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## The Intimate International Relations of Museums: a Method

This article proposes a method for analysing museums as sites of intimate and colonially-produced international relations. Beginning with fieldwork that approaches museums as sites through which people intimately encounter the objects, institutions, selves and others of international politics, we explore how intimacy can be ‘read’ as socio-sexual affect, scales and proximities, and colonial differentiation/racialisation. The article is grounded in fieldwork at the British Army Royal Engineers museum in Kent, UK, conceptualised as an assembly of, following Stoler, imperial debris. We explore how certain museum exhibits work as intimate ‘organising objects’, locating the museum collection, and those who visit or are excluded from it, within the intimate circulations of imperial and colonial violence. The article makes two core contributions: Firstly, responding to recent literature in IR on museums we propose a framework for understanding how museums and exhibitions function as everyday sites of coloniality and racialisation. Secondly, we propose that approaching intimacy as a method is instructive for fieldwork in international relations (including museums) which takes the colonial constitution of the global/local seriously.

Keywords: *fieldwork, method, intimacy, museums, war, empire, coloniality, imperialism*

### Introduction

At the British Army Royal Engineers Museum in Kent, UK, visitors are invited to marvel at objects representing the might of British military engineering. In particular they are called upon to celebrate the role of that engineering in literally building empire, described by an information board as ‘honourable conquest’<sup>1</sup>. The museum displays are dominated by machines and technology: bridging devices, mapping technologies, fortifications, weapons. There is a lot of hard, forged metal, peppered with some more organic offerings such as a collection of teeth ripped from the mouths of the dead at Waterloo. Yet, these exhibits, and how visitors are invited to relate to them (and to the museum, the British Army, state and empire) occurs within the terms of a very different object. The visitor is guided through these material remains of state violence by something ‘cute’ and familiar: a small pet dog. Collected by British soldiers from a Crimean battlefield in 1854 and later becoming the mascot of the Royal Engineers and the museum, ‘Snob’ the terrier dog is now a taxidermy exhibit, a cartoon character on informational signs that guide visitors (particularly children) through the museum, and a plush toy ambassador for the museum with its own Twitter account<sup>2</sup>. The juxtaposition of Snob and the other materials invokes in the visitor a set of emotional reactions and (perhaps) familiar relationships. On the floor of a glass case amongst an assortment of weapons, paraphernalia and battlefield materials, the taxidermy dog is jarringly ‘charming’, ‘sweet’ and seems - against an array of metal things - paradoxically ‘alive’. To many visitors he is likely to be intimately familiar as a pet - one of the family.<sup>3</sup> It is easy to imagine reaching down to pet him, an impulse, the visitor seems invited to imagine, shared with the soldiers who brought him back with them to England.

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<sup>1</sup> A film playing in the museum describes how, as “the army’s builders”, the Royal Engineers “built and defended Britain’s empire”

<sup>2</sup> @REMuseum\_Snob

<sup>3</sup> We note the western centric account of dogs as domesticated/family here. This is an aspect we unpack in more detail below.

This description, based on ethnographic fieldwork at the Royal Engineers Museum in the summer of 2018<sup>4</sup>, raises a number of important questions about how we might study museums as sites of international relations that are bound within the 'collecting' and 'cataloguing' objects of conquest. In the particular case of Snob, these reflections relate to the historical conditions under which, to some, dogs can be imagined as friendly and familial in the first place. Already, in this seemingly banal encounter in the Museum, we are confronted with an object that calls out our own positionality as white western visitors/researchers who, whilst critical of the museum, can still be called upon to imagine this military mascot as 'part of the family' and through Snob be invited to marvel at the 'glory' of British colonial and imperial militarism. Following from this point, in this article we ask how can the museum itself be understood as an institution that is made in histories and presents of International Relations (IR)? How might we, as researchers, approach the museum as a site of fieldwork; what should we look for? How might we account for our own positionality? How can we understand and analyse objects and the responses they elicit?

We contend that questions such as these can be addressed through a methodological and conceptual approach which understands museums as everyday sites of coloniality and explores this through fieldwork and analysis centred on the politics of intimacy. Using this approach, a museum can be 'read' as a space in which visitors are invited to intimately encounter the objects, institutions, selves, and others of international relations which comprise a system of power structured by colonially-forged racial logics and classifications<sup>5</sup>. We develop an approach to analysing intimacy as encompassing not only social relations between people but also processes of encountering objects and institutions. To illustrate this, we draw on and discuss the fieldwork at the museum of the British Army Royal Engineers with which the article opened. This is a site through which visitors are invited to engage with an institution of state power and violence via a collection of objects spanning hundreds of years of British imperial and colonial war.

Our starting point is that museums are important sites for the constitution of international politics. They are locations of embodied experiences which normalise the conduct of a range of geopolitical processes. Studying museums as sites of international relations illuminates the grammars, logics and narratives of international politics<sup>6</sup> and that comprise the ongoing coloniality of global power. We draw on the burgeoning scholarship on museums, heritage and memorialisation in IR, which has provided valuable accounts of the everyday reproduction of IR in sites such as the museum or gallery<sup>7</sup>. Museums are important political sites because they

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<sup>4</sup> This visit to the Royal Engineers Museum was one of a number to military museums around the UK and involved immersion in the visitor experience, self-observation (through a form of autoethnographic encounter) and observation of other visitors, staff, and curators, taking photographs and collecting documents and objects. This approach shares much with that detailed by Audrey Reeves in Audrey Reeves, 'Auto-ethnography and the Study of Affect and Emotion in World Politics: Investigating Security Discourses at London's Imperial War Museum', in Maéva Clément and Éric Sangar, eds., *Researching Emotions in International Relations: Methodological Perspectives on the Emotional Turn*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018): 103-127

<sup>5</sup> Anibal Quijano, 'Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,' *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 215-232, 218; Walter D. Mignolo 'Delinking: The Rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality,' *Cultural Studies*, 21 (2) (2007): 449-514.

<sup>6</sup> Debbie Lisle, 'Rejuvenating method,' *Critical Studies on Security* 2, no.3 (2014): 370-372

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Christine Sylvester, *Art/Museums: International Relations Where We Least Expect It* (London: Paradigm, 2009); Debbie Lisle, *Holidays in the Danger Zone: Entanglements of War and Tourism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016); Gail Dexter Lord and Ngairé Blankenberg, *Cities, Museums and Soft power* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015); Yunci Cai, 'The art of museum diplomacy: The Singapore–France cultural collaboration in perspective,' *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 26, no.2 (2013): 127-144; Audrey Reeves, 'Mobilising bodies, narrating security: tourist choreographies at Jerusalem's Holocaust History Museum,' *Mobilities* 13, no. 2 (2018): 216-230; Julia Welland, 'Violence and the contemporary soldiering body' *Security Dialogue*, 48, no. 6 (2017): 524–540; Elisa Wynne-Hughes, 'Governing through garbage-city tourism: Producing international neoliberal subjects'. *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 17, no. 6 (2015): 839-852.

are rendered as locations of truth-telling where they work as high-cultural sites for national and imperial memorialisation and thus structure central accounts of who and what is deemed worthy or unworthy to be marked and remembered in national and imperial history and contemporary international politics. Whilst existing studies examine the importance of museums to IR or undertake analyses of aspects of the international within museum sites, we identify two important areas that warrant further development. Firstly, in order to understand the significance of museums within international politics, we suggest that it is important to pay attention to the ways in which they function as everyday (rather than spectacular) sites of coloniality. This is because of the colonial logics underpinning the museum as an institution, part of the ways in which contemporary global structures of power are shaped by colonially-produced arrangements and relations. Secondly, as questions of method have become increasingly central to IR in both academic research and teaching<sup>8</sup>, we see the question of methodological approaches to museums as an important area for further consideration<sup>9</sup> and suggest that it is imperative to develop methods that are attuned to relations of coloniality. The central contributions of this article stem from addressing these two related areas through the development of an account of intimacy as method.

To make these contributions, this article forwards an account of intimacy as a method for studying museums as everyday sites of coloniality. Drawing upon extensive work taking place in other disciplines, particularly that within political geography<sup>10</sup>, we develop existing accounts of intimacy in international relations<sup>11</sup>. Queer theory and feminist scholars have demonstrated the importance of paying attention to intimacy to understand the gendered and sexualised structures of the political but have addressed the racialised and colonial to a much lesser extent.<sup>12</sup> We explore intimacy as an analytical approach to the study of geopolitics which also reflexively engages with the positionality of the researcher.<sup>13</sup> Extending an account of intimacy as a method we also speak to the emergent body of literature in IR on affect and emotions<sup>14</sup>, that, whilst it tends not to be framed within the conceptual terms of 'intimacy', works to question the bodily sensations, encounters and sensibilities, and

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<sup>9</sup> Whilst there has been little in the way of a concerted engagement with questions of method in relation to museums in IR, an important recent exception is Reeves, 'Auto-ethnography and the Study of Affect and Emotion in World Politics'.. The question of a methodological approach to museums has been taken up in Museum Studies but this this has not been orientated towards questions of the international, geopolitics, warfare, violence which are central to IR. See Sharon MacDonald, *A Companion to Museum Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Rachel Pain 'Intimate War', *Political Geography* 44, (2015): 63-73; Sara Smith, 'Intimacy and angst in the field,' *Gender, Place & Culture* 23, no. 1 (2016): 134-146; Deborah Cowen and Emily Gilbert, 'Fear and the Familial,' in Rachel Pain and Sara Smith, eds., *Fear: Critical Geopolitics and Everyday Life*, (London: Ashgate: 2008), 49-58;

<sup>11</sup> For example, Rahul Rao, 'The Diplomat and the Domestic: Or, Homage to 'Faking It'', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 45, no. 1 (2016): 105-112; Cynthia Weber, *Queer International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); V. Spike Peterson, 'Family Matters: How Queering the Intimate Queers the International,' *International Studies Review* 16, no. 4 (2014), 604–608.

<sup>12</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California, 1990); Lauren Berlant, ed., *Intimacy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000); For more explicit accounts of the imperial and colonial intimacy see Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Victor Roman Mendoza, *Metroimperial Intimacies: Fantasy, Racial-Sexual Governance, and the Philippines in U.S. Imperialism, 1899-1913* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015). Queer theory scholarship has also more recently taken up questions of race: Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Jin Haritaworn, Adi Kuntsman, Silvia Posocco, eds., *Queer Necropolitics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Kim V.L. England, 'Getting Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research', *The Professional Geographer* 46, no.1 (1993): 80-89.

<sup>14</sup> Linda Åhäll, 'Affect as Methodology: Feminism and the Politics of Emotion', *International Political Sociology* 12, no 1 (2019): 36-52; Linda Åhäll and Thomas Gregory, *Emotions, Politics and War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015); Emma Hutchinson, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Asli Calkivik and Jessica Auchter, 'Symposium Introduction: Debating Trauma and Emotion in World Politics', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 47, no. 2 (2019) 231–236.

relations of objects that we are also interested in.<sup>15</sup> Finally, throughout the article, we draw on Ann Laura Stoler's account of imperial debris which refers both to the ruins of Empire and the ongoing ruination caused by colonial power, warfare and imperial capitalism<sup>16</sup>. We put forward an account of museums as sites of imperial debris, illuminating how they are simultaneously sites for the amassing of the material remains of projects of empire and also for the reproduction of present and ongoing colonially-structured forms of power and violence. Exploring the colonial role of museums and how they are arranged through and organise colonial forms of power and racialisation, we further engage with the burgeoning literature on IR, race and the colonial.<sup>17</sup> In doing so, we further demonstrate the everyday character of colonial politics and the mundane way that divisions around the human Other take place.

The article unfolds as follows. Firstly, we discuss museums as sites of international relations, everyday settings through which visitors encounter and are situated within state power and coloniality. Thinking about museums as imperial debris, we reflect on the patternings of raced and classed inclusion/exclusion through which processes of coloniality occur and consider how a researcher coming to a museum is (already) bound within them. Secondly, we set out an approach to analysing international relations at museum sites through fieldwork and conceptualisations of intimacy. We work with an understanding of intimacy as encompassing the circulatory processes of socio-sexual affect, scales and proximities, and the enactment of colonial divisions and hierarchies. We describe how intimacy can be useful to understanding not just relations between people (including in a fieldwork setting) but also how people relate to objects and the institutions they are understood to represent. Thirdly, we illustrate this approach in application at the Royal Engineers Museum. We analyse 'Snob' the dog as something we term an organising object, one that indexes the broader museum collection, and those who visit or might be included or excluded from it on particular terms, within the intimate circulations of imperial and colonial violence in the past and present. Fourthly, in the conclusion we map the wider application of the proposed method.

## Visitors, Researchers and Coloniality at the Museum

When researching museums as sites of international politics, we have paid attention to a range of elements. These include the institutional arrangements of the particular museum (funding, mission objectives, state relations), approaches to curation (archival practices, exhibition rationale), specific exhibitions (objects, floor plans), and the interactions, emotions, feelings, and experiences of visitors. We might examine how a museum is spatially and sensorily arranged, how objects, video installations and soundscapes are used within and configure the exhibits, how routes and journeys are scripted through the space, how visitors are invited to and do engage, both in the designated context of the 'interactive exhibit' and more generally. We might trace the stories about the world that are told in and through the museum, and the ways in which visitors are invited to

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<sup>15</sup> Clément and Sangar eds., *Researching Emotions in International Relations: Methodological Perspectives on the Emotional Turn*; Lauren Wilcox, *Bodies of Violence: Theorizing Embodied Subjects in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Illaria Carrozza, Ida Danewid and Evelyn Pauls, 'Racialized Realities in World Politics', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 45, no. 3 (2017): 267–268; Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda and Robbie Shilliam eds., *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014); Anna M. Agathangelou and Kyle D. Killian, ed., *Time, Temporality and Violence in International Relations: (De)fatalizing the Present, Forging Radical Alternatives* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); Alison Howell and Melanie Richter-Montpetit, 'Racism in Foucauldian security studies: biopolitics, liberal war, and the whitewashing of colonial and racial violence', *International Political Sociology* 13, no. 1 (2018): 2-19; Alison Howell and Melanie Richter-Montpetit, 'Is securitization theory racist? Civilizationism, methodological whiteness, and antiblack thought in the Copenhagen School', *Security Dialogue* (2019). OnlineFirst, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010619862921>

be, to fit, and to be a part (or otherwise) within these stories. The museum fieldwork that we discuss in this article, and that has been a wider feature of our respective work, has paid attention to these aspects of the museum space through a combination of research practices that fall, sometimes fairly loosely, into the categories of auto-/ethnography, observation, discourse analysis, informal conversations and more formalised interviews. Photographs are typically taken along with written notes and, depending on the museum, we might come away with a collection of objects such as leaflets for educational trails around the site or souvenirs from the shop. The latter exemplify the stories that are told through the museum's curatorial strategies whilst also being the focus of orchestrated interaction between the visitor and the museum space. Depending on the size of the museum and practical considerations we will sometimes encounter a museum over a single day and sometimes over several. The museum's website and associated websites such as Trip Advisor provide additional material. The strategy outlined here has much in common with Audrey Reeves' auto-ethnographic approach to museums. In this approach the researcher is immersed in the social environment that they are studying with a particular attention paid to the affective experiences generated within the museum setting<sup>18</sup>. The strategy can also be understood as an example of what Debbie Lisle describes as 'site-specific ethnography'<sup>19</sup>.

Speaking as we have of 'the museum' as a site, and people's encounters with it, risks suggesting a homogeneity that does not exist. Museums are diverse, comprised of many elements and can be many things.<sup>20</sup> People relate to, or are excluded from, the museum space in many different ways. Our approach and analysis has been generated in the context of research at British museums, and we are two white British academics. We both grew up in the United Kingdom and like many other British kids experienced our earliest encounters with the museum as simultaneously fun, dull, recreational, touristic and educational. We had been going to museums our whole lives before we began to encounter them consciously as research sites. As Reeves notes, the point of foregrounding the researcher is not to make the researcher the object of analysis, rather the 'self' of the researcher – including such things as the positionalities we refer to here – functions as a resource<sup>21</sup>. Different contexts call for different approaches; it is not our aim to create a universal template that can be identically applied to any museum anywhere by everyone. However, we suggest in the rest of this article that an attention to the existing familiarities that researchers might have with museums and ways in which they might already be intimately connected to them, a reflexive attention to positionality, and a broader analysis of intimacy can be useful across museum sites.

Museums are increasingly viewed within IR as sites of international politics, not just as repositories of heritage but the active production and remaking of the international.<sup>22</sup> Museums are places in which political processes, institutions, logics, and myths are reconstituted, stabilised and naturalised. The museum is a space of 'everyday' politics: museums function as sites through which certain people are invited to understand the world in particular ways. Museums are often presented as places of learning, knowledge, and are authorised as 'history', 'culture', 'art'. They are repositories for state-sponsored and sanctioned versions of the social and cultural world. In this way, they are produced as sites of 'national debate',<sup>23</sup> memorialisation,<sup>24</sup> the creation of

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<sup>18</sup> Reeves, 'Auto-ethnography and the Study of Affect and Emotion in World Politics: Investigating Security Discourses at London's Imperial War Museum' p. 110-114

<sup>19</sup> Lisle, 'Rejuvenating method,' *Critical Studies on Security*, p.372

<sup>20</sup> Tony Bennett and Chris Healy, 'Introduction: assembling culture,' in *Assembling Culture*, Tony Bennett and Chris Healy eds., (London: Routledge, 2011), 1-8.

<sup>21</sup> Reeves, Reeves, 'Auto-ethnography and the Study of Affect and Emotion in World Politics: Investigating Security Discourses at London's Imperial War Museum', 110

<sup>22</sup> Sylvester, *Art/Museums*.

<sup>23</sup> Brenda S. E. Yeoh, 'Museums and the cultural politics of displaying the nation to the world', *Identities* 21, no. 4 (2017): 48-54.

<sup>24</sup> Jessica Auchter, *The Politics of Haunting and Memory in International Relations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 47.

'citizenship'.<sup>25</sup> They retain a pedagogical and civic function at the same time that they are commodified and experienced through the neoliberal frame of heritage tourism<sup>26</sup>.

Approaching the study of museums we need to be attuned to how museums are sites of *ongoing* colonial power. As Anibal Quijano, Walter Dignolo and others have detailed, coloniality is the way in which the modern world and world power is structured by logics of racial classification<sup>27</sup>. The colonial is therefore not a matter of history but an ongoing power structure. Taking this seriously in the study of museums means moving beyond the idea that museums are places of heritage but, rather, are sites which reproduce a colonially shaped and mandated contemporary world. Stoler's work on ruins provides a useful means of thinking about the coloniality of the museum<sup>28</sup>. Whilst the 'ruin' is known by its decay, often the museum is considered a site of preservation; the restoration of 'ruins'. The museum is the spectacle of the exhibition, the authorising of material culture contrasted against the 'rot' of ruins. Within the imperial and colonial mindset, museums are the civilised counterpoint to cultures which cannot tell their own history (so that some only have ruins). Because of this, rather than in spite of it, we can think of museum as forms of imperial debris and part of the continuing legacies of colonial ruination<sup>29</sup>. That is, the rot and decay central to the 'ongoing nature of imperial process'<sup>30</sup>.

To speak of debris is to be reminded that Euro-American museums are filled with the looted, stolen, violently acquired objects of colonial occupation. Many are still funded by wealth extracted directly from the slave trade, or from other forms of accumulation by dispossession. The hoarding of artefacts by such institutions is not merely the valorising of 'the spoils of war' by an occupying force but part of the dual function of colonial violence. It sustains white European superiority as it subjugates and destroys other cultures. The exhibit, as with the museum, was a particular optic of imperial power through which colonised people were made into a spectacle of the white masculine gaze, to be objectified and examined<sup>31</sup>. This had a particular racialised-sexualised logic. Consider, for example, the exhibition of the 'Venus Hottentot' woman Saartjie Baartman across France and Britain in the late 1900s, produced as a figure of exoticism and eroticism. After being experimented upon after her death by the eugenicists George Cuvier (the founder of the Natural History Museum in Paris), her body parts were kept on display in the Museum of Man until the late 1970s and only returned to South Africa in 2002<sup>32</sup>. Thus, the logic and the structure of the exhibit, and that of the museums that house them, has been centrally involved in the production of systems of racial classification.

Within this logic, imperial powers have long used local populations' alleged inability to care for material culture as a sign of their 'infancy' and underdevelopment, to justify not returning significant artefacts. Northern museums still refuse the return of artefacts, often premised on claims to 'global culture' or humanity. In this way, ruination continues even as it is steadily remarked upon and reflected upon by purportedly 'progressive'

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<sup>25</sup> Tony Bennett, Robin Trotter, Donna McAlear eds., *Museums and Citizenship: A Resource Book* (Brisbane: Queensland Museum, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> Philip W. Scher. 'Heritage tourism in the Caribbean: The politics of culture after neoliberalism', *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 30, no. 1 (2011): 7-20.

<sup>27</sup> Quijano, 'Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America':218; Dignolo, 'Delinking: The Rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality.'

<sup>28</sup> Stoler, *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Stoler, 'Preface', in *Imperial Debris*, IV.

<sup>31</sup> bell hooks, 'The oppositional gaze : Black female spectators', In *The Film Theory Reader: Debates and Arguments*, Marc Furstenau ed., (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 229-243; Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley, University of California, 1991), 1-10. Also see Tony Bennett, 'Civic seeing: museums and the organisation of vision', in *Companion to Museum Studies*, Sharon MacDonald ed., (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 263-81.

<sup>32</sup> Lydie Moudileno, 'Returning Remains: Saartjie Baartman, or the "Hottentot Venus" as Transnational Postcolonial Icon', *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 45, no 2 (2009): 200-212.

curation.<sup>33</sup> We stress that the imperial debris of museums is not only isolated to artefacts taken by colonising forces, or explicitly 'about' colonised populations, it can also concern the logics and arrangements of objects and their relationships to the structural conditions of past and ongoing forms of colonial inequality and violence. Imperial debris is not just the remainder of colonial occupation in colonies but also within (neo)metropolises like Britain. In the metropole, museums remain sites of the reproduction of colonial knowledge – including the ongoing categorisation of people into more or less human, based upon their historical 'worth' and the making of colonised parts of the world into what Aurora Vergara Figueroa calls 'empty spaces' – devoid of culture or history.<sup>34</sup>

The Royal Engineers Museum is an exemplary case of imperial debris. On the museum information board titled 'Honourable Conquests', the visitor is told that in the 19th century the Corps of Royal Engineers was the 'technical arm of the British Army', called upon to 'create, often from scratch, the infrastructure of the modern state'. The board celebrates the Engineers' building of canals, roads and railways in Canada, India, Egypt and Sudan and their undertaking of the survey of India, which 'mapped and measured the entire sub-continent'. It is also noted that '[m]any Royal Engineers were distinguished archaeologists and explorers' and several 'became imperial administrators and colonial governors'. Objects that are chosen to tell this story are, for example, mapping and surveying devices – technologies of colonialism through which land was catalogued, measured and apportioned between the imperial powers. In another part of the museum, the Engineers' role in contemporary wars and occupations is celebrated: visitors can learn about the tools and equipment used to build Camp Bastion, as well as roads and railways (the infrastructures of occupation). This museum is an outward public facing valorisation of (ongoing) technologies of colonial war, and its exhibitions are littered with artefacts which were used in acts of domination and dispossession. The museum captures many of the violent accruals and perpetuations of Empire and, as we go onto argue with the case of Snob, its exhibitions work to normalise and obscure these dynamics through particular curatorial strategies.

Exploring museums as imperial debris goes beyond recognising and tracing the artefacts and structural conditions of the museum as an institution; it requires the researcher to pay attention to how museums organise and address visitors, researchers and so on. This matters for methodology. For example, the visitor being called upon by powerful retellings of British imperial history is a potent part of the heritage industry in the UK which, as Divya Tolia-Kelly has shown, relies on a deeply racialised affective politics that interpellates (hails or addresses) people based upon colonial schemas of human worth<sup>35</sup>. We might consider here how museum exhibitions appeal to visitors through the construction of spaces which distinguish or mark out white bodies as citizens 'who fit'. This frequently works to racialise those whom the institution and space codes as out of place, spoken about rather than to, or as objects fixed upon by colonial retellings of history that frame colonialism as nostalgia, or as the subject of white liberal guilt)<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> Greater London Authority, *Delivering Shared Heritage: The Mayor's Commission on African and Asian Heritage* (London: Greater London Authority, 2005); Roshi Naidoo 'Nevermind the buzzwords: 'race', heritage and the liberal agenda', in *The Politics of Heritage: The Legacies of Race*, Jo Littler and Roshi Naidoo eds., (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 36-48.

<sup>34</sup> Aurora Vergara Figueroa, *Afrodescendant Resistance to Deracination in Colombia: Massacre at Bellavista-Bojayá-Chocó* (London: Palgrave, 2018). See also Bernadette T. Lynch & Samuel J.M.M. Alberti, 'Legacies of prejudice: racism, co-production and radical trust in the museum', *Museum Management and Curatorship* 25, no. 1 (2010): 13-35,

<sup>35</sup> Divya P. Tolia-Kelly, 'Feeling and being at the (postcolonial) museum: presencing the affective politics of 'race' and culture'', *Sociology* 50, no. 5 (2016): 896-912; on being made 'out of place' see Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Postcoloniality*. London: Routledge; Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders: Race Gender and Bodies Out of Place* (Oxford: Berg Publishing, 2004).

<sup>36</sup> Tolia-Kelly, 'Feeling and being at the (postcolonial) museum: presencing the affective politics of 'race' and culture''.



A method for studying museums that uses the positionality of the researcher as a tool of inquiry requires careful reflection on who is being addressed and in what ways within a museum setting. Encountering a museum as researchers, we may be entering a familiar space, one in which we have already been invited to play a role in the making of national identity, or we may be placed in an exclusionary, partial or marginal position to it. As white lower middle class children growing up in the UK the museum was a mainstay of 'educational' family trips, a place to press noses against glass to look at skeletons, get bored in the Saxon pottery exhibit, and - if we were good - buy an eraser from the shop. Such experiences are deeply embedded in the museum as imperial debris. Museums in postcolonial states like the UK are deeply racialised just as they are bound to bourgeois conceptions of the citizen. They relate a class logic about the good citizen as a subject that should access and learn national (which in the UK case is imperial) history and culture. The class and race logics which shaped our experience of museums as sites of 'familiarity' work to stratify the affective politics of these spaces. Working-class children are invited into museums as places of aspirational citizenship through school visits, but how these subjects and populations are addressed is cut through with other organising principles of race, gender and sexuality<sup>37</sup>. A white working-class child might be addressed by narratives of Empire in radically different ways to a working-class child of colour. Tolia-Kelly and Raymond record how Maori research participants experienced the imperial debris of museums and galleries at the British Museum as 'theatres of pain', sites of 'dismemberment' and 'disempowerment'.<sup>38</sup> This raises important questions for how to study museums and approach them as spaces for 'fieldwork'. How the researcher experiences the museum is already and always bound to how and whether they 'fit' there, structured by wider pathways of imperial debris. It is important to consider existing familiarities with the practice of visiting a museum and how this familiarity entails being continuously racially interpellated within the space<sup>39</sup>. In this context, how might researchers navigate the study of museums?

### Intimacy as a method

Drawing on reflexive feminist research, one way of navigating the messiness of this type of research is using 'intimacy' as a method.<sup>40</sup> If we are already intimately bound to the museum through the collapsing distinctions of researcher and visitor, past experience, raced and gendered markers, then intimacy can provide a tool to unpack these relationships.

The discussion of intimacy has had an increasing cache in critical social science research, though to a lesser extent IR,<sup>41</sup> with extensive influence from feminist, queer and postcolonial scholarship. Whilst the intimate has often been assigned a place within the study of family and sexuality it has increasingly been discussed in relation to questions of citizenship<sup>42</sup>, warfare<sup>43</sup>, and empire<sup>44</sup>. The study of intimacy has been forged, alongside

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<sup>37</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, 'Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color' *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1990): 1241; Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, (New York: Random House, 1981); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2d ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>38</sup> Tolia-Kelly, 'Feeling and being at the (postcolonial) museum', 900-905.

<sup>39</sup> Ghassan Hage, 'The Affective Politics of Racial Mis-interpellation', *Theory, Culture & Society* 27, no. 7-8 (2011): 112-129.

<sup>40</sup> Sara Smith, 'Intimacy and angst in the field', *Gender, Place & Culture* 23, no. 1 (2016): 134-146.

<sup>41</sup> Weber, 'Queer International Relations'.

<sup>42</sup> Saha Roseneil, Isabel Crowhurst, Ana Cristina Santos and Mariya Stoilova 'Reproduction and Citizenship/Reproducing Citizens: Editorial Introduction', *Citizenship Studies* 17, no. 8 (2013): 901-911; David Bell and Jon Binnie, *The Sexual Citizen Queer Politics and Beyond* (Bristol: Polity Press, 2000); Joe Turner, 'Governing the domestic space of the traveller in the UK: 'family', 'home' and the struggle over Dale Farm', *Citizenship Studies* 20, no. 2 (2016): 208-227.

<sup>43</sup> Cowen and Gilbert, 'Fear and the Familial'; Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism In Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). Pain, 'Intimate War'.

other feminist and queer projects, to denaturalise heteropatriarchy through the collapsing of binaries around private/public, global/local, and abnormality/normality to critique state power and the sanctioning of the heterosexual family as *the* mode of socio-sexual relations.<sup>45</sup> Contemporary work on intimate geopolitics has taken this in new directions,<sup>46</sup> examining how intimacy is not just shaped by geopolitical processes - state sovereignty, international capitalism, warfare - but is central to the constitution of those processes.<sup>47</sup> To Rachel Pain, an analysis of intimacy helps to disturb how we think about space and time and how we consider scales and proximities.<sup>48</sup> For example, examining how fear works in both the colonial war on terror and in domestic violence collapses the distinctions between the domestic/international and war/household that patriarchal violence works to arrange. The house of domestic abuse is tied to the conduct of the battlefield in ways that disturb our existing categories of 'there'/'here' and 'now/then'.<sup>49</sup> We stress the importance of this burgeoning work on intimate geopolitics for helping us analyse how museums work as everyday affective sites for the reproduction of international politics and violence.

However, postcolonial and decolonial feminist scholarship reminds us that intimacy cannot be reduced to sexuality, nor can the geopolitics of intimacy be detached from questions of Empire. In Stoler's seminal work on intimacy, she explores how colonial rule in the 19th century was navigated around carnality and intimacy.<sup>50</sup> Here feelings and sensibilities that were 'innermost' (love, desire, bodied proximities, affective relations) were understood as central to how ideas of race and hierarchies of patriarchal imperialism were sustained and protected, for example through rules on miscegenation or the distribution of inheritance rights and citizenship<sup>51</sup>. Postcolonial and decolonial feminist scholars have been at the forefront of developing the analysis of intimacy to emphasise the ways in which intimacy is highly raced and bound to coloniality, for instance by showing how dominant notions of intimacy such as heteronormative domesticity were western social relations that were imposed on colonised populations.<sup>52</sup> Equally, intimacy was used to organise the construction of the racial superiority/inferiority of coloniser/colonised through claims to modernity/savagery.<sup>53</sup> We are reminded here of how normative intimacy is arranged around the idea that non-European people's kinship patterns are 'backwards', savage and in need of modernising.<sup>54</sup> This remains central to the driving force of modernisation

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<sup>44</sup> Stephen Legg, *Prostitution and the Ends of Empire: Scale, Governmentalities, and Interwar India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Elizabeth Povinelli *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Joe Turner, 'Internal colonisation: The intimate circulations of empire, race and liberal government'. *European Journal of International Relations*, 24, no. 4 (2018): 765–790.

<sup>45</sup> Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, 'Sex in Public', *Critical Inquiry* 24, No. 2 (1998): 547-566.

<sup>46</sup> Pain and Smith, 'Fear'; V. Spike Peterson et al 'On intimacy, geopolitics and discipline: Elena Barabantseva and Aoileann Ní Mhurchú in conversation with V. Spike Peterson', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 20, no.2 (2018): 258-271.

<sup>47</sup> Elena Barabantseva, Aoileann Ní Mhurchú & V. Spike Peterson, 'Introduction: Engaging Geopolitics through the Lens of the Intimate', *Geopolitics*, 2019 DOI: [10.1080/14650045.2019.1636558](https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2019.1636558).

<sup>48</sup> Pain, 'Intimate War'; Anderson, Carvalho, and Tolia-Kelly, 'Intimate Distance: Fantasy Islands and English Lakes' *Ecumene* 8, no. 1 (2001): 112-119.

<sup>49</sup> Jaqueline Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>50</sup> Anne Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

<sup>51</sup> Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*; see also Nancy Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>52</sup> Maria Lugones, 'Heterosexualism and the Colonial / Modern Gender System', *Hypatia* 22, no.1 (2007): 186-209; Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*; Nyan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

<sup>53</sup> Lugones, 'Heterosexualism and the Colonial / Modern Gender System'.

<sup>54</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather* (London: Routledge, 1995).

and development under liberal (neo)imperialism.<sup>55</sup> When we approach intimacy as a method we want to stress the way that proximities and circulations of the intimate cannot be divorced from the history of Empire and that when dominant heteronormative appeals to intimacy are coded, for example in museum exhibitions, this is always and already racialised.

Whilst questions of intimacy may instinctively relate to 'individual feelings', work on intimate geopolitics<sup>56</sup> has demonstrated intimacy is bound to power. Attention to intimacy can reveal how supposedly proximate, local, socio-sexual, affective encounters and relations are bound to and equally reproduce international and global regimes of power<sup>57</sup>. This work is both conceptual and methodological.<sup>58</sup> 'Intimacy' provides a means of denaturalising spatial and temporal assumptions whilst providing a series of practices which help the researcher be attuned to their place within wider political processes. Thinking through our own intimate entanglements in the museum space calls upon us to be reflexively attentive to autoethnographic processes. It invites us to be critical about positionality and how we, as researchers, encounter the unfamiliar yet already familiar museum as a research site. However, we contend that an attention to the politics of intimacy can have a much broader utility when 'reading' the museum, beyond a focus on the researcher 'self'.

Intimacy, we suggest here, is particularly useful for researching museums. Firstly, museums are already a site of socialisation to which visitors are often 'intimately' bound through formative affective encounters; secondly, museums are places of particular embodied encounters between institutional spaces and objects reified by nationalism and colonialism; and thirdly, as civic spaces museums are sites which rely upon mobilising particular regimes of socio-sexual and raced normalcy such as family, domesticity, heteronormativity, patriotism, able-bodiedness<sup>59</sup>. Museums are both 'everyday' and highly geopolitical as sites of imperial debris through which colonial history, war, violence, and the ongoing power structures of coloniality circulate. Visiting a museum involves participation and engagement in the reproduction of these processes through, for example, reading, following trails, watching films, interactive exhibitions, and moving one's body in particular ways. The museum calls upon us through particular types of bodied intimacy and relationships to objects and experiences. Museums include and exclude and racially interpellate subjects through intimate circulation of emotions and relationship to others and objects. They make appeals to normalcy (such as whiteness, maleness, colonial nostalgia, heterosexism, cisgenderism) that hide the very political work done in and by museums and exhibitions. Intimacy helps denaturalise and expose these processes whilst providing an (auto)ethnographic and reflexive practice to explore the researcher's various complicities or exclusions. Thinking through intimacy gets at the affective and emotional circulations that are tied to museums as imperial debris.

We argue that intimacy is not only the navigation of social relations with another person, such as in the close and proximate affective encounters which are central to fieldwork,<sup>60</sup> but also our feelings and sensibilities when encountering objects and institutions. This directs us to examine processes in which we ourselves are entangled. Here, intimacy is a means of understanding our embodied and emotional relations to people and objects which often defy categorisation. At the same time, it is a means of exploring how those relations are always associated with global colonial dynamics of power.

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<sup>55</sup> See Patricia Owens, *Economy of Force* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>56</sup> Pain, 'Intimate War'; V. Spike Peterson, 'Towards Queering the Globally Intimate', *Political Geography* 56, (2017): 114-116; Alison Mountz and Alison Hyndman, 'Feminist Approaches to the Global Intimate', *Women's Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1/2 (2006): 449.

<sup>57</sup> Peterson 'Towards queering the globally intimate'.

<sup>58</sup> Smith 'Intimacy and angst in the field'

<sup>59</sup> Tolia-Kelly, 'Feeling and being at the (postcolonial) museum'

<sup>60</sup> Smith, 'Intimacy and angst in the Field'.

We draw upon different aspects of the associated literature to conceptualise intimacy in three overlapping processes:

1. *Intimacy as socio-sexual affect.* Intimacy enables us to question our relations to objects and subjects which are bound up with feelings of closeness and familiarity.<sup>61</sup> This could be emotional and embodied states, but also refers to how intimacy is made intelligible; how intimacy is understood and experienced is always tied to normative ways of being together, through heteronormativity and homonormativity.<sup>62</sup> For example, feelings of intimacy relate to how we are orientated by wider regimes of power towards certain objects, bodies and others – through appeals to and social relations of domesticity, family, household, consumption, reproduction, nationhood, citizenship. How we might encounter or feel intimately connected to an object or picture can be viewed as organised around schemas of heteronormativity and emotional circulations that are historically linked to these social relations. Following Berlant and Warner we consider heteronormativity as a series of moral privileges embedded within systems of power.<sup>63</sup> Heteronormativity (and, bound to this, homonormativity) relates to how heterosexuality is characterised as morally superior and how this is fashioned through markers of supposed ‘progress’ such as individualism, domesticity, hygiene, lifestyle, patriarchal gender relations, child rearing, social reproduction as much as sex.<sup>64</sup>

Intimacy here is not solely confined to human-human relations but can also encompass how humans relate to objects or animals, as our analysis of Snob illustrates. This recognises what Cudworth and Hobden call the deep embeddedness and connections and interdependencies between human and non-human animal systems.<sup>65</sup> It also demonstrates how experiences of socio-sexual affect are stimulated and propagated by seemingly inanimate or moving objects. The intimate and the corporeal senses of proximity and affect they refer to are not always about positive emotional states – desire, love, eroticism – but can also be about revilement, hate, disgust. However, what we are interested in is both how these relations of intimacy emerge between humans, objects and animals and how they remain arranged through dominant normative heteronormative and colonial schemas of worth. Western forms of domesticity are imagined to be intimate spaces of family but this can also include relations to fetishised objects, commodities and of course animals. Intimate relations between humans and animals are usually governed by strict taboos around affection, particularly sex.<sup>66</sup> Equally, which animals are objects of affection is often governed by prior assumptions about their domestic fit as ‘pets’, working animals or as food. Such strict boundaries around intimacy betray the place that sex has in marking further boundaries between human and animals<sup>67</sup>, in ways that are parallel (if not directly comparable) to the way that sex was used to draw racial categories. The intimate as we use it gets at these encounters, bonds and affections and asks us to explore how these states emerge and the political work they do in museum spaces.

2. *Intimacy as scales and proximities.*<sup>68</sup> Objects in museums can reveal intimate relations linking places and times. Circulations and relations between and across objects illuminate how what might otherwise be

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<sup>61</sup> Natalie Oswin and Eric Olund, ‘Governing intimacy’, *Environment and Planning D* 28, no. 1 (2010): 60-67.

<sup>62</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 30-31.

<sup>63</sup> Berlant and Warner, ‘Sex in Public’.

<sup>64</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 31.

<sup>65</sup> Eric Cudworth and Steve Hobden, ‘The posthuman way of war’, *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 6 (2016): 513-529.

<sup>66</sup> Michael Brown and Claire Rasmussen, ‘Bestiality and the Queering of the Human Animal’. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 28, no. 1 (2010), 158-17.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>68</sup> Our conception of scales and proximities draws heavily on Pain, ‘Intimate War’ and Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*.

understood mainly as 'past', such as colonial violence, continue to be embedded in and reproduced in the now. Intimacy helps question the division of the world into domestic/international, local/global and complicates common sense understandings of the 'far' and 'near' and 'past' and 'present'. In the words of Lisa Lowe, an attention to intimacy can reveal the 'proximities of the geographically, and conceptually distant sites'.<sup>69</sup> For example, an intimate attention to objects can illuminate how imperial debris connects seemingly disparate sites, bodies, and subjects that would otherwise (such as through analyses built on ideas of the liberal nation state) appear distant: Birmingham and Kingstown, New Orleans and Lagos. A manacle might tell a story about its production in a 19th century Birmingham factory, to it being bound to the leg of an African slave in the middle passage, to the life history and forms of oppression that affect people racialised as Black today. Intimacy helps address the 'usually unrecognized and unacknowledged structural articulations'<sup>70</sup> between objects, places, peoples.' Whilst objects can remain static, for example in a glass box in a museum, tracing intimacies reveals the circulations of objects and their attachments which may leave traces of other 'unruly' stories and experiences. These are 'stories' that might not fit so neatly fit into the touristic, civil and nationalist/imperial role of the museum.

The use of intimacy here appeals precisely to the museum as imperial debris, emerging as an institution and a series of practices of archiving, cataloguing, differentiating, and exhibiting, out of the processes of extending colonial knowledge of the world. Regardless of whether or not an object is materially linked to imperialism, intimacy draws our attention to the circulations and the "geopoliticalness" of objects. To consider the intimacy of a series of objects is to recognise the economy of ruins and debris – where they were produced, what they were used for, bound to, broken from and how they were 'discovered', stolen, appropriated, gifted, (allegedly legitimately) bought and eventually curated. This draws our attention to the historicity of objects but also the political work they continue to do. An object's intimate relations to other objects, events, places, people, animals can challenge a conventional linear notion of time and our 'common sense' understanding of what Empire was and is (such as, as a grand strategy of expansion 'over there').<sup>71</sup> This is through the relations it reveals, opens up or hides. This also draws our attention to how museums produce and remake colonial power through the curating and narrating of objects. For example, the curation of the manacle of an African slave does not only allude to the 'dead past' of history, but may work to address certain people racialised as Black within the historical legacies of slavery and anti-black violence today.<sup>72</sup> Museums do not only narrate Empire but are a part of the fabric of its reproduction. This reproduction is of course contingent and messy and relies upon the frames through which the object is presented and encountered. What we suggest here, however, is that objects have intimacies born out of circulations and use. This, in turn, reveals how the past collapses into the present and how intimate purportedlydistant places and times suddenly become. Intimacy can work as an analytical strategy which allows us to see these circulations and how they are addressed and organised through museum curation.

*3. Intimacy as colonial differentiation.* Finally, intimacy relates to the racial stratifications of people under Empire, part of what Walter Mignolo calls the construction of 'colonial difference'.<sup>73</sup> As we raised above,

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<sup>69</sup> Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 2.

<sup>70</sup> Stephanie Smallwood, 'Reading the archive of liberalism with Lisa Lowe: Reflections on The Intimacies of Four Continents', *Cultural Dynamics* 29, no. 1–2 (2017): 83–88.

<sup>71</sup> Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 25.

<sup>72</sup> Juanita Sundberg, 'Trash-Talk' & the Production of Quotidian Geopolitical Boundaries in the United States-Mexico borderlands', *Social and Cultural Geography* 9, no. 8 (2008): 871–890.

<sup>73</sup> Walter Mignolo, 'I am where I think: Epistemology and the colonial difference', *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 8, no. 2 (1999): 235–245.

modern intimacy is heteronormative, it relies on the idea of domesticity and family as key aspects of human progress.<sup>74</sup> Appeals to intimacy, whilst being concerned with appropriate feelings and orientations towards others (including sex, desire, touching etc.), are also wrapped up with the delineation of suspect and suspicious intimacies; for example, those intimacies and kinship practices that have been historically deemed 'abnormal' or 'underdeveloped' because they challenge, rupture or threaten heteronormative universalism and order. Whilst queer theorists have long demonstrated how heteronormative ideals have cast homosexuality as deviant, this has largely ignored how heteronormativity has a profound relationship with colonial racism.<sup>75</sup>

Dominant ideas of intimacy from the 19th century focussed on European domesticity, arranged around the bourgeois nuclear family and patriarchal gender relations. Queer scholars of colour such as Roderick Ferguson and decolonial feminists such as Maria Lugones have demonstrated how these conceptions of nuclear family are fundamentally based on Western capitalist and patriarchal conceptions of gender and sexuality and thus function as highly racialised social ideals.<sup>76</sup> Colonisers used what Ferguson calls 'taxonomies of perversion' to codify and evidence the alleged inferiority of colonised people, indigenous communities and slaves, based upon how far they were viewed as emulating or deviating from Western forms of domesticity, Christian marriage and heteronormative family.<sup>77</sup> Lugones and Nigerian Feminist Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí take this point further by showing how gender and sexuality were in fact central to how colonised people (in their separate cases in West Africa and indigenous communities in Latin America) were subject to dispossession and control by (settler) colonisers, imperial governments and missionaries.<sup>78</sup> The historic system of gender and sexuality created in Western Europe was firstly used to reveal the racial inferiority of colonised people and then as a sign of communities' 'development' towards European modernity. To Lugones, drawing on Oyěwùmí, 'the scope of the system of gender imposed through colonialism encompasses the subordination of females in every aspect of life'.<sup>79</sup> In considering how intimacy functions within broader patterns of imperial debris we need to stay alert to how questions of intimacy were central to the racialisation of colonised peoples who were viewed as underdeveloped in their practices of kinship and how this is refashioned through ongoing modes of colonial racism today. How, for example, communities in both the Global North and South are deemed 'backwards' and 'savage' because of their apparent absence of domesticity, 'primitive kinship structures' and the treatment of women.<sup>80</sup> And how, in this way, through ideas of intimacy some people are viewed as not properly modern but

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<sup>74</sup> Povinelli, *Empire of Love*.

<sup>75</sup> For example, See Lauren Berlant, ed. *Intimacy*; David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz, 'Introduction: What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?', *Social Text* 23, nos. 3–4 (2005): 1–18. On the white amnesia and Eurocentrism of queer theory see Keguro Macharia, 'On Being Area-Studied: A Litany of Complaint', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 22, no.2 (2016): 183–189. For an overview of debates on queer theory in IR and questions of race see Melanie Richter-Montpetit, 'Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex (in IR) But were Afraid to Ask: The 'Queer Turn' in International Relations,' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 46, no.2 (2018): 220–240.

<sup>76</sup> Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations In Black: Toward A Queer Of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2004); Maria Lugones, 'The coloniality of gender', *Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise*, no. 2 (2008): 1–17.

<sup>77</sup> Broadly on imperialism, colonialism and domesticity see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather* (London: Routledge, 1995). On indigenous communities see Maria Lugones, 'Toward a Decolonial Feminism', *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2011): 742–759; Mark Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight?: Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). On slavery see Hortense Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book', *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 64–81; Patricia Collins, 'It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation', *Hypatia* 13, no. 3 (1998): 62–8; Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>78</sup> Lugones, 'The coloniality of gender'; Lugones, 'Toward a Decolonial Feminism'; Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women. Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

<sup>79</sup> Lugones, 'The coloniality of gender', 7.

<sup>80</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*; see also Joe Turner, *Bordering intimacy: Postcolonial governance and the policing of family* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming).

also not properly human.<sup>81</sup> Liberal personhood is defined by a capacity for proper intimacy and individualism<sup>82</sup>. This supposed universalism masks the racial hierarchies and colonial violence that mark people out as human, not-quite human or non-human. In this way, intimacy can organise personhood by demarcating who is or is not properly intimate.

Intimacy as colonial differentiation illuminates how intimate hierarchies are arranged through heteronormative appeals to domesticity. This, as suggested above, is not solely concerned with human-human relationships. Intimacy can also be about the appropriate treatment, practical and metaphysical relationship between humans, objects, the environment, plants and animals. Colonialism relies on dismantling local and indigenous knowledges and practices of relating to the human/non-human world, that is, subordinating them as backwards, dangerous or irrational. Western knowledge continues to propagate this dismantling and with it imposes particular normative modes of intimate interactions between people and things – even by positing or questioning this dualism we reproduce a particular Western and Eurocentric form of categorisation. Following John Kinder, we can consider the zoo as one tool of imperialism, obsessed as it is with the domestication, management and curation of nature, while at the same time as fetishising and exoticising habitats it plays a role in destroying.<sup>83</sup> Normative conceptions of the intimate relay and reorganise principles around how modern ‘civilised’ societies treat animals, such as through how ‘we’ treat non-human animals, the division between pets, farm animals and ‘wild animals’, the keeping of animals in a household, or even rites of death and use of animals in warfare (commonly horses, dogs, elephants).<sup>84</sup> We can still often see how the apparent ‘inappropriate’ treatment of animals is used as a proxy for racialisation of populations as ‘backwards’, ‘savage’ or ‘uncivilised.’

### **Intimate Objects of Imperial and Colonial Violence**

To illustrate the above approach to intimacy as method we turn to fieldwork encounters at the Royal Engineers Museum and the particular political significance of the Museum and Corps mascot, ‘Snob’ the dog. Snob exists as a taxidermy dog in a glass case in the Museum’s Crimean War gallery (Figure 1), a cheerful cartoon on printed signage placed around the museum which provides a fun family-oriented trail linking other objects (Figure 2), and a soft and huggable plush reproduction dog which is photographed by museum staff around the museum and beyond it, taking part in activities with children and doing school outreach work. The photographs are posted on a Twitter account associated with ‘Snob’ which purports to disseminate information about ‘fun family friendly activities, education events and learning news’<sup>85</sup>. The object label for the taxidermy dog records the following:

Found beside the body of a Russian officer after the Battle of the Alma this dog was adopted by the 11th Company Royal Sappers and Miners. Brought back to England he was originally called ‘Alma’, but was re-christened ‘Snob’ when he preferred the Officers Mess at Chatham to the Guardroom. Next to him is the Crimea Campaign medal with an “Alma” clasp which was awarded to ‘Snob’ after the battle.

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<sup>81</sup> Spillers, ‘Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book’.

<sup>82</sup> Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 23.

<sup>83</sup> John Kinder, ‘Zoo Animals and Modern War: Captive Casualties, Patriotic Citizens, and Good Soldiers’, in *Animals and War: Studies of Europe and North America*, ed., Ryan Hediger (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2012), 45 - 75

<sup>84</sup> Cudworth and Hobden, ‘The posthuman way of war’.

<sup>85</sup> @REMuseum\_Snob

When he died, the balance of 'Snob's' remains were buried near the parade square at Brompton Barracks whilst his skin was stuffed to produce the taxidermy object. The cartoon and plush character are more recent curatorial additions. The role that Snob plays within the museum occurs across multiple objects and platforms. He is what we term an organising object: one that anchors, orientates and indexes the broader museum collection, its comprising objects, and those who visit or might be included/excluded from it on particular terms. Being attuned to organising objects in the fieldwork setting allows access to the broader logics of meaning within a museum collection and a starting point to analyse a broad range of objects in intimate relation.



Figure 1. 'Snob' at the Royal Engineers Museum, Gillingham, Kent, UK. Source: author

In the fieldwork encounter one is struck initially not by the obvious *politics* of Snob but by his 'cuteness' and out-of-placeness within a museum focused on mapping techniques, surveying instruments and bridging machines (such perceptions which in and of themselves reveal Western-centric codifications of dogs as 'domesticated'). Snob is listed as object No. 24 in the glass case. No. 23 is a 'Russian fireball' and No. 25 is a 'Russian landmine pressure plate'. Snob stands on the floor of his case amongst these items of battlefield debris, not at eye level like many exhibits but as something we look down upon as we would any other small dog. It would seem perfectly natural to stoop and pat him. He is soft amongst hard objects; the fireball, the landmine, guns, a helmet. Part of the impulse to stoop and touch the dog derives from his out-of-place tactility: his softness, his texture, his feel, something which is accentuated and rendered in his plush toy form. The visitor cannot touch him because he is inside a glass case but the familiarity of the encounter means we do not need to; the visitor addressed by Snob's familiar cuteness has stooped to pet many other dogs before. Through this tactile familiarity we are invited to relate to Snob in the same way, supposedly, as the Sappers who also had the urge to stoop and pet this dog on the battlefield and fold him into their domesticity and their institution.

The role of 'Snob' in the museum is particularly affecting. Snob is mobilised in a way that asks us to connect with him as a friendly, benign pet. We are called upon by particular normative claims to dogs as 'family friendly', as safe, as domesticated, as harmless, in order to experience the museum, its comprising objects, and its stories



about international relations – and particularly the ‘honourable conquest’ of Empire, in a certain way. Calling upon us to relate intimately (‘non-politically’/‘privately’) to the museum and the military institution undertakes particular types of political work within the narration of the history of the Royal Engineers, British army and British imperial and colonial state more widely. ‘Reading’ the intimacies of ‘Snob’ reveals processes of colonial and imperial erasure, where the violence of imperial war is hidden within and by appeals to ‘man’s best friend’. ‘Snob’ is a safe, and indeed cute and loveable, container for British state violence in the past and present.



Figure 2. Cartoon ‘Snob’, mascot of the Royal Engineers Museum (Reproduced by permission of the Royal Engineers Museum, Library & Archive )

#### *Snob and intimacy as socio-sexual affect: The domestication of Snob and the Royal Engineers*

Visitors are invited to relate to Snob as a family pet. The stuffed animal seems patable, he is cute and unthreatening. Contemporary Western social relations cast animals as not just accessories to family life but intrinsic parts of it. However, for other visitors inhabiting this space, the dog may have entirely different intimate relations bound to very different historical experiences of the uses of dogs within strategies of colonial violence. For the white coloniser dogs were ‘family pets’, for colonised populations dogs were frequently used in methods of control, disciplinary punishment and torture - for example, they were frequently used in plantation economies to terrorise and hunt down escaped slaves.<sup>86</sup> That is, visitors are invited to relate to the stuffed dog as a sort of quasi-family member and through him they are called upon to relate to British soldiers, and what it is that these soldiers have done and continue to do, in particular ways. However, this invitation depends upon the historical force of intimacy to make certain things relatable to certain bodies. The benign story of Snob’s ‘adoption’ by the Royal Engineers emphasises the more relatable domestic aspects of soldiers’ lives; soldiers are just like us – they have pets, too. The figuration of Snob suggests that the daily contours of ‘civilian’ and ‘military’ lives are not so different. However, as such an intimate encounter in and of itself reproduces particular silences, as we elaborate below, the use of the dog as a ‘family friendly’ mascot is in and of itself premised on a coloniser’s view of the intimate relations between humans and animals.

The violence of Snob’s origins, part of the detritus of violence littering the battlefield, is elided by the neat narrative of his rescue and integration into British military life. The Crimean war becomes the setting for a

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<sup>86</sup> For example, see Larry Spruill, ‘Slave Patrols, “Packs of Negro Dogs” and Policing Black Communities’, *Phylon* 53, no. 1 (2016): 42-66.

heart-warming story about some soldiers getting a pet rather than one about the destruction, loss and suffering of imperial violence. In several interconnected ways, therefore, the domestication of Snob is simultaneously the domestication of soldiers, understood as the ways in which soldiers, as Paul Achter puts it, are ‘fit’ into ‘conventional ideological structures... for consumption at home’, ideological structures that make “war seem permissible and worthy”,<sup>87</sup> or, indeed, cute and fun<sup>88</sup>. This appeal to an endearing and familiar domesticity relies on particular affective relations between the visitor to the museum and Snob as an organising object. It relies on, envisions and includes a particular visitor subject, one for whom dogs elicit effective responses comprising the familial, the fond and the unthreatening. For some visitors, a dog might elicit feelings of disgust or fear, so this moment in which the visitor is invited to relate to Snob as an organising and orienting principle within the wider museum becomes one of fitting/unfitting, inclusion/exclusion and belonging/unbelonging.

#### *Snob and intimacy as scales and proximities: The afterlife of Crimea*

Snob’s curation has involved a once living thing being rendered into an inanimate object that is stuffed, mounted and displayed. Yet Snob continues to ‘live’, or rather he has an afterlife, in the form of his cartoon image and plush toy, and more broadly as the mascot of the Royal Engineers buried and memorialised beneath their parade ground. Across these multiple forms and objects, Snob is connected to spaces, people and violences across space and time. The figure of the dog, in both his literal and more symbolic materialised forms, bonds the present-day museum space, visitors to it and the Royal Engineers as an institution, to the battlefields of the Crimean war and the narrative of (neo)colonial war more widely. As imperial remains, Snob is produced out of the ruination of colonial war (specifically, in the case of the Crimean War, the British and French Imperial forces’ attempts to stop the Russian Empire taking control of the Dardanelles straits and access to India).<sup>89</sup> Yet, he animates the contemporary military institution’s origin story of Empire as ‘honourable conquest’ and circulates this storying of the past into the present moment and the Royal Engineers’ recent and current campaigns. The way in which visitors are invited to intimately relate with Snob simultaneously makes what might seem ‘past’ and ‘dead’ much more ‘present’ and ‘alive’.. As we have seen, the storying of Snob works to erase broader questions about the imperial presence of British soldiers in the Alma and makes it into a story of soldierly benign care and compassion; ‘good men’ looking after dogs. The movement of Snob’s body not only collapses the geographical ‘distance’ between Britain/Crimea/Turkey/India, but it also collapses distinctions between ‘past’ and ‘present’. Snob’s afterlife in the form of mascot and symbol of the Royal Engineers makes the ‘good soldier’ story also one about soldiers of today and implicitly reassures the visitor that recent and contemporary conquests continue to be ‘honourable’. The soldiers in Crimea who rescued Snob are translated, through the afterlives that circulate around the body of the dog, into an emblem for contemporary soldiers who can also be understood through ideas of care and compassion. They can then be made intelligible as good men on present day honourable rescue missions, saving entire regions by bringing them the same civilised values that prompted their historic comrades to stoop and pet Snob that day on the Crimean battlefield.

#### *Snob and intimacy as colonial differentiation: The personhood of Snob, erasure, and differentiating the civil from the savage*

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<sup>87</sup> Paul Achter, ‘Unruly Bodies: The Rhetorical Domestication of Twenty-First-Century Veterans of War’, *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 96, no. 1 (2010): 48.

<sup>88</sup> See: Julia Welland, ‘Joy and war: Reading pleasure in wartime experiences’, *Review of International Studies* 44, no. 3 (2018): 438–455; Joanna Tidy, ‘War Craft: The Embodied Politics of Making War’, *Security Dialogue* 50, no. 3 (2019): 220–238, 234–5.

<sup>89</sup> David Goldfrank, *The Origins of the Crimean War* (London: Routledge, 1993).

Although we started thinking and writing about Snob as an inanimate object the reader may observe how we have animated him in our prose. Snob is ‘he’ rather than ‘it’. We have written him into a position of gendered personhood, arguably to a greater extent than anyone else in this paper (including ourselves). Within the museum Snob is awarded a great deal of personhood. He is given a name and a story, and individualised as a social media presence. We learn that he was given a medal, something usually reserved for people. In these ways he is produced, and relatable to by visitors, as much more of a person than the millions of people who lived and died under British colonial rule. They are largely absent from the museum other than as terrain. The Museum proudly observes that the Royal Engineers literally built the British Empire. In its accounts of imperialist and colonial mapping, terrain, and bridging, those whose lands were mapped, whose bodies were collapsed into terrain, whose lives were carved as territory, are conspicuously erased or held up as examples of exotic otherness – the ‘photograph of a Zulu Witch Doctor taken by a Royal Engineer in 1879’ being a prime example within the museum.

The presence of Snob as a person entails the absence of others on these terms. The production of animal personhood functions as a differentiating mechanism that separates the ‘civilised’ (fully human) from the ‘savage’ (not fully human). The treatment of Snob the dog as *someone* to be cared for, and the situatedness of this within a particular cultural imagination of ‘man’s best friend’, is an example of the wider ways in which the relationship between humans and animals, and the appropriate treatment of particular animals become linked to ideas of civilisation and civilised personhood. This differentiation concerns the intimate relations of who is allowed into domestic spaces, who is treated as ‘family’, and who is used for the family. Such codification of appropriate relations of intimacy relates to how people are deemed civilised or uncivilised. There are those that have appropriate intimate and domestic relations (such as caring for dogs) and those who do not (who may eat them, not care for them or fear them). This is not only organised around human intimacy but also that with animals which are treated in particular ways based upon assumptions of appropriate or suspicious intimate relations and domesticity. The colonial figuration of the dog as a signifier of civilised differentiation is alive and well today – the practice of Western soldiers ‘rescuing’ dogs from the countries they are occupying and bringing them ‘home’ has spawned myriad crowdfunding initiatives, charities and a subgenre of dog rescue memoir<sup>90</sup>.

Snob is part of the imperial debris of museums, both as a material ‘leftover’ from imperial and colonial violence and as part of coloniality’s ongoing processes of ruination. As a material object the now-preserved dog was originally a spoil of war, picked up from the remains, rot and destruction of an imperial battlefield. And in the ways discussed here through the terms of our encounter with it, this object of ruin reproduces the ongoing violence and ruination of colonial power. . As we have argued, within the museum, Snob is given more personhood than the millions who were killed and dispossessed under British colonialism, past and present, and through the actions of units such as the Royal Engineers, whether in colonial India or in Iraq today. The treatment of Snob as ‘part of the family’ is central to the way that this colonial violence is normalised and even celebrated within the exhibition. Snob’s curation not only obscures the museum as imperial debris but Snob’s is imperial debris; the curated object directly links the colonial and imperial wars of the Crimea and the protection/opening up of trade routes to India with ongoing forms of global warfare conducted by the British state which the wider museum narrates. At the same time, the prominence and anthropomorphisation of Snob reveals the active legacies of racial schemas of human worth reproduced within the museum space and within

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<sup>90</sup> Examples include Craig Grossi, *Craig And Fred: A Marine, a Stray Dog, and How they Saved Each Other* (New York, Harper Collins: 2017); Jay Kopelman, *From Baghdad to America: Life after War for a Marine and His Rescued Dog*, (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2010); Terri Crisp, *No Buddy Left Behind: Bringing U.S. Troops’ Dogs and Cats Safely Home from the Combat Zone*, (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2012).

contemporary international politics. In the treatment of Snob, we are reminded how domesticated animals were often, and arguably continue to be, treated as closer to humanity than colonised peoples.<sup>91</sup> Where dogs are recognised as part of the family, these same appeals to familial intimacy can be used to reveal the apparent backwardness of populations and communities racialised as non-white. The ‘underdevelopment’ of heteronormative domesticity and appropriate human and animal intimacies continues to be used as a proxy for the apparent absence of civilisation and humanness and this works as a justification for dispossession and violence.<sup>92</sup> Whilst Snob might invite intimate feelings through the objects curation, this invitation works to sustain racialised modes of address. The object works as a site of international politics by intimately addressing the position of the white coloniser/visitor/researcher who can both imagine the dog as benign and the museum as a space ‘free’ of colonial violence. Within the broader logics and material linkages that constitute museums as imperial debris, Snob is merely one node in how colonial knowledge and subject positions are reproduced within such sites in the metropole.

### Conclusion

When looking for ‘international relations’ at a British military museum, we might be tempted to pass over Snob the dog. ‘He’, and the responses he seems to invite (as cute, out of place, familiar and familial, or equally disgust and fear), might seem like a fleeting curiosity but nothing much more. However, as we have shown, Snob, and the intimate responses he invites and elicits (and the assumptions about these intimate responses that, as researchers, we made when encountering Snob during fieldwork), are key to understanding the British Army Royal Engineers Museum as an everyday site of coloniality. The starting point for our analysis in this article has been that when studying museums as sites of international relations we should be attuned to the ways in which they are sites of a colonially-produced international. Guided by the concept of coloniality, and framing this in the museum context through the notion of imperial debris, we have put forward a methodological approach to the museum space which involves strategies for fieldwork and analysis oriented towards intimacy as socio-sexual affects, scales and proximities and differentiating logics. In particular, we have drawn attention to the intimate politics of objects<sup>93</sup>, such as in the way that organising objects script socio-sexual and affective encounters within museums. We have pointed to the ways in which a site-specific auto-/ethnographic exploration of coloniality and intimacy at the museum works with how researchers are already called upon to experience them and their collections of imperial debris through racialised logics of citizenship, nationalism, history, and geopolitical institutions. This directs attention to the positionality of the researcher and an entailed ethic in which our inclusions, complicities or exclusions are situated within ongoing colonial structures and relations. These issues pertaining to reflexivity, positionality and power speak more broadly to the politics of fieldwork itself. Although here we have focused on the museum as a research site, the questions, sensitivities and strategies we have outlined can be applied to other forms of ‘collection’ or archive, and to other collections of, and social/political relations with, objects.

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<sup>91</sup> Take for example the case of ‘Just Nuisance’, which was a dog that used to frolic among the naval officers in Simon’s Town, South Africa in the early 1940s. It was subsequently formally enlisted in the Royal Navy and was buried with a full military funeral. At this time, black people were often not considered fully human and were subject to violent policies of white supremacist rule. Today, there is a bronze statue of Just Nuisance in the Simon’s Town harbour. See <https://www.simonstown.com/just-nuisance>. We would like to thank the editorial team for this illustrative example.

<sup>92</sup> Turner, *Bordering intimacy*

<sup>93</sup> Tidy, ‘War Craft: The Embodied Politics of Making War’.