and just as the second shot fell, he gave one long irascible groan. Africa, in a second, grew endlessly big, and Denys and I, standing upon it, infinitely small.”<sup>1</sup>

Experiences such as Blixen’s above, were nothing exceptional in colonial Kenya in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, as hunting had almost become synonymous with colonial life in Africa. Both the wilderness and the exotic game were attractive to many Europeans and soon it became a complete hunting-craze. Colonies such as Kenya would very quickly become known as ideal hunting grounds: as “white hunters appeared in Central Africa from the 1850s, and by the 1870s and 1880s they had become very nearly a flood.” (MacKenzie 1988: 122).

This article examines why hunting was such a big part of the British empire and what this specific style of hunting reveals about the colonial and imperial mindset of this time. It furthermore examines the gendered and racial aspects of both hunting and colonialism. Karen Blixen and her personal hunting experiences will function as the specific piece of investigation, as it will be examined how her experiences with both big game hunting and being a white colonial woman

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<sup>1</sup> Karen Blixen, *Out of Africa*, (Random House, 1938), p. 235-236.

corresponds with the overall points found throughout the previous examinations. This article is thus conducted from the following research question: what do the hunting practices and traditions of the British colonies in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century reveal about the colonial mindset of that time and how does Karen Blixen's personal experiences in colonial Kenya embody this mindset?

Hunting being an enormous part of life in colonial Africa is well established in academic publications such as John M. MacKenzie's book *The Empire of Nature* (MacKenzie 1988) in which he underlines just how colonialism and hunting correlated and how hunting functioned as an imperial tool of power and masculinity. Women going hunting in the colonies, as Blixen did, however, is examined in Vijaya Ramadas Mandala's article "British Huntswomen in Colonial India: Imperialism and Gender Hierarchies, 1809-1921" (Mandala 2020). Mandala examines the difference in how white women would hunt in the colonies as opposed to women hunting in Europe. The lives of the Blixens in the colony of Kenya as white northern Europeans are investigated by Raita Merivirta in the article "Nordic Settler Identities in Colonial Kenya: Class, Nationality and Race in Bror and Karen Blixen's Transimperial Lives" (Merivirta 2023). The article focuses on the Blixens place in the colony in terms of race and social class and by that brings a further understanding of Karen Blixen's colonial experiences.

### Hunting in the Imperial Colonies

MacKenzie among other things, claims that to the imperial colonists, hunting was in many ways a frontier of its own. Furthermore, it was an open one at that, in opposition to a closed frontier that is characterized by being settled with an established authority, an inhibited freedom of action for the frontiersman, a greater population pressure on the land and the status of the non-whites deteriorates (Ibid.: 89). According to Todd Cleveland's book *A History of Tourism in Africa* the colonists seem to have greatly exercised this 'inhibited freedom of action' (Ibid.: 89), as hunting quickly became popular in the African colonies and "it was said that one was more likely to be hurt by a bullet than a lion." (Cleveland 2021: 53).

This sudden influx of colonial hunters of course had an impact on the African wildlife and environment. When the first white settlers came to the African colonies there was an impressive number of animals roaming the lands as “animals were so plentiful that elephants foraged in herds of hundreds. At times, antelopes covered the savannah like a carpet (...) One might see 150 rhinoceros in a day” (Ibid.: 40). Of course, the numbers of animals could not keep up with the hordes of European hunters and neither could the local environment, as colonies such as Kenya had to go through massive changes to accommodate its new settlers, for example the city of Nairobi, which “had been founded as a railroad depot in 1899 yet within eight short years had become a tourism hub for big-game hunting and was made the capitol of the colony.” (Ibid.: 55). Not only did the wildlife and the environment go through large changes, but life was also forever changed for the native Africans who also felt the presence of the new European hunting craze, since hunting, which had played a large part in both their pre- colonial diet and economy and was suddenly challenged (MacKenzie 1988: 55). The overhunting by the white settlers greatly impacted the native Africans in that it caused a quite sudden scarcity in animals, and to ensure that the settlers would continue to have game to hunt, the imperial authorities instilled so-called ‘game laws’ and ‘game reserves’ to restrict the big game hunting (Ibid.: 121). However, these laws that highly restricted who was allowed to hunt and where, did not include the native Africans. This had detrimental consequences as they could no longer support themselves as they previously had been able to (Ibid.: 121).

The European settlers did not only deny the natives their hunting game, but also forced them from their homes in order to acquire land for farming and game reserves (Merivirta 2023: 490). The natives’ need to support themselves and the settlers’ need for cheap labor created the ‘squatting system’ which is described Raita Merivirta’s article “Nordic Settler Identities in Colonial Kenya: Class, Nationality and Race in Bror and Karen Blixen’s Transimperial Lives” as such:

“The small white population of the Protectorate owned a huge chunk of the arable land of the country, but large areas remained unfarmed. Consequently, large numbers of Africans began squatting in the white highlands. Until the end of the 1920’s, African squatters’,

resident farmworkers on the Europeans' farms, cultivated much of the land for the landowners in exchange for their own plots on the farms." (Ibid.: 490).

The settlers had thus created a feudal society in the African colonies, casting themselves as the feudal lords and the native Africans as their subjects. Not only did the settlers create a feudal structure in the societies of the African colonies, but their hunting style would also invoke a feudal feel according to MacKenzie, as "the monarch's authority in the land is represented by his or her role as the greatest hunter." (MacKenzie 1988: 15). This notion that the big game hunt was more than a sport to the settlers, but instead a display of colonial power, is also supported in William K. Storey's article "Big Cats and Imperialism: Lion and Tiger Hunting in Kenya and Northern India, 1898-1930" (Storey 1991) as he claims that "for the hunters, the basic underlying structures of the hunt symbolized the triumph of culture over nature and of the colonist over the colonized" (Storey 1991: 149) and that "the hunting of big cats by Europeans, as opposed to various indigenous hunting traditions and techniques, expressed colonist power because of its potent symbolism and because it was an activity open only to the most powerful inhabitants of a colony." (Ibid.: 154). These scholars thus suggest that hunting was not only a display of power, but also a display of culture and civilization since only the wealthy and cultured were able to pursue it, just as the feudal hunts of the past. Hunting the wild and exotic animals in the colonies was then highly symbolic of the colonial 'triumph' over the natives as well.

In "A History of Tourism" Cleveland describes how the white Europeans who either visited or settled in the colonies, expected "high times, an African extension of the privileged life that entertained them, or bored them, in Biarritz and St. Moritz, in the West End and Newport. Like polo and yachting, safari's combined excitement with luxury." (Cleveland 2021: 54). The colonies had thus become a haven and hideout for the wealthy white Europeans who were looking for excitement, entertainment and exclusivity and wanted a change of air. The colonies had then become a haven for the wealthy white Europeans who frequented the 'champagne safaris' as they were jokingly named (Ibid.: 54).

This claim that many wealthy Europeans looked to the African colonies when going on vacation is supported in E. I. Steinhart's article "Hunters, Poachers and Gamekeepers: Towards a Social History of Hunting in Colonial Kenya" (Steinhart 1989). Many of the early colonist settlers who had spent much of their time in Africa hunting, did their best to benefit from the new and massive hunting tourist-influx in Kenya, including both Karen Blixen's husband Baron Bror von Blixen-Finecke and her later love interest Denys Finch-Hatton (Cleveland 2021: 53). These men acted "as guides, organizers and field leaders of the 'champagne safari's' (or hunting parties) which gave the Kenyan safari its unique reputation for luxury and the Colony its overseas image as a wealthy sportsman's paradise." (Steinhart 1989: 254). Storey too, supports this notion in his article, as he states that "Kenya in particular had a reputation for having the best selection of game, as well as being one of the more expensive places to hunt." (Storey 1991: 154). In Shafqat Hussein's article "Sports-hunting, Fairness and Colonial Identity: Collaboration and Subversion in the Northwestern Frontier Region of the British Indian Empire" (Hussein 2010) it is stated how the colonial hunters cared much for both fairness and equality in the hunt, which is what distinguished sports hunting from hunting for practicalities (Hussein 2010: 114). The sports hunters wanted to believe that the hunted animal entered the hunt on some agreed upon rules and terms, in order to make the hunt more exciting to the hunter and to elevate the hunt into something greater than a disadvantaged animal being killed merely as the victim of a game: "Of course, in the case of hunting as a sport, the animal, which is hunted cannot lay down, or agree to, a set of rules under which it could be hunted. So, what is considered as fair game is then imposition of hunting ideals, in the shape of rules, of one class of hunters over another." (Ibid.: 114). Hussein thus suggests that the hunt was not only an unequal sport, but also highly symbolic of the unequal fight between the colonizer and the colonized. However, the deployment of the European notion of fairness was not only a way to make the hunt into a sport of its own, but also to distinct the imperial huntsmen from the native huntsmen (Ibid.: 114).

Hunting both for sport and for social separation, was also a relic from the European Middle Ages in which the wealth and aristocracy had hunted for entertainment and thrill, and dominance, rather than need. Especially the social separation and exclusivity was important for the colonists; having a

clear hierarchy in place for hunting and making up a system in which only they were allowed to hunt, was essential (Cleveland 2021: 39). In order to have themselves be the only ones hunting in the colonies, the settlers deemed the traditional African ways of hunting, by using poison to kill big game, barbarous and unmanly and in doing so claiming the hunting grounds for themselves (Ibid.: 39). Deeming the native hunting practices 'unmanly' was to the white settlers very grave, as being manly and masculine was highly esteemed in the white European societies and something to strive for: as it is stated in Joseph Sramek's article "Face Him like a Briton": Tiger Hunting, Imperialism, and British Masculinity in Colonial India, 1800-1875" (Sramek 2006) how "hunting was central to the development of that all-important Victorian trait of "character" (Ibid.: 665).

The notion of hunting creating 'character' and being the key to achieving true masculinity is supported by MacKenzie as he states that the masculine aspect of hunting was also, at this time, a very central theme in juvenile literature, and it was thus taught very early on that hunting was a formidable way of becoming a true man (MacKenzie 1988: 47). Moreover, Sramek states in his article how "only by successfully vanquishing tigers would Britons prove their manliness and their fitness to rule over Indians." and with this he too supports the correlation between hunting and masculinity at this time, but also the suggestion that successful big game hunting was symbolic of the success of the empire (Sramek 2006: 659). MacKenzie and Sramek then both suggest, in this, that there was a clear connection between hunting and masculinity to the colonists that and hunting was thus a way to prove just how fit they were to rule over the natives of their colonies.

Furthermore, hunting was viewed as the "perfect expression of global dominance in the late nineteenth century" since it "required all the most virile attributes of the imperial male" such as courage, individualism and sportsmanship (MacKenzie 1988: 51). The 'imperial male' was thus the immediate ideal to the colonial man, and according to MacKenzie hunted to exercise his power and dominance as an agent of the empire (Ibid.: 51). The big game hunt therefore provided the colonial men with both masculinity and dominance, but it also prepared them for their imperial duties since "willingness to take life was an important part of this ethos, and hunting was seen as a necessary

preparation and training for European expansion and conflict with other peoples.” (Ibid.: 44). The hunt had seemingly, at this stage, surpassed the status of a leisurely hobby.

## Colonial Women and Whiteness

As examined in the section above, the colonizing men were often times eager hunters and by that, willing agents of their empire aiding the European expansion. Karen Blixen, is an example, of a typical white European woman who travelled to Kenya in hopes to make hers and her husband's fortune by farming the 'new' land. In Tom Buk-Swienty's book *Løvinden* (Buk-Swienty 2019) about Blixen's life, it is stated that Blixen came to Africa with her fiancé the baron, Bror von Blixen-Finecke, as they were to run a coffee farm in Kenya as an investment made by Karen's family (Ibid.: 41). It was very typical of this time for women to come to the colonies with their husbands in search of fortune. In Ann L. Stoler's article "Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-Century Colonial Cultures" (Stoler 1989) she states that the typical colonial woman functioned as either missionaries, nurses or teachers, and through these jobs the women would help forward the imperial mission and agenda (Ibid.: 642). Whether Blixen was as a stereotypical colonial woman in this matter is somewhat established in Kirsten Holst Petersen's book *Burden or Benefit? Imperial Benevolence and Its Legacies* (Petersen 2008) in which a letter from Blixen to her family in Denmark is included, and in it she writes how she "would very much like to start a school on the farm" however, she is doubtful about the utility of a school on her land saying: "I actually don't know is it wouldn't be better if the native could be kept in their primitive stage, but I consider that to be out of the question." (Ibid.: 111). Blixen thus seems to be quite adamant that civilizing the natives would be rather necessary and by that, she too is an agent of the empire, through her activities in Kenya, just as the stereotypical colonial woman was.

## Whiteness in the Colonies

Being a colonizing woman in the British colonies, also meant being both European and white. Being white and whiteness was an essential part of colonial life as a settler, as the entire social hierarchy



and acceptance in the colonies rested in the settler's whiteness. In Merivirta's article "Nordic Settler Identities in Colonial Kenya" (Merivirta 2023) the hierarchy of whiteness in the colony of Kenya is explained as such:

"Yet the definition of 'whiteness' was not altogether simple. For most settlers, the British were the most superior 'white race', but the Protectorate's British settlers – including here Anglo South Africans, Americans, Canadians, New Zealanders, and Australians - welcomed Western Europeans. They could help in the civilizing project. But whites from other parts of Europe, well, their whiteness was suspect. Southern Europeans, or even whites of a lower class, were 'not quite white', they were not considered prestigious or civilised enough." (Ibid.: 495).

This hierarchy of whiteness is thus not solely based on skin-color, hair-color or eye-color, in that the settlers distinguished the whiteness from geography, rather than color. One had to be white of skin surely, but determining who were more 'acceptably white' based on geography shows that whiteness was seen as more than just a skin-color. This way to differentiate different types of whiteness within being white is explained in the article "The White Woman's Burden: from colonial "civilization" to Third World "development" by Jawad Syed and Faiza Ali (Syed & Ali 2011), in which they explain race as being socially constructed to justify discrimination against others, such as non-whites (Ibid.: 350). By applying Syed and Ali's theory, whiteness thus extends both ethnicity and race as there then can be different types of whiteness, within the white race. Whiteness is then, with this theory applied, fluid and has "a tendency to prefer and blend towards a norm set by the elite groups within the race." (Ibid.: 350) As whiteness can both change as social standards change and the different types of white can hold their own value due to these standards, whiteness then seems to be more of a mindset than anything physical as such.

Even though the Blixen's were not British, they were from western/northern Europe where their whiteness was deemed to be a sufficiently kind of white (Merivirta 2023: 495). According to Bill Schwarz' book *The White Man's World* (Schwarz 2011) there was a tendency for the settlers to credit

their whiteness for their place in the world and to view their whiteness as a guarantee for their place as global rulers (Ibid.: 169). Schwarz explains how the imperialists “might have believed that their modernity was a product of their whiteness; but it was whiteness which was the sign of their being modern, and of their role as self-appointed makers of history.” (Ibid.: 169).

In this worldview, it was whiteness and white people that brought modernity and ‘civilization’ with them because of merely being white. This view furthermore suggests that whiteness was an asset to the empire as “the power of the empire resided in the activities of the white man, in particular capacities of white femininity, in white brains and in white blood. In this view whiteness was a possession.” (Ibid.: 180). Whiteness was thus not only a mindset, but a possession or tool of imperial power in the hands of the colonists, just a hunting was perceived to be.

### The White Woman

Although there was much power in being white and European in the colonies, the true heads of these societies at this time, were the white men. As earlier stated, the white women were usually companions on the journeys to the colonies and even though they would have jobs, the women were not on their own in the colonies (Mandala 2020: 72). However, according to Syed and Ali the white colonial women did in fact enjoy a distinct sort of privilege through their whiteness in that “despite their own gendered subordination, white women’s membership of the dominant group afforded them a range of rights and concessions.” (Syed & Ali 2011: 350). This claim would suggest that colonial women thus had far more privileges and possibilities than the homebound European women, since the colonial women were suddenly citizens of a colony in which the true secondary citizens were the natives, and not the women. In the colonies, the women counted only as being white citizens and their gender was suddenly no longer the barrier it used to be in Europe, and because of this these women enjoyed privileges they never had before. This claim is also supported in Durba Ghosh’s article “Gender and Colonialism: Expansion or Marginalization?” (Ghosh 2004) in which she states that:

“Seen to be in diminished capacity because they were members of the ‘weaker sex’, white women benefited from being members of the ‘superior races’, and were charged with the responsibilities of upholding the cultural and moral values of the empire.” (Ibid.: 738). By being teachers and missionaries, for instance, the colonial women were then upholding the empire’s cultural and moral values by spreading it out into the colony via the natives they were teaching.

### Colonial Women and Big Game Hunting

Regarding her imperial duties as a white colonial woman, Blixen definitely lived up to the expectations of her time, but not as commonly Blixen also enjoyed going big game hunting in the reserve near her grounds. As earlier established hunting was seen as the true mark of masculinity in Victorian Britain and as a sport that required courage and virility (MacKenzie 1988: 51). The attitude that hunting was an activity reserved for men was a notion very popular in western/northern Europe at the time, where many men thought that women did not have the physique required to ride a horse, or they commonly believed that hunting made a woman less desirable to marry, as it is claimed in Vijaya Ramada Mandala’s article “British Huntswomen in Colonial India: Imperialism and Gender Hierarchies, 1890-1921” (Mandala 2020). Women hunted nonetheless, and usually took part in fox-hunting as it was one of the more accepted forms of hunting for women to be part of (MacKenzie 1988: 21). Although some women hunted back in Britain, they did have to face quite a bit of criticism from the society, and often times they were only accepted in the hunting parties as wives, guides or servants, but never equals (Mandala 2020: 72).

Blixen too, came from a home in which hunting was not encouraged as an activity for women as her father believed that “the gun doesn’t suit the fairer sex any better than the crochet hook suits the rest of us.”<sup>2</sup> (Ellerbæk 2023). Blixen was therefore just as used to gender barriers when it came to hunting, as any other white European women in her time. However, these gender barriers did not seem to play as big a part in the colonies, as it did in Europe as “such physical, cultural and sociopolitical barriers imposed by Victorian society in Britain were comfortably disregarded in the

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<sup>2</sup> Original: ”geværet klæder ikke det smukke køn bedre end hæklenålen os andre.”

colonies” and as such, there was less keeping the colonial women from going big game hunting in the British colonies (Mandala 2020: 84). An example of just how accepted hunting women were in the colonies is an anecdote from Blixen’s memoir “Out of Africa”, in which Blixen and her love-interest and professional big game hunter Denys Finch-Hatton has gone hunting and comes upon a lion: “Denys asked me in a low voice: ‘Shall I shoot her?’ – For he very courteously looked on the Ngong Hill as my private hunting-ground”<sup>3</sup> Blixen seems in this instance to be viewed, by Finch-Hatton, as an equal and capable hunter that commands respect; Blixen is thus in this situation not a woman, but a white hunter and is because of that, treated as an equal.

Furthermore, both Blixen and her husband Bror would write letters home to their family in Denmark, describing their hunting trips and safaris. Bror would often times praise Blixen’s hunting abilities in these letters: “she has proven to be a very good shot and can now brag of being the only danish lady who has shot both leopard and lion.”<sup>4,5</sup> Bror himself was, as mentioned earlier, a professional big game hunter in Kenya and would spend most of his time hunting, but seems to have had no qualms about his wife going hunting as well (Steinhart 1989: 254). This letter then also supports the claim of gender barriers being disregarded in relation to hunting, in the colonies made by Mandala (Mandala 2020: 84).

## Hunting in ‘Out of Africa’: Imperial Power and Symbolism

As established earlier in the article, an essential quality of hunting in the colonies was displaying imperial power. The hunt itself had become a symbol of the empire and its global power; and especially lion-hunting was viewed as being very prestigious, as a lion was “the most fearsome foe, a dragon substitute, a source of awe and fascination to most African hunters. All were proudest of their tally of lion kills.” (MacKenzie 1988: 47). Not only was Blixen, according to her husband, the

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<sup>3</sup> Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 229.

<sup>4</sup> Karen Blixen & Aage Westenholz, *Karen Blixens afrikanske farm. En brevsamling 1913-1931*. (Gyldendal: København, 2018), p. 465.

<sup>5</sup> Original: ”Hun har vist sig at være en meget god skytte og kan nu prale af at være den eneste danske dame, der har skudt baade leopard og løve”.

first Danish lady to shoot and kill a lion<sup>6</sup> but she would even shoot so many lions, that she had trophies to spare and would give, according to Simon Lewis' article "Culture, Cultivation and Colonialism in "Out of Africa" and beyond" (Lewis 2000); "lion-skins to "the Indian High Priest" and to King Christian X of Denmark, in the latter case claiming to have shot the lion herself." (Ibid.: 70-71). Blixen herself also confirms on more than one account in her memoir that the lions she shot would almost always be skinned before she even got home, so that she would have trophies to bring back with her: "while the sun rose they skinned the lions (...) We sat on the short grass and ate and drank. The dead lions, close by, looked magnificent in their nakedness."<sup>7</sup> Blixen was thus not only keen on hunting as her fellow settlers, but she also was an eager trophy hunter which very much correlates with the hunting-spirit of the colonies at this time.

Blixen furthermore shares, in her memoir, another anecdote of a lion-hunt in which she and Finch-Hatton shoots and kills a couple of lions on Blixen's land. As soon as the lions are shot and killed, the native children on her grounds emerge from the school she set up, and as they come outside, they find Blixen sitting on top of one of the dead lions.<sup>8</sup> The fact that Blixen, a white settler, is sitting on a hunted and killed lion seems to more or less establish the symbolism of imperial power in big game hunting. The symbolic setting is completed by the native children emerging from a school in which they are taught imperial values and morals by their colonist ruler. This assumed symbolism can of course not be determined, neither can Blixen's thoughts or intentions with this anecdote; but the immediate symbolism is striking.

The native children that Blixen had taught in her school was of course 'squatting' children who lived on Blixen's farm because their own lands were stolen by settlers. Blixen had set up the school to enlighten the native children because she believed herself to be goodwilled just as "whitely people generally consider themselves to be benevolent and goodwilled, fair honest and ethical." (Syed & Ali 2011: 351). In this, Blixen was indeed, in this instance, a very typical white settler who enjoyed

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<sup>6</sup> Blixen & Westenholz, *Karen Blixens afrikanske farm*, p. 465

<sup>7</sup> Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 231

<sup>8</sup> Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 236

the feudal structure of the colonies as she “promoted herself as a feudal lady, selflessly protecting her retinue of dedicated Africans.” (Merivirta 2023: 500).

### Hunting for Sport

As previously established in earlier sections, the hunt in the colonies was made into a sport for the settlers. Blixen too, treated the big game hunt as a sport as she reminisces on how she would get caught up in the sport: “Here in the hills there were Buffaloes. I had even, in my very young days, - when I could not live till I had killed a specimen of each kind of African game, - shot a bull out here.”<sup>9</sup> Blixen seems to have been just as much a sportswoman as the next hunting settler at this time. On this account, Blixen thus proves to be very much in tune with the hunting zeitgeist in the colonies at this time.

In Hussein’s article it was previously stated that the settlers would convince themselves that the animals they hunted, somehow had agreed to be hunted and agreed to rules that would make the hunt fair and equal (Hussein 2010: 114). Another way to ‘make’ the animal a more equal opponent was to personify them and credit the animals with human abilities they had no way of possessing. Hussein brings an example of this in his article: “But the ibex is a gentleman in his manners and customs as compared with his spiral-horned cousin lower down mountain; he gives you all the chances that a fair-minded animal should give an honest foe. (...) he has been a worthy opponent.” (Ibid.: 117). In this example the preyed animal is made capable of both having manners and being ‘fair-minded’; both very human qualities.

This way of perceiving the prey animal as an equal seems to have been somewhat common in the colonies, since Blixen too confirms to have used this tactic herself, in her memoir. Blixen would credit her hunted prey with abilities and intelligence as she writes the following: “They were both full-grown, young, strong, fat lions. The two close friends, out on the hills or on the plains together

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<sup>9</sup> Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 241

yesterday had taken the same great adventure into their heads, and in it they had died together.”<sup>10</sup> By perceiving the animals to be capable of human qualities such as ‘going on adventures’ and being friends, Blixen made them human and by that a fair opponent, fair game. Blixen thus utilize the same strategy that many other colonizers did, in that she perceives her prey to have been more humanlike than it was and thus justify her hunting it.

### Champagne Safaris and Reserves

As many of their fellow settlers, Blixen and her husband too, enjoyed going on safari when they needed time away to enjoy themselves (Cleveland 2021: 54). As Blixen falls ill with malaria in the beginning of their time in Africa, she writes home that “now the doctor has recommended a change of air and since we don’t want to go to a hotel we will instead go on a little safari tomorrow.”<sup>11, 12</sup> Blixen thus establishes, with this letter, how going on safari was something fun and soothing to do in the colonies. Her husband writes the following, to her family as they return from the safari: “Dearest Uncle Aage! We are now home from our safari and it has been a success. Tanne is strong and well again, and it has been a pleasure to once again see her tanned and happy.”<sup>13, 14</sup> The safari then did Blixen very good and even seems to have had a healing effect on her, as she returned from it happy and healthy, according to her husband. Blixen and her husband thus seem to have frequented the ‘champagne safaris’ just as much as all the other white settlers and tourists in the colonies (Ibid.: 54). This cavalier exploitation of the African wilderness, natives and animals was, once again, very stereotypical at this time and by this, Blixen solidifies to have embodied many aspects of the white colonial experience in Africa.

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<sup>10</sup> Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 236.

<sup>11</sup> Blixen & Westenholz, *Karen Blixens afrikanske farm*, p. 81.

<sup>12</sup> Original: ”nu har Doktoren raadet meget til en change of air og da vi ikke gerne vil tage op til et Hotel gaar vi ud paa en lille Safari i morgen.”

<sup>13</sup> Blixen & Westenholz, *Karen Blixens afrikanske farm*, p. 465.

<sup>14</sup> Original: ”Kæreste Onkel Aage! Vi er nu hjemme efter vor safari og den har været en succes. Tanne er stærk og rask igen, og det er en fornøjelse atter at se hende solbrædt og glad.”

## Conclusion

Big game hunting in the imperial colonies in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century was heavily influenced by notions of power, masculinity and whiteness. The colonial hunt became a display of imperial power both by controlling the native population through game laws and reserves, and thus destroying both their economy and food supply, and also by helping creating a feudal structure that oppressed the natives and forced them to work for the white settlers.

Whiteness was highly esteemed and because of this white colonial women experienced far more privileges than they had been used to in Europe, due to being white and thus being first-class citizens. Gender was then, in many ways, not as prominent a barrier as it was back in Europe. The women were thus placed or encouraged to take jobs that helped forward the imperial mission and vision, such as teachers and missionaries, but were also able to go hunting on equal terms with the colonial men. This opportunity was seized by Karen Blixen, who turned out to be an adamant and seemingly skilled hunter, who would hunt on the same terms as her male counterparts. Furthermore, Blixen's fondness of hunting, sportsmanship and feudalism all correlate with the overall zeitgeist of the colonies of this time. Blixen was additionally and simultaneously quite a typical white woman in the colonies in both her actions, beliefs and ethnicity.

Moreover, the notions and claims of power display, sport, feudalism, gender and whiteness in imperial hunting made by scholars such as MacKenzie, Storey, Hussein, Merivirta, Mandala etc. all support and confirm one another, and thus emphasize the overall historical outline of imperial hunting showcased in this article. Blixen's memoir and personal experiences further supports these scholarly and historical claims, as they align very well. Blixen's experiences both hunting and as a white European woman in the African colonies is thus, in many ways, an embodiment and incredible primary example of the overall imperial hunting experience and colonial experience at this time.





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