



Saha, J. (2015). Among the Beasts of Burma: Animals and the Politics of Colonial Sensibilities, 1850-1940. *Journal of Social History*, 48(4), 910-932. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shv003>

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Jonathan Saha

**Among the Beasts of Burma: Animals and the Politics of Colonial Sensibilities,
c.1840-1940**

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Abstract

According to imperial writings, the Burmese were too close to animals, both physically and emotionally. It was claimed that some Burmese people had innate connections to animals, notably elephant-drivers with their elephants. British writers were also intrigued but disgusted by what they deemed to be inappropriate interactions with animals, recounting apocryphal tales of women breastfeeding orphaned non-human mammals. But despite these negative portrayals of human-animal relations, imperial texts also betray their authors' own material and sentimental ties to animals. Their adoration of their pets and their sufferance of pests both served to embed them in the colony. Using insights drawn from animal history, sensory history, postcolonial theory and historical geography, this article explores how these felt encounters with animals were mediated in colonial discourse. I argue that uncovering these hitherto overlooked affective colonial relationships with animals is necessary to contextualize histories that have primarily focused on the emergence of scientific and bureaucratic imperial representations of nature.

Introduction: Touching Animals

Jacques Derrida thought hard about what it means to look at animals. To really *look* at them. To be aware of their returned gaze, to consider their thoughts, and to confront the essentially unknowable nature of their internal worlds. Derrida wrote that he confronted an abyss between the human and the animal realms when he looked at his cat, and when he saw his cat look back at him. But he also showed us that this divide between us and them cannot be captured and fixed in language, or in space or time. The gap between humans and animals is subject to change. It has been redefined in new historical circumstances. But Derrida argues that although the division has slipped between the fingers of philosophers, scientists and others who have attempted to fix it, the act of looking at animals is still central to defining what is human.¹

This profound, unbridgeable division is, however, a metaphysical one. Physically, Derrida could reach out and touch the cat. These felt encounters with animals are just as important for historians to consider as visual encounters, particularly to those who in the anti-humanist tradition do not take definitions of human nature to be given or natural.² Tactile encounters between humans and animals have also changed over time.³ In different periods they have been granted different meanings and been subject to different taboos. But touch can also be a causal factor in history. Material encounters, be they with other sentient beings or with inanimate objects, have psychic effects.⁴ This is neatly captured in the duality of the term “touching”. It can mean both physical acts and emotional responses. When an animal is touched by, or touches, a human it contributes to an affective state: perhaps pleasure, or nostalgia, or anxiety, or disgust. This paper explores how the affective nature of human-animal physical proximity was mediated through colonial discourse.⁵ It is also a study that seeks to uncover the presence of animals within colonial discourse, one that attempts to take seriously their material as well as their textual presences.⁶

The focus of this study is colonial Burma, which was colonized through three wars during the nineteenth century (1824-6, 1852, 1885) and incorporated into the administrative apparatus of British India. Burma makes for a useful case study because of its particular place in the imperial

“imaginative geography” of Asia, a place in which animals were defining features.⁷ Expanses of jungle populated by a bewilderingly diverse array of wildlife provide the back drop for British travel-writing and literature set in the colony. Its location at the crossroads of India, China and Southeast Asia further enhanced its reputation for a varied ecology. As a result, some of the nineteenth century’s most prominent Anglo-Indian natural historians dedicated themselves to studies of Burma’s flora and fauna.⁸ It was also a favourite site for hunting within British India, because of the abundance of jungle fowl, wild elephants, tigers and other game.⁹ The colony was especially associated with elephants in the imperial imagination. This was in part because of the popular interest in white elephants, which were believed to be revered by the Burmese.¹⁰ It was also the result of the rapid growth of the timber trade in Burma’s forests during the nineteenth century and into the mid-twentieth century.¹¹ Elephant labour was essential to the extraction of teak from forests and to its processing in timber yards. These commercial ventures contributed to imperial visual culture. The image of elephants working with timber was prominent in the branding of Burmese teak, and watching elephants work in Rangoon’s timber yards was a fixture of the tourist circuit.¹² This extensive employment of elephants meant that veterinarians employed in the colony added considerably to the generation of medical knowledge about the Asian elephant.¹³ Burma was a colony in which human-animal relations were prominent in imperial culture.

Since this article focuses on colonial discourse within British Burma, it is also implicitly about the silencing of Burmese ways of understanding interspecies encounters in the English-language colonial archive.¹⁴ This is not to say that the colonized were unimportant in the production of knowledge, although their roles in this process were certainly marginalized in this archive.¹⁵ Nor is it meant to suggest that wider, perhaps even subaltern, representations of felt experiences with animals cannot be uncovered. By focusing on British perceptions, I do not mean to further marginalize other systems of thought.¹⁶ Rather the article emphasizes that there existed a distinctively colonial politics to how felt encounters with animals were represented. At the same time, in the absence of a discussion of Burmese perceptions, it should not be assumed that they had

more harmonious relationships with the animal world. This would be a re-presentation of a colonial “noble savage” motif, one that unfortunately is still implicitly present in some critiques of Western modes of thought regarding animals.¹⁷ Despite this caveat, the advent of colonial rule in Burma was a profound moment in the history of human-animal relations there.

As animal historians have shown, the nineteenth-century “age of empire” saw the emergence of new understandings of animals -- including humans -- informed by powerful intellectual developments, such as Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. It has been demonstrated by a number of studies that the concurrent rise of a modern overseas empire with industrial capitalism fundamentally reshaped British perceptions of animals.¹⁸ These histories have excavated some of the ideological shifts in the imperial centre and in colonial policy, but the parts of the world that were colonized in this period have largely remained on the fringes of such studies. In general, the world beyond Europe and north America has attracted less attention in animal history.¹⁹ The postcolonial agenda of “provincializing Europe” within history writing has had little impact upon this field.²⁰ Furthermore, without wanting to deny the historical importance of these nineteenth-century epistemological shifts, it is worth remembering that they were not universally dominant. Colonized populations’ understandings of the animal world were not swept aside by these imperial ways of thinking about animals. Alongside and in interaction with emergent imperial conceptions of animals, colonized peoples conceived of animals in diverse and distinct ways.²¹ There is a danger that the Eurocentric focus implicit in some animal history creates a teleological metanarrative in which non-Western ways of being with animals are emplotted as doomed to disappear in the wake of colonization.²²

This narrative curiously echoes late nineteenth-century imperial claims that they were bringing modern knowledge of animals to cultures characterized by anthropomorphic understandings of animals and by the inhumane treatment of animals.²³ This claim to modernity was predicated on the belief that as colonizers they could stand apart from nature, translate it into scientific knowledge, and manage and exploit it through bureaucratic structures.²⁴ It is a narrative

with some empirical support. Animal historians working on colonial contexts that have shown that the mid-nineteenth century witnessed a shift in imperial rhetoric and practice towards dispassionate, removed interactions with animals. The hunt, for instance, began to be framed in terms of conservation and wildlife management, although peril and adventure were never entirely absent from accounts.²⁵ In addition there have been a number of studies that have examined the rise of veterinary and medical human-animal interactions, bureaucratic schemes for managing animal populations, and the didactic display of animals in zoos.²⁶ Evidently, the consolidation of imperial power in many parts of globe at the end of nineteenth century coincided with the emergence of more emotionally detached ways of observing, understanding and interacting with animals. However, taking a lead from Martha Few and Zeb Tortorici's collection of essays on animals in Latin American history, more can be done to "denaturalize and historicize" these imperial conceptualisations and practices.²⁷

The rise of scientific and dispassionate representations of interactions with animals is undoubtedly an important aspect of colonization. However, it is a focus that implicitly sustains the notion that British colonizers *were* able to remove themselves from the animal world and reduce animals primarily to objects for observation. It would appear from these histories that imperial representational practices were conducted at a distance from animals, either physically or emotionally. So doing, they also unwittingly reinforce the argument that with modernity sight became the predominant sense, taking precedence over the "lesser" senses.²⁸ Animal encounters appear stripped of any wider inter-sensory experience beyond the visual. Sensory historian Mark Smith has recently unpacked this problematic assumption, noting its inherently elitist framework. After all, only some in even metropolitan nineteenth-century societies had the privilege to ocularly study texts, objects and images in relative isolation from the rest of the sensory world. Smith argues that retaining an awareness of how a range of sensory experiences were present when people saw things in the past, disrupts the assumed link between vision and modernity.²⁹ In a parallel move, the historical geographers Felix Driver, Jamie Lorimer and Sarah Whatmore have sought to uncover the

ways that the colonial gaze was produced through embodied practices and material relations. In this approach, Lorimer and Whatmore put a particular emphasis on human-animal relations.³⁰ These studies together suggest that by opening up historical studies to a greater range of sensory experiences, and by paying closer attention to physical, embodied encounters, historians can problematize the imperial story. Colonizers' attempts to establish physical and emotional detachment from animals need to be situated alongside the material relations with animals upon which these performances were predicated. Visual encounters need to be situated alongside concurrent physical encounters.

John Miller has examined the relationship between detached observation and visceral physicality in his study of the animal body in Victorian imperial adventure fiction. He too identifies a difference between looking and touching in the texts. The former relies on distance. The ability of the human observer to stand apart from wildlife and observe it. He contrasts this to the intimacy of touch. In these physical encounters the division between human and animal is breached, and the imperial authors he studies fear losing themselves in the resulting sensual *mêlée*.³¹ This anxiety is palpable in many of the imperial writings set in British Burma. However, anxiety is not the only recorded emotional response to physical proximity with animals. Beyond the genre of romantic adventure fiction -- some examples of which are discussed below --, in memoirs, natural histories, scientific texts, ethnographies, travel writings, and government reports, there are a range of other affective states the historian can uncover. The persistence of these physical and emotional encounters should cause us to suggest that the "affective wall", which Elizabeth Collingham argues was erected by the Anglo-Indian community in the late-nineteenth century in response to their often unpleasant bodily experiences of India, was in fact a rather porous one.³² We might instead concur with Ann Laura Stoler's argument that colonial cultures, and their archived texts, were never detached from affective and intimate experiences.³³

The diversity of British representations of touching animals (as well as smelling and hearing them) in colonial Burma was structured by several factors. The most salient being: who was

touching the animal; and what animal was being touched. And there was a politics behind who could and who could not touch this or that animal, as well as to how these encounters were portrayed; a politics of what we might call colonial sensibilities. Crucially, this was a politics informed by colonial society's near ubiquitous concern with policing racial divisions, a concern intrinsically bound-up with anxieties over sexuality.³⁴ Reflecting this idealized, but frequently compromised, division between the colonized and the colonizers in British Burma, the remainder of the article has been divided into two sections. The first examines British portrayals of Burmese tactile interactions with animals, drawing out the ambivalence of imperial disgust and desire in witnessing and imagining these encounters. The second then turns to British imperialists themselves, demonstrating that although they often maligned the Burmese for being too physically and sentimentally close to animals, they too shared their material and emotional lives with animals, particularly pets and pests. These sections show that far from being detached observers of animals, British colonizers were both affected by Burmese felt encounters with animals and had their own myriad affective felt encounters with animals. Uncovering these felt encounters unsettles British imperialists' claims to be harbingers of modernity based on their distance from the animal world, claims that have not yet been fully challenged in animal history.

Disgust and Desire

Imperial writers often drew attention to the physical and emotional closeness that the Burmese were said to have with animals. This representational politics is unsurprising. Denying the humanity of oppressed groups by linking them to animals was a rhetorical strategy deployed by dominant authorities in many historical contexts.³⁵ In British Burma these portrayals were not uniformly negative, or indeed uniform in content, but they all served to mark the Burmese out as "Other", with varying degrees of subtlety and success. A central marker of this difference was religion, Burmese Buddhism being characterized by one late nineteenth-century British travel writer visiting the colony as having a "pitying love for animals".³⁶ However, the sharpness of this binary is

complicated by the further differentiation of the population by ethnicity. The Karen, for instance, had emerged by the mid-nineteenth century as a particularly important group for colonial knowledge of Burmese animals. This was because of their reputation as jungle-residing hunters and because of the comparatively successful penetration of Christian missionaries within some sections of their communities. Their alleged closeness to the animal populations of Burma made them simultaneously crucial intermediaries for gathering information on the country's natural history, and targets for racist anthropological categorisations of them as "primitive".³⁷ These claims represent the general and sweeping end of British portrayals of the proximity of Burma's colonized populations to animals. More ambivalent responses to human-animal tactility emerged in imperial writings on more specific physical relationships. In this section I will discuss just three: portrayals of Burmese elephant-drivers, called *oozies*; representations of snake-charmers; and claims that Burmese women breastfed animals.

The expansion in the operations of large-scale British timber companies in Burma during the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, resulting in the extraction of over half a million tons of teak between 1919 and 1924 alone,³⁸ was only possible through elephant labour. The labour of these elephants, in turn, was only possible through the employment of *oozies*. Although derided in a government report on Burmese elephants in 1894 as lazy and untrustworthy,³⁹ the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation veteran James "Elephant Bill" Williams regarded them as an indispensable source of knowledge and skill. In his published memoir and semi-fictionalized account, both published in the 1950s, he emphasized that he learned about elephants not from his fellow officers in the company -- most of whom he suggested were drunkards --, or from colonial writings, but from his *oozies*.⁴⁰ He also drew repeated parallels between the *oozies* and their elephants in three areas: their life cycles, particularly around adolescence and musth; their temperaments, claiming both were generally docile, but dangerous and uncontrollable when provoked; and even their addictions, with a shared addiction to opium hinted at throughout his memoir.⁴¹ This is particularly apparent in some of the photographs inset in his memoir, *Elephant Bill* -- for instance in *Figure 1*,

the caption for which describes the *oozie* as “almost part” of his elephant. The physicality and skins of both elephant and rider are also commented upon and made the focus of the image. Depictions of nudity and partial undress, as Philippa Levine has pointed out, could connote base savagery or be used in high aesthetics,⁴² but in this depiction of an *oozie*, the focus on the undressed body is to highlight his shared emotional and tactile connections to the elephant. The photograph is intended to show an intimate and innate connection between the two, a naturalistic portrayal that masked the more fraught relations of the forestry labour regime.

<Insert Figure 1 Near Here>

George Henry Evans was author of the 1894 report that disparaged the abilities of *oozies*. Despite this he nonetheless acknowledged the singular importance of an *oozie*'s tactile connection with their elephant. During his time as the Superintendent of the Civil Veterinary Department in the colony in the early-twentieth century, Evans became a world-renowned expert in elephant diseases. His major publication on the subject, *Elephants and Their Diseases*, in many ways epitomizes the detached, scientific mode of reducing animals into objects of study associated with imperialism. For instance, the weight of the different body parts of a typical working elephant, dismembered for the purpose of the task, is presented matter-of-factly in table form.⁴³ His prose leaves no space for an acknowledgement of the material, let alone affective, nature of such a macabre procedure. Yet, despite his commitment to producing objective knowledge on elephants, he concedes that knowledge of individual elephants is not reducible to writing. Instead, *oozies*' understandings of their elephants “can only be gained by experience” and “cannot be placed on record or otherwise handed down”.⁴⁴ This experiential knowledge resulting from close, physical interaction with elephants is deemed indispensable to their management. Without this experiential knowledge, and the *oozies*' command of it, Evans' own work would not have been possible. Implicitly his medical interventions and observations were dependent upon the tactile understandings between elephant and *oozie* that rendered the animal docile enough for study. It is perhaps their place as unavoidable intermediaries between colonizer and elephant that led to Evans' frequent hostile criticisms of the

character of *oozies*. His resentment seems analogous to that directed towards “native informants” in the generation of colonial knowledge.⁴⁵

Experiential knowledge of elephants derived from close physical ties with the animals, whilst central to imperial veterinary study, was not to be acquired by Europeans, who were instead employed as supervisors over *oozies*. This was in part due to the racial logic of colonial governance within the forestry regime,⁴⁶ but it was also due to colonial sensibilities. “Elephant Bill” Williams’ contemporary and acquaintance Phillip Howe, who worked in the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation’s commercial rival Steel Brothers, recalled his experience of attempting to drive an elephant in his unpublished memoirs. After describing the techniques of the *oozies*, who sat behind the elephant’s head and used their legs to direct the creature by manipulating its ears, he noted that this skin-on-skin activity was a source of discomfort to Europeans. The hairs on the elephant’s body apparently provoked an itch and caused a rash on white legs.⁴⁷ Implicitly the colonizers’ heightened sensitivity to the friction generated between human and elephant skin in routine forestry labour was a mark of a “sensory hierarchy” structured by race.⁴⁸ Such sensibilities may have served to justify the racially hierarchical employment practices of imperial timber companies. Either way, racial discourse was not only predicated upon differences in skin color,⁴⁹ but on the sensitivity of the skin. In these discussions about the sensitivity of skin, there was some debate about elephant skin. Some British travel writers claimed that elephants were annoyed by mosquitos just as much as they were themselves. It was a claim doubted by the imperial traveller and soldier George Younghusband who quipped that it was a rumour being misleadingly propagated by a boastful mosquito full of unwarranted bravado.⁵⁰ It was also noted by both travel writers and imperial veterinarians that elephants were among the “higher” animals that suffered from sunstroke.⁵¹ The status of both British colonizers and elephants was enhanced by claims that their skin felt more. In contrast, *oozies*’ skins were portrayed as comfortable in contact with their elephants.

The romantic depiction of the *oozies*’ relationship with working elephants was also based upon the positive place of elephants in the British imagination. Their partial submission to

domestication rendered them honorary “good animals”, among the generally bad wild animal populations, in the eyes of Victorian natural history writers.⁵² Snakes, however, were firmly in the bad category. Yet depictions of people riding elephants and of snake charmers were both enduring features of Orientalist imagery. The difference between them may be that human-snake relations were viewed as unnatural and alarming, particularly in contrast to the naturalized physicality of the *oozie*-elephant connection. In her 1897 book the travel writer Alice Hart remarked upon the habit in some parts of Burma of keeping pythons as pets. She also noted that the Government of Burma’s attempts to destroy poisonous snakes, by offering rewards for the bodies of dead snakes, backfired when entrepreneurial members of the population began breeding and killing them solely in order to claim the money.⁵³ Comments on their venom and generally untrustworthy nature, injected a sense of jeopardy into these observations.

In literary portrayals of official life in Burma, colonial authors gendered human-snake tactility. In her scandalous and genuinely shocking 1901 novel *Anna Lombard*, a New Woman novelist writing under the fantastic pseudonym Victoria Cross described a dance performed by an eleven year-old Burmese girl with a snake. In the scene, a desperately lonely and lovelorn young official is being tempted, and almost seduced, by this child and her charmed snake. The narrative purpose of the episode is to establish the character’s self-sacrificing, earnest suppression of his libido. Through the book Cross details what she imagines to be the psychological effects of this repressed desire and tracks how it eventually brings about a new, more-enlightened form of masculinity. An early turning point within this plot, the protagonist resists the temptations of the writhing, combined movements of girl and snake.⁵⁴ Cross was building on Burma’s reputation as a colony where white men regularly made “temporary wives” of Burmese women, with some being accused of having relationships with children.⁵⁵ It was part of a broader critique of imperial masculinity.⁵⁶ She used a portrayal of snake-charming to both exemplify male desire and to make it appear unsettling and unnatural.

This scene is echoed by one in a more conventional imperial novel set in Burma. Absent of a critique of male desire or empire was *Fascination*, the third novel written by the long-serving judge in the colony, Cecil Champain Lewis. Written a decade later, it is a tedious but kind-hearted British tourist and an otherwise stolid British official who both become captivated by the young Burmese snake-charmer who performs for them. She turns out to be as deadly and deceptive as her trained snakes.⁵⁷ Lewis' portrayal is a condemnation of female sexual desire, and in this sense it is diametrically opposed to *Anna Lombard* in its message. However, in both scenes the physical intimacy of the Burmese women with a snake is intended to be simultaneously erotic but unsettling. In the novels, the characters display revulsion at the sensuousness of the scene. In *Fascination*, at the climax of the snake-charming performance, the young Burmese female dancer moves her face closer and closer to her snake's mouth until they are touching. She then licks its muzzle. The chaste and attractive British young woman witnessing the act finds it "disgusting". Her manipulative and adulterous step-mother, by contrast, professes her wish to be able to perform the act herself.⁵⁸ Both novels used this disturbing sensuousness between Burmese women and animals didactically. Through them they encouraged the policing of potentially transgressive imperial carnal desires for the colonized.⁵⁹

Literary depictions of snake-charming are not the only examples of gendered and sexualized portrayals of Burmese intimacy with animals. There are repeated references in imperial writings to Burmese women breastfeeding baby elephants, goats, panthers and bears, apparently either at the behest of the Burmese monarchy or because of their Buddhist beliefs.⁶⁰ The photograph labelled *Figure 2* purports to show a woman breastfeeding an elephant in neighbouring Siam. The juxtaposition of the human child on one breast, and the elephant on the other, emphasizes her physical proximity to the animal, and produces a sense of the act as an unnatural one. This is clearly a staged and posed photograph. It is not merely attempting to document the practice, it is *producing* the practice by moving it from the anecdotal to the evidential. As with the photographs of the *oozies* discussed above, the undressed body is highlighting the intimacy between human and animal --

although in this shot, any impression of intimacy is undermined by its highly intrusive nature. Whilst the photographer is unknown, the image was acquired by the Wellcome Trust library collections in 1930 from one J. Hamilton Evans, along with a photograph of two copulating elephants and another showing a deformed Filipino child.⁶¹ In this context, it appears that the photograph was of the *Ripley's Believe it or Not* type, exploitative fascination with the “abnormal” and shocking, and reveals how this could overlap with imperial myths.

<Insert Figure 2 Near Here>

Along with being used to evidence the excessive intimacy of Burmese encounters with animals, these imperial representations reveal their own voyeuristic impulses. In his second book *Bandoola*, James Williams recalled being drunk and sexually frustrated at a village party in the Burmese jungle and, in the chaos, finding the sight of Burmese women breastfeeding in public simultaneously disgusting and alluring, resulting in feelings of shame.⁶² A description of cross-species nursing that similarly reveals the author's own voyeurism was produced by John Nisbet, one-time Conservator of Forests in British Burma. In his two-volume 1901 overview of the colony's history, culture and administration he recounted the experience of a British resident surgeon at the Konbaung court in 1875 who witnessed the royal white elephant being breastfed by a group of roughly twenty Burmese women. He claimed, Nisbet reported, that the women became so “nervous and excited” by the duty that “the milk even spouted from their breasts before these were touched by the big beast's trunk.”⁶³ Whilst Nisbet found the scene “disgusting”, he was attempting to tantalize the reader through his explicit detail.⁶⁴

I have not found any evidence of royal orders having been issued by the Konbaung dynasty to arrange this practice during the second half of the nineteenth century. To the contrary, it appears that collecting and feeding royal elephants their fodder was not viewed as a merit-making activity but was a punishment.⁶⁵ On the other hand, it is clear that feeding orphaned baby elephants was a problem faced by imperial timber trading companies. Howe of the Steel Brothers firm recalled using tinned condensed milk and rice water for the task.⁶⁶ British interest in apocryphal tales of

elephants drinking human breast milk sets the novelty of their own consumption habits into relief. Travel writers and novelists often bemoaned the lack of cows' milk in the colony, despite the presence of large herds of cattle. Muriel Bowden, whose husband was employed by the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation during the 1920s, wrote to her mother of the difficulty of finding either cows with a temperament conducive to being milked, or Burmese servants capable of milking a cow without being kicked. She also recalled her husband's joke that she should drink elephants' milk to fatten up after a period of protracted illness.⁶⁷ Despite their voyeuristic interest in apparently novel Burmese practices, British colonial rule appears to have actually brought with it the practice of milking cattle to produce dairy for human consumption. As with elephant driving, the physical practice of milking was farmed out to Burmese and Indian staff.

Imperial portrayals of Burmese physical interactions with animals were similar in the sense that they emphasized racial difference through human-animal felt encounters. The Burmese were too close to animals, physically and emotionally. *Oozies* were said to be at one with their animals. The touch of their skin against that of their elephants revealed their intimate and innate connection. European skin was, by contrast, too sensitive. However, these portrayals of human-animal tactility demonstrate that colonial discourse was heavily marked by ambivalence.⁶⁸ The sexualized portrayal of female snake-charmers and breastfeeding suggest a complex and contradictory interplay of disgust and desire within imperial writings.⁶⁹ These writings reveal more about their imperial authors than any Burmese practices. They demonstrate that they were emotionally and materially invested in Burmese felt encounters with animals. Emotionally, as we have seen, by rendering them as sources and outlets for feelings of disgust and desire. And materially in veterinary practice, the timber trade and the production of dairy, just three examples of many forms of labour which necessitated that the colonized touched animals' bodies to produce goods and knowledge for imperial consumption. However, not all imperial interactions with animals were mediated by Burmese bodies. British colonials in Burma had their own felt encounters with wildlife.

Pets and Pests

The racial differentiation implicit in imperial descriptions of the physical and emotional intimacy of the colonized with animals, was an element of colonial discourse that sat alongside ample evidence of British intimacy with animals in Burma. This was an unacknowledged tension. The potential contradiction was masked by wider imperial claims to a scientific mode of relating to animals, a position supported by spurious portrayals of the apparently credulous, superstitious, overly sentimental, and occasionally brutal practices of the colonized.⁷⁰ By the second half of the nineteenth century, the imperial natural historian or zoologist portrayed themselves in their scholarly writings and governmental reports as detached observers of wildlife. Of course, these written performances of their dominance over the natural world were predicated on material connections to animals.⁷¹ Scientific knowledge of animals in Burma was generated through colonial actors touching and feeling the bodies of living and dead creatures. These physical encounters were also necessitated by new medical practices. For example, colonial smallpox vaccination campaigns necessitated the maintenance of the cowpox lymph in cattle.⁷² Similarly, bacteriological research into malaria was supported by the breeding of mosquitos in laboratories.⁷³

Scientific sources rendered these material connections with animals in the language of detached observation and left little space for any acknowledgement of the affective nature of this labour. Despite this, James “Elephant Bill” Williams’ account of his first amateurish post-mortem on one of the elephants in his charge offers some hints at the initial revulsion that might have been felt by novices in handling dead animals. Rummaging around in the animal’s remains, managing the unpleasant smell, texture and sight, Williams was unable to identify many of the creature’s vital organs and joked that he believed it to have died from a lack of kidneys. He went on to shoot a healthy specimen in order to learn their anatomy properly. This second post-mortem he proudly portrayed as a turning point in his career and characterized as an act of sympathy for elephants as a species.⁷⁴ However, representations of the affective states of such intrusive felt encounters were rare in writings on medical and scientific practices. In contrast, fictional accounts of life in Burma,

memoirs, and travel writing brought out the physical and emotional interactions between British imperial actors and animals in other spheres, particularly the home and the jungle. Imperialists' sentimental ties to animals -- occasionally born out of an unwelcome proximity to an animal -- were especially apparent in their interactions with pets, pack animals and pests.

The mid nineteenth-century missionary and natural historian Francis Mason briefly noted the domestication of otters as pets by the Burmese in his 1850 book on Burma's flora and fauna, the result of some thirty years of living in the country. He also remarked on Major Macfarquhar's friendly but "ugly" pet tapir.⁷⁵ Although during the nineteenth century the domestication of animals was read by some as a sign of "civilisation",⁷⁶ in Mason's observations there was evidently no gulf between British and Burmese society when it came to keeping pets. The taking of local animals as pets conforms to a broader attempt by the British to domesticate Burmese practices and artefacts in their homes.⁷⁷ And the attempted domestication of Burmese animals did not end in the mid-nineteenth century. Following the close of the First World War, having successfully mobilized a company of Kachin soldiers who fought in Mesopotamia,⁷⁸ Captain Colin Enriquez published a number of books detailing his experiences in Burma's borderworlds. In the second, titled *A Burmese Loneliness*, he wrote of his belief that humans and animals could strike common understandings. He argued that through studying and getting to know an animal, and being truly harmless toward them, a mutual bond could develop. It was with Carlo, a Himalayan bear, that Enriquez found such an understanding. He looked after Carlo having purchased him from captivity as a young cub. He constructed an open area surrounded by a trench to keep Carlo enclosed, although as the bear grew he was effectively free to come and go as he pleased. Enriquez affectionately recalled Carlo clumsily blundering into the pantry one night after a jungle excursion and having to clean the remnants of spilt Worcester sauce from him as a result.⁷⁹

But it was not only Carlo in whom Enriquez found relief from his solitude. He found inspiration in birds, insects, cows, mules, bullocks; almost every creature he encountered. He wrote, "I have made many friends in the animal world, friendships more important to me I think than many

human ones.”⁸⁰ Enriquez’s attempt to establish an understanding with animals, particularly Carlo, is an example of what Donna Haraway calls the “significant otherness” of a companion species. As he represented it in his book, it was through making kinship with various animals that Enriquez found his place in the solitude of the frontiers. It was a kinship that did not deny the difference between the companions, and it was a kinship entangled with the expansion of British imperial authority in Southeast Asia.⁸¹ Enriquez was perhaps more invested in these human-animal relationships than other British imperialists, but he was not alone in having them. Felt encounters with animals -- both real and imagined, as well as physical and affective -- were a perennial aspect of British colonial culture in Burma.

By the twentieth century, dogs were the predominant companion species of British colonizers in Burma. As Erica Fudge has shown, relationships with pets such as domestic dogs were inherently imaginative encounters, as the relationship involves an attempt to understand the familiar animal sharing one’s life.⁸² This imaginative work was clear in a traveller’s account of Burma published in 1909, purportedly written by a dog. The dog, called “John”, travelled the northernmost reaches of the colony with his master “the Colonel”, the Colonel’s wife the “Mem Sahib”, their female friend, referred to only as “Missy Sahib”, and their entourage of Indian servants and heavily-loaded ponies. John himself was a Burmese former street dog who found these unusual white people intriguing, although as a Buddhist he disapproved of their hunting. Throughout the book he provides a wry commentary on the foibles of these colonials, who make eager travellers but are ultimately ill-at-ease in Burma. Although an independent and somewhat sarcastic animal, John makes his home with the Colonel and the Mem Sahib and settles into a comfortable, cosy life. Writing from the perspective of a dog, naïve in the ways of human society, enabled the human ghost-writer to poke light-hearted and banal fun at the British in Burma -- particularly the women.⁸³

The account was not a representative portrayal of the lives of domesticated dogs in the colony. Unfortunately, the sorry fates of the dogs owned by James “Elephant Bill” Williams appear to have been more common. Bilu, a “black ball of fluff”, died of pneumonia. Sally, a bull-terrier,

Williams had drowned after she had become lame from hook-worm. Karl died after severing his jugular vein on an iron stake whilst chasing another dog. Molly Mia was shot by Williams when he suspected that she had rabies. Jabo was most likely killed by having his skull cracked by a paddle wielded by one of Williams' staff. And there were many others who died in their own uniquely tragic circumstances; on more than one occasion, being eaten by a leopard. The passages in Williams' books in which he reminisces about his pets consist of a litany of grim and grizzly deaths.⁸⁴ But his relationships with these dogs served to ground him in Burma. Each fresh cause for grief, strengthened his emotional attachment and heightened the post-imperial nostalgia of his memoir. Both Williams' memoir and the fictionalized travel account suggest that living with dogs enabled British colonials to develop a sense of belonging in Burma.

The appearance of dogs in colonial homes was a sign of imperial domestication at a time when their disappearance from the streets of Burmese cities was read as a sign of the "improvement" of the colony. Early nineteenth-century travellers wrote relatively approvingly of scavenger dogs' utility in keeping the streets clean.⁸⁵ But by the end of the century travellers instead noted how sewage systems were coming to replace them, part of the greater medical regulation of colonial cities in South Asia that necessitated controls on urban animal populations.⁸⁶ These processes could be directly linked, since occasionally the British in Burma took in and domesticated dogs from the street. Muriel Bowden, writing to her mother from Burma in the earlier 1920s, wrote fondly of her pet dog Patch, although she worried about what she considered its ignominious heritage. Patch was at least part a "pariah" dog, or a "pi" dog as the British often referred to street dogs, reflecting the colonial and social Darwinist discourses in which dogs were entangled.⁸⁷ His long, lively tail gave away his origins, according to Bowden, and so she decided to have it cut off. This anatomical modification, she hoped, would mean that he would be welcome in the British hill station of Maymyo. Bowden and her husband went for a walk to avoid overhearing any yelps of pain from Patch, leaving their servant to perform the operation.⁸⁸ In this case, the transition from a pariah dog to be avoided in the street, to a colonial companion to be petted, entailed physically

altering the animal's body. Bowden's letter also reveals the division of labour in domesticating animals. She engaged in playful, affectionate contact, whilst the infliction of pain was outsourced to her servant.

Bowden's correspondence also helps us to contextualize her affective ties with her pet dogs within wider colonial sensibilities. The interwar years saw a shift in the exclusionary politics of colonial society in British India, as some official pressure was brought to bear on clubs to widen their membership to non-whites.⁸⁹ Bowden complained about the social encroachment of those she called "blacky-whites", referring to Eurasians. Her anxieties about the intermingling of white and non-white bodies were also apparent in her complaints about what she found to be the bad smell of Burmese crowds.⁹⁰ The racist sensitivities that Bowden espoused in these brief passages are an example of what Collingham calls an "affective wall" erected between the British body and India during the nineteenth century. It was a performative barrier that was under increasing threat in the twentieth century as the figure of the Anglo-Indian lost cultural credibility.⁹¹ However, the presence of dogs within the Bowden home demonstrates that affective ties to animals continued to be an important link between the British body and India, or in this case Burma. Their presence also reveals that colonials were selective in what unpleasant smells they complained of. By bringing dogs inside their homes, British bodies were inevitably brought into contact with their animal companions' waste. In later letters, Bowden described the difficulties she experienced house breaking a new puppy, a task that left her perpetually cleaning urine from the furniture.⁹² The urban problems of animal waste had parallels in the domestic sphere.

Outside of the domestic setting, British imperial agents developed emotional ties through their close felt encounters with pack animals. George Younghusband, a British soldier who recounted his trip to Siam overland from Burma in *Eighteen Hundred Miles on a Burmese Tat* in 1888, wrote sentimentally about his Burmese pony Joe. Despite being apparently a cantankerous, obstreperous and mischievous animal who would stubbornly not move when rushed, and who ate Younghusband's hat, through the duration of the trip Younghusband came to imbue him with a

distinct personality. In fact it was in part because Joe “vexed [his] soul” that Younghusband became so fond of him. Younghusband wrote about how he sympathized with Joe’s pains on the journey, even when he later came to believe that the pony was duping him. He commented upon the best ways to load and ride ponies so as to avoid causing injury to them. His intimate and tactile relationship with Joe throughout his travels led him to identify with the animal and sympathize with his labours through seeking to understand the pony’s own discomfort.⁹³ Through his writing Younghusband was attempting to convey the significance of the understanding he believed he had established with Joe, his animal companion. This identification with his pony, and his claims to understand the animal’s individual personality, echoes George Evans description of the experiential knowledge generated between *oozie* and elephant. The British in Burma might come to understand their ponies through direct physical and affective touch, but their knowledge of elephants was mediated through the touch of Burmese workers.

But it was not only domesticated animals that were colonial companion species in Burma, there was plenty of unwanted contact with creatures the British viewed as pests. Writing in 1907, Geraldine Mitton described in her account of her travels in the colony the many annoyances and irritations caused by insects to Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation officers in the jungles of Burma. She recited their stories of countless leeches, hairy caterpillars and swarms of wasps, all of whom lay in wait to attack the unsuspecting as they went about their daily routines.⁹⁴ However, whilst these were tales of mild hardship, their retelling though Mitton served to provide these imperial actors with the status of hardy “jungle-wallah” -- a highly masculine performance of becoming accustomed to the challenging conditions in Burma’s forests.⁹⁵ By recalling the irritation of insect pests, timber officials working in the colony were demonstrating their familiarity with the jungle, and establishing their place within it.

Becoming accustomed to pests also marks the narrative of colonial judge Arthur Eggar’s 1906 novel *Hatanee*. At the end of the novel the main character, Jackson, returns to his former lodgings in Rangoon having had a horrific -- and, frankly, ludicrous -- experience in the jungle in

which he lost two fingers to a British missionary who attacked him whilst disguised as a tiger.

Whilst convalescing, the noisy toad that hides under his closest and croaks continuously, formerly a source of irritation to him, is now welcomed as familiar friend.⁹⁶ Similarly, the presence of reptiles in the home reoccurs in colonial writings as a source of mild nuisance, but also comfort. The Steel Brothers' Phillip Howe detailed in an unpublished short story, how both the British and the Burmese would listen out for the calls of a house-dwelling lizard known as the Tuck-Too, as it was thought that seven consecutive calls were good luck. He also praised them for eating other pests that otherwise dominated their homes.⁹⁷

Muriel Bowden's letters too captured the pleasures and the dangers of household pests. She frequently informed her mother of the flies and mosquitos that bit her and her husband, although they apparently preferred his flesh. She wrote how in heavy rains the fleas ran riot on the floor of their home -- and, with hindsight, we might wonder how many of these creatures entered their home via their pet dogs. These "cheery companions", as she termed the fleas, were attracted to her white stockings, and Bowden and her husband entertained themselves by making a game of catching them when they appeared on the garment.⁹⁸ These were reassuring scenes, retold for her mother in Britain, in which she had made a happy domestic life in the adversity of a tropical ecology. Just months later, her discussion of fleas takes a much more serious tone as a result of an outbreak of plague in Maymyo. As well as the human inhabitants of colonial homes, these fleas had fed on another common pest, the black rat. Having described the alarming spread of the disease among servants, she described how the "natives seem to snuff out like flies."⁹⁹ The simile diminished the suffering of Burmese and Indian domestic servants, but her letters also laid out the epidemic and epizootic pathways that she believed the disease to have taken; fleas, rats, servants, finally endangering Europeans. The ambivalence the British in Burma displayed towards household pests was entangled with their ambivalence towards intimate relationships with their servants and the proximity of white and non-white human bodies.

In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, medical research into infectious diseases such as plague, malaria, rabies and sleeping sickness had popularized the knowledge that pests were potential vectors of epidemic outbreaks. Rats resultantly became one of the principal targets for the colonial state's sanitary measures designed to eliminate potential routes of plague contagion. It was recognized that physical contact with some animals could pose a tangible threat to human life, and not only through disease. Encounters with venomous snakes, ravenous tigers and elephants in musth could all lead to violent deaths. But through writing about contact with animals, imperial authors also expressed their wider anxieties about sickness, madness and death. Animals were not only physically related to bodily weakness, their figurative presence was symbolic of imperial fears about their own bodily and mental integrity.¹⁰⁰ This was evocatively captured in the New Woman novel *Anna Lombard*. Shortly after the novel's protagonist had refused the advances of the young Burmese snake-charmer she is found hanged. This precipitates his physical and mental decline, as he succumbs to the unremitting heat and humidity of the colony. This decline is marked by the invasion of his house by numerous animals: “[h]undreds of white, transparent lizards”; “perfect armies” of “green and gold flies”; “dozens of solemn, heavy-bodied spiders”; “long ribbons of black tree ants”; snakes; and a “portly and venomous looking scorpion”. He awakes to find his floor littered with a thick carpet of dead and dying insects. They are even in his food. Tired, weakened and alone, his thoughts turn to suicide.¹⁰¹ The presence of animals in the home could be a source and expression of anxiety for the British in Burma, as much as it could embed them in the colony.

Despite the rise of scientific approaches to studying animals in the colony, the British were no more removed from the animal world than their colonized subjects, neither physically nor emotionally. However, in contrast to their depictions of Burmese encounters with wildlife, they often portrayed their own interactions with animals more positively. Their representations of tactile and intimate relationships with animals served to show how they became embedded in Burma. Through detailing affectionate relationships with dogs -- and other animals -- and by living with Burma's myriad pests, British writers attempted to demonstrate that they could make a home in the

colony. But, like their portrayals of Burmese felt encounters with animals, this was a discourse marked by ambivalence. Animals were both pests and pets, irritants and balms. Petting their dog, they could feel at home. Being bitten mosquitos might remind them of their inhospitable, foreign surroundings. Their relationships with animals revealed the anxieties of not being fully “at home” in empire.¹⁰²

Conclusion

Uncovering how physical and affective encounters with animals were mediated through colonial discourse reveals another rhetorical strategy through which members of British colonial society attempted to differentiate themselves from the colonized population. Recent studies of changing British depictions of Burma have increasingly emphasized the diversity, fluidity and inconsistency of representations.¹⁰³ For some, this in itself is a sign that colonial discourse was not a pervasive nexus of power/knowledge in which Burma came to be represented as “Other” in imperial eyes.¹⁰⁴ But whilst depictions of human-animal intimacies in colonial discourse were not monolithic, or straightforward, and were certainly marked by ambivalence, there was a discernable politics behind imperial representations.

Although we have seen that both the British and the Burmese were intimately connected to animals in colonial discourse, the politics behind imperial representations kept them separate from one another. Burmese interactions with animals were represented as a sign of their cultural inferiority in comparison to British colonial culture with its heightened sensibilities. At the same time, imperial portrayals of physical encounters could be expressions of colonizers’ ambivalent desires for the colonized. Meanwhile, even within the same source, imperial writers attempted to convey their familiarity with the colony through depicting their close ties to animals. In this way, the pets they loved and the pests suffered were acknowledged as companions. Again, this was marked by ambivalence. Animals were a potential threat to health and could overrun the colonial space. They could be signs of the alien nature of the environment they were living in.

The politics of colonial sensibilities about touching animals reveals the complex place that animals had in the imperial imagination. Animals were not simply objects in the colonial gaze. They were not merely another “Other” to the imperial self, located beneath humans in a hierarchical “chain of being”.¹⁰⁵ When it came to felt encounters, imperial portrayals were not so rigid. Rather, animals are better analysed as having been materially and figuratively entangled in the production of colonial discourses of difference. Animal histories set in colonial contexts must take account of the underlying politics of colonial sensibilities that informed representational practices. This way they might be able to maintain a greater critical distance from imperial claims to have engendered the detached and dispassionate, scientific and bureaucratic practices associated with modern relationships with animals. These practices were important, but they existed alongside, and were occasionally dependent upon, affective, physical encounters.

Acknowledgments

I have benefited greatly from comments on versions of this paper presented to the British Animal Studies Network at their 2014 annual conference on “Feeling” held at the University of Strathclyde, and to the “Hard and Soft Power: Questions of Race, Intimacy and Violence in the Comparative Colonial Toolkit” conference held at the University of Kent. I am also grateful to Rachel E. Johnson, Simeon Koole and Esme Cleall for their careful readings of earlier iterations. Many thanks to the Arts and Humanities Research Council who have funded this research.

¹ Jacques Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 2 (2002): 369–418; Joanna Bourke, *What It Means to Be Human: Reflections from 1791 to the Present* (London, 2011).

² Erica Fudge, “A Left-Handed Blow: Writing the History of Animals,” in *Representing Animals*, ed. Nigel Rothfels (Bloomington, 2003), 3–18; Nigel Rothfels has recently noted that this distinction between “touching” and “seeing” has been a methodological barrier between activists concerned with “real” animals, and academics concerned with “representations” of animals. He argues, convincingly, that “touch” too should be understood within the historically contingent contexts that framed perception. See: Nigel Rothfels, “Touching Animals: The Search for a Deeper

Understanding of Animals,” in *Beastly Natures: Animals, Humans, and the Study of History*, ed. Dorothee Brantz (Charlottesville; London, 2010), 38–58.

³ For the changing felt experiences between humans and animals in late-medieval and early modern Europe, see: Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana; Chicago; Springfield, 2012), 93–102.

⁴ For a detailed theoretical exposition of how we might conceptualize affective tactility, see: Mark Paterson, “Affecting Touch: Towards a ‘Felt’ Phenomenology of Therapeutic Touch,” in *Emotional Geographies*, ed. Joyce Davidson, Liz Bondi, and Mick Smith (Aldershot, 2005), 161–73. Many thanks to Simeon Koole for directing me towards this. And, for a historical approach that makes use of new materialist approaches to explore affective states historically, see: Ben Kafka, *The Demon of Writing: Powers and Failures of Paperwork* (New York, 2012).

⁵ As Alain Corbin has argued, the historian’s access to past sensory experiences are always mediated by language. Alain Corbin, “Charting the Cultural History of the Senses,” in *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, ed. David Howes (Oxford, 2005), 128–39; also see: Rothfels, “Touching Animals.”

⁶ Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert, “Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: An Introduction,” in *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human-Animal Relations*, ed. Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert (London, 2000), 1–36.

⁷ Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1979).

⁸ For instance: Edward Blyth, *Catalogue of Mammals and Birds of Burma* (Hertford, 1875); for more on Blyth, and his relationship with the Asiatic Society and Charles Darwin, see Christine Brandon-Jones, “Edward Blyth, Charles Darwin, and the Animal Trade in Nineteenth-Century India and Britain,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 30, no. 2 (1997): 145–78; Burma was also important for botanical study, see: Sulpice Kurz, *Preliminary Report on the Forest and Other Vegetation of Pegu* (Calcutta, 1875); Sulpiz Kurz, *Forest Flora of British Burma* (Calcutta, 1877).

⁹ Fitz William Thomas Pollok and W. S. Thom, *Wild Sports of Burma and Assam* (London, 1900); Richard Lydekker, *The Game Animals of India, Burma, Malaya and Tibet* (London, 1907).

¹⁰ Sarah Amato, “The White Elephant in London: An Episode of Trickery, Racism and Advertising,” *Journal of Social History* 43, no. 1 (2009): 31–66.

¹¹ Raymond L Bryant, *The Political Ecology of Forestry in Burma, 1824-1994* (London, 1997).

¹² See: The National Archives (UK), Kew, London: CO 956/534, “Empire Marketing Board: Posters. A Teak Forest in Burma; Artist: Keith Henderson”, 1926-1939; for more on the place of nature in the branding of Burma teak, see: Raymond L Bryant, “Branding Natural Resources: Science, Violence and Marketing in the Making of Teak,”

Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers 38, no. 4 (2013): 517–30; for tourist circuits, see: Anon., *A Handbook for Travellers in India, Burma and Ceylon*, 4th ed. (London, 1901), 423–4.

¹³ George H. Evans, *Elephants and Their Diseases: A Treatise on Elephants*, 2nd ed. (Rangoon, 1910); National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, IP/16/VB.2: George H. Evans, “Report on Burmese Elephants” (Simla, 1894).

¹⁴ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995).

¹⁵ Nicholas B Dirks, “Colonial Histories and Native Informants: Biography of an Archive,” in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, ed. Peter van der Veer and Carol Appadurai Breckenridge (Philadelphia, 1993), 279–312.

¹⁶ Philo and Wilbert, “Animal Spaces, Beastly Places,” 8–10, 16.

¹⁷ See the distinction made between literate and oral cultures in David Abram, *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology* (New York, 2010), 10–11.

¹⁸ For a classic study see: Harriet Ritvo, *Animal Estate: The English & Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA, 1987); also see the essays -- in which little attention is paid to the world beyond Europe -- collected in Kathleen Kete, ed., *A Cultural History of Animals in the Age of Empire*, vol. 5, *A Cultural History of Animals* (Oxford, 2007); and for a well cited polemic, see Jason Hribal, “‘Animals Are Part of the Working Class’: A Challenge to Labor History,” *Labor History* 44, no. 4 (2003): 435–53.

¹⁹ Three recent exceptions are: Ian Jared Miller, *The Nature of the Beasts: Empire and Exhibition at the Tokyo Imperial Zoo* (Berkeley, 2013); Martha Few and Zeb Tortorici, eds., *Centering Animals in Latin American History* (Durham N.C; London, 2013); Julie E. Hughes, *Animal Kingdoms: Hunting, the Environment, and Power in Indian Princely States* (New Delhi, 2013).

²⁰ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J, 2000).

²¹ For an excellent study that handles these issues expertly for early colonial India, see: Sujit Sivasundaram, “Trading Knowledge: The East India Company’s Elephants in India and Britain,” *The Historical Journal* 48, no. 1 (2005): 27–63; and for Indian engagements with scientific understandings of animals in a later period, see: Samiparna Samanta, “Dealing with Disease: Epizootics, Veterinarians and Public Health in Colonial Bengal, 1850-1920,” in *Medicine and Colonialism: Historical Perspectives in India and South Africa*, ed. Poonam Bala (London, 2014), 61–74.

²² Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Pasts?,” *Representations*, no. 37 (1992): 1–26.

²³ Sivasundaram, “Trading Knowledge”; Pratik Chakrabarti, “Beasts of Burden: Animals and Laboratory Research in Colonial India,” *History of Science* 48, no. 2 (2010): 125–52; Brett L. Shadle, “Cruelty and Empathy, Animals and Race, in Colonial Kenya,” *Journal of Social History* 45, no. 4 (2012): 1097–1116, thanks to Will Jackson for bringing my attention to this article.

²⁴ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA, 1993); Ian Jared Miller describes this contradictory claim to be able to translate nature whilst claiming that nature itself is receding from human society “Ecological Modernity”. See his discussion in: Miller, *The Nature of the Beasts*, 1–22.

²⁵ John M. Mackenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism*, Studies in Imperialism (Manchester, 1988); Jamies Lorimer and Sarah Whatmore, “After the ‘King of Beasts’: Samuel Baker and the Embodied Historical Geographies of Elephant Hunting in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Ceylon,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 35 (2009): 668–89.

²⁶ For some examples that have not already been cited above, see: William G Clarence-Smith, “Diseases of Equids in Southeast Asia, C. 1800-C. 1945: Apocalypse or Progress?,” in *Healing the Herds: Disease, Livestock Economies, and the Globalization of Veterinary Medicine*, ed. Karen Brown and Daniel Gilfoyle (Ohio, 2010), 129–45; Mahesh Rangarajan, “The Raj and the Natural World: The War Against ‘Dangerous Beasts’ in Colonial India,” *Studies in History* 14, no. 2 (1998): 265–99; Nigel Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo* (Baltimore; London, 2002).

²⁷ Zeb Tortorici and Martha Few, “Writing Animal Histories,” in *Centering Animals in Latin American History*, ed. Zeb Tortorici and Martha Few (Durham N.C; London, 2013), 5.

²⁸ There is a parallel here with the arguments of John Berger in his essay “Why Look at Animals?” in which he argues that with modernity animals are reduced to disappointing spectacles. See: John Berger, *About Looking* (London, 1980), 3–28.

²⁹ Mark M. Smith, “Producing Sense, Consuming Sense, Making Sense: Perils and Prospects for Sensory History,” *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 4 (2007): 841–58.

³⁰ Felix Driver, “Imagining the Tropics: Views and Visions of the Tropical World,” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 25, no. 1 (2004): 1–17; Lorimer and Whatmore, “After the ‘King of Beasts.’”

³¹ John Miller, *Empire and the Animal Body: Violence, Identity and Ecology in Victorian Adventure Fiction*, Anthem Nineteenth Century Series (London, 2012), 183–8.

³² E. M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c.1800-1947* (Cambridge, 2001).

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- ³³ Ann Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2, no. 1 (2002): 87–109.
- ³⁴ Ann Stoler, "Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, no. 3 (1992): 514–51; and for a study of these tensions in Burma, see Penny Edwards, "Half-Cast: Staging Race in British Burma," *Postcolonial Studies* 5, no. 3 (2002): 279–95.
- ³⁵ Philip Armstrong, "The Postcolonial Animal," *Society & Animals* 10, no. 4 (2002): 413–19.
- ³⁶ Alice Marion Rowlands Hart, *Picturesque Burma: Past & Present* (London, 1897), 9.
- ³⁷ For the former view, see Rev. Francis Mason, *The Natural Productions of Burmah, or Notes on the Fauna, Flora, and Minerals of the Tenasserim Province and Burman Empire* (Maulmain, 1850); and for the latter, see J. W. Helfer, "Note on the Animal Productions of the Tenasserim Provinces; Read at the Meeting of the 10th October, 1938," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 7 (1838): 855–56.
- ³⁸ Bryant, *Political Ecology of Forestry*, 103.
- ³⁹ Evans, "Report on Burmese Elephants."
- ⁴⁰ J. H. Williams, *Elephant Bill* (London, 1950); J. H. Williams, *Bandoola* (London, 1953).
- ⁴¹ Williams, *Elephant Bill*, 56–64, 65–73, 162–5.
- ⁴² Philippa Levine, "States of Undress: Nakedness and the Colonial Imagination," *Victorian Studies* 50, no. 2 (2008): 189–219.
- ⁴³ Evans, *Elephants and Their Diseases*, 6–7.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.
- ⁴⁵ Dirks, "Colonial Histories and Native Informants".
- ⁴⁶ Bryant, *The Political Ecology of Forestry*.
- ⁴⁷ India Office Records, British Library, London, hereafter IOR, Mss Eur, D1223/1: P.A.W. Howe, *Account of a Career with Steel Brothers, Burma 1929-42*, "Pynmana, 1929", 6, n.d..
- ⁴⁸ Corbin, "Charting the Cultural History of the Senses".
- ⁴⁹ Burmese white elephants were discussed in relation to anxieties over skin pigmentation, see: Amato, "The White Elephant in London".

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- ⁵⁰ Geraldine Edith Mitton, *A Bachelor Girl in Burma* (London, 1907), 83–4; G. J. Younghusband, *Eighteen Hundred Miles on a Burmese Tat: Through Burmah, Siam, and the Eastern Shan States* (London, 1888), 16–7.
- ⁵¹ Hart, *Picturesque Burma*, 18; Joshua A. Nunn, “Sunstroke in Animals,” *British Medical Journal*, no. 1943 (March 26, 1898): 862.
- ⁵² Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 23–5.
- ⁵³ Hart, *Picturesque Burma*, 24; this appears to have been a common problem with such policies Michael G. Vann, “Of Rats, Rice, and Race: The Great Hanoi Rat Massacre, an Episode in French Colonial History,” *French Colonial History* 4, no. 1 (2003): 191–203.
- ⁵⁴ Victoria Cross, *Anna Lombard* (New York, 1901), 46–51.
- ⁵⁵ Chie Ikeya, *Refiguring Women, Colonialism, and Modernity in Burma* (Honolulu, 2011); Jonathan Saha, “The Male State: Colonialism, Corruption and Rape Investigations in the Irrawaddy Delta c.1900,” *Indian Economic Social History Review* 47, no. 3 (2010): 343–76; K. A. Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class Under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and Their Critics, 1793–1905* (London, 1980); Archibald Mackirdy and William Nicholas Willis, *The White Slave Market* (London, 1912), 247–52.
- ⁵⁶ It was part of a much broader shift towards regulating male sexuality, see: Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England Since 1830*, 2nd ed (London, 2000).
- ⁵⁷ Cecil Champain Lewis, *Fascination* (London, 1913).
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 102–3.
- ⁵⁹ Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality, and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, N.C., 1995).
- ⁶⁰ For instance, in: Williams, *Elephant Bill*, 69, 143; Grattan Geary, *Burma, after the Conquest, Viewed in Its Political, Social, and Commercial Aspects, from Mandalay* (London, 1886), 19; Hart, *Picturesque Burma*, 93–4; Pollok and Thom, *Wild Sports of Burma and Assam*, 149.
- ⁶¹ Many thanks to William Schupbach at the Wellcome Library for providing me with the provenance of the image.
- ⁶² Williams, *Bandoola*, 86.
- ⁶³ John Nisbet, *Burma Under British Rule - and Before*, vol. 1 (Westminster: Constable, 1901), 203.
- ⁶⁴ For more on Nisbet’s, and his fellow officials, views of Burmese women, see: Saha, “The Male State.”

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- ⁶⁵ Than Tun, trans., *The Royal orders of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885*, vol. 9, 10 vols. (Kyoto, 1989); Than Tun, trans., *The Royal orders of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885*, vol. 4 (Kyoto, 1986), 51, 173.
- ⁶⁶ IOR, Mss Eur, D1223/1: Howe, *Account of a Career with Steel Brothers*, “Tales of Elephant Calves, their training etc. Bhamo 1932/3”, 2, n.d..
- ⁶⁷ IOR, Mss Eur, F575: Ann Bowden and Ian Adams, ed., *Ever Your Loving Mully: Letters from Burma of Muriel Bowden to Her Mother Alice Britten in England 1922-24* (2008), 1 July 1923.
- ⁶⁸ Of course, this is no novel insight. See: Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” *October* 28 (1984): 125–33.
- ⁶⁹ Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*.
- ⁷⁰ For the rise of this scientific approach, see: Sujit Sivasundaram, “Trading Knowledge”; Pratik Chakrabarti, “Beasts of Burden”.
- ⁷¹ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*.
- ⁷² Atsuko Naono, *State of Vaccination: The Fight Against Smallpox in Colonial Burma* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2009), 36-59.
- ⁷³ *Second Annual Report of the Harcourt Butler Institute of Public Health, Rangoon, for the Year 1927* (Rangoon, 1928), 4.
- ⁷⁴ Williams, *Elephant Bill*, 21, 33–4.
- ⁷⁵ Mason, *The Natural Productions of Burmah*, 226, 243.
- ⁷⁶ See, for instance: John Crawfurd, “On the Relation of the Domesticated Animals to Civilization,” *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London* 2 (January 1, 1863): 387–468; and for the broader context, see: Dorothee Brantz, “The Domestication of Empire: Human-Animal Relations at the Intersection of Civilization, Evolution, and Acclimatization in the Nineteenth Century,” in *A Cultural History of Animals in the Age of Empire*, ed. Kathleen Kete, vol. 5, *A Cultural History of Animals* (Oxford, 2007), 74–94.
- ⁷⁷ Penny Edwards, “On Home Ground: Settling Land and Domesticating Difference in the ‘Non-Settler’ Colonies of Burma and Cambodia,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 4, no. 3 (2003): np.
- ⁷⁸ For the full complexity of this process, a crucial moment in the emergence of a “Kachin” identity, see: Mandy Sadan, *Being and Becoming Kachin: Histories beyond the State in the Borderworlds of Burma* (Oxford, 2013), 198–254.

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- ⁷⁹ Colin Metcalfe Enriquez, *A Burmese Loneliness; a Tale of Travel in Burma, the Southern Shan States and Keng Tung* (Calcutta, 1918), 246–9.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 262.
- ⁸¹ Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago, 2003).
- ⁸² Erica Fudge, *Pets* (Stockfield, 2008), 1–12.
- ⁸³ Anon., *A Dog's Life in Burma, Told by the Dog* (London, 1909).
- ⁸⁴ Williams, *Elephant Bill*, 133-5; Williams, *Bandoola*, 123-6, 166-74.
- ⁸⁵ Howard Malcom, *Travels in the Burman Empire* (Edinburgh, 1840), 54.
- ⁸⁶ Hart, *Picturesque Burma*, 30, 40–1; David Arnold, “Pollution, Toxicity and Public Health in Metropolitan India, 1850–1939,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 42 (2013): 125–7; and a Victorian fear of dogs was partly sustained by a disproportionate alarm about hydrophobia, see: Neil Pemberton and Michael Worboys, *Mad Dogs and Englishmen: Rabies in Britain, 1830-2000* (Basingstoke, 2007).
- ⁸⁷ The colonial politics of dogs has been explored in a comparative framework in: Aaron Skabelund, “Can the Subaltern Bark? Imperialism, Civilization, and Canine Cultures in Nineteenth-Century Japan,” in *JAPANimals: History and Culture in Japan's Animal Life*, ed. Gregory M. Pflugfelder and Brett L. Walker, Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies 52 (Ann Arbor, 2005), 195–244.
- ⁸⁸ IOR, Mss Eur, F575: Bowden and Adams, ed., *Ever Your Loving Mully*, 13 March 1922.
- ⁸⁹ Mrinalini Sinha, “Britishness, Clubbability, and the Colonial Public Sphere: The Genealogy of an Imperial Institution in Colonial India,” *Journal of British Studies* 40, no. 4 (2001): 489–521; the tensions of this piecemeal change within colonial society in Burma have been famously chronicled in: George Orwell, *Burmese Days* (London, 1989).
- ⁹⁰ IOR, Mss Eur, F575: Bowden and Adams, ed., *Ever Your Loving Mully*, 9 March 1922, 28 October 1922.
- ⁹¹ Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*.
- ⁹² IOR, Mss Eur, F575: Bowden and Adams, ed., *Ever Your Loving Mully*, 17 June 1922, 23 June 1922.
- ⁹³ Younghusband, *Eighteen Hundred Miles on a Burmese Tat*, 7, 14, 42–3, 66–8, 116.
- ⁹⁴ Mitton, *A Bachelor Girl in Burma*, 84–90.
- ⁹⁵ Hugh Nisbet, *Experiences of a Jungle-Wallah* (St. Albans, 1935); Williams, *Elephant Bill*.
- ⁹⁶ Arthur Eggar, *The Hatanee: A Tale of Burman Superstition* (London, 1906).

⁹⁷ IOR, Mss Eur, D1223 Part 14: P.A.W. Howe, Drafts/Copies of Burma short stories based on stories told whilst in Burma. Based on true incidents in Steel Brothers. Forest Dept. 1918 to 1928, “The Switch”, n.d., and the claim finds support in Enriquez, *A Burmese Loneliness*, 163.

⁹⁸ IOR, Mss Eur, F575: Bowden and Adams, ed., *Ever Your Loving Mully*, 24 March 1922.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2 September 1922.

¹⁰⁰ These anxieties have been unpacked in imperial adventure fiction excellently in Miller, *Empire and the Animal Body*.

¹⁰¹ Cross, *Anna Lombard*, 59–63.

¹⁰² Ranajit Guha, “Not at Home in Empire,” *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 3 (1997): 482–93.

¹⁰³ Stephen L. Keck, “Picturesque Burma: British Travel Writing 1890–1914,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35, no. 3 (2004): 387–414; Andrew Jarvis, “‘The Myriad-Pencil of the Photographer’: Seeing, Mapping and Situating Burma in 1855,” *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 4 (2011): 791–823; Deborah Deacon Boyer, “Picturing the Other: Images of Burmans in Imperial Britain,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 35, no. 3 (2002): 214–26; Lucy Delap, “Uneven Orientalisms: Burmese Women and the Feminist Imagination,” *Gender & History* 24, no. 2 (2012): 389–410; Mark Clement, “A Cross-Cultural Encounter in Pre-Colonial Burma: Henry Gouger’s Narrative of Commerce and Captivity, 1822–26,” *Journal of Burma Studies* 17, no. 2 (2013): 335–71.

¹⁰⁴ This argument is most explicit in Clement, “A Cross-Cultural Encounter in Pre-Colonial Burma”; particularly his critique of Mary Louise Pratt’s influential analysis of imperial travel writing, see: M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

¹⁰⁵ They were both these things too, as the brilliant studies of Ritvo and Bourke demonstrate. Ritvo, *Animal Estate*; Bourke, *What It Means to Be Human*.