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Murder at London Zoo: The Politics of Late-Colonial Sympathy in Interwar Britain¹

Jonathan Saha

Police officers found San Dwe behind the tapir house just after midnight on August 25, 1928. When they discovered him, he was dressed only in a pyjama top and his underpants. He was in visible distress and incoherent—or, at least, the policemen struggled to understand him. English was his second language, and it was reportedly ‘broken’ in the best of circumstances. San Dwe was one of the zoo’s elephant-drivers, a young Karen man of twenty-two years, who had moved to London from Burma less than three years earlier. He told them that he had injured his foot after falling from the window of the room, located immediately above the tapir house, in which he lived. He also told them that his roommate, the famous and celebrated mahout, Said Ali, had been attacked by a group of white men and was ‘finished’. On investigating, the officers found that the door to the room had been forced open, and in it they discovered Ali’s

¹ The research for this article was made possible by Arts and Humanities Research Council funding. I am indebted to Rachel E. Johnson and Peter Coates, as well as to the editors and the anonymous reviewers, whose encouraging suggestions and critical feedback have improved this article immeasurably. I am grateful for the hospitality and conversation of Ben and Catherine Bankhurst that made the research for this essay possible. And, additional thanks must go to the Centre for South Asian Studies at the University of Cambridge, where I received very helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

body.² He had been violently murdered in his bed. It appeared that he had died from repeated blows from a sledge hammer and a pickaxe, both of which had been left at the scene. San Dwe was taken by the police for medical observations. One officer recalled in his deposition that San Dwe was ‘foaming at the mouth’, although the doctor at the mental hospital dismissed this claim. She said he was but a frightened young man.³

In his initial statement to the police, taken that morning, San Dwe claimed that on the evening of his death Said Ali had quarrelled with some white men and women from the window of their small shared room. These people were having sex openly in the street that ran alongside the perimeter of the zoo.⁴ Said Ali called them animals. A man shouted back, ‘shut up, you black man, shut up’. Later that night, four men burst into their room whilst they were sleeping. They demanded that Said Ali tell them where his moneybox was kept. Then, San Dwe recalled, they beat Ali brutally, whilst he himself slid under his own bed, made his way to the window, and threw himself out of it, to effect his escape.⁵ This was how the police came to find him, dazed and hurt, wandering about in the zoo grounds in the middle of the night. In a later interview,

² The National Archives, Kew, London, hereafter TNA, CRIM 1/446: ‘Deposition of Maynard Evans, Police Officer’, 13 Sept. 1928.

³ TNA, CRIM 1/446: ‘Deposition of Percival Bussey, Police Officer’, 13 Sept. 1928; ‘Deposition of Gwendoline Mayer, Registered Medical Practitioner’, 4 Sept. 1928.

⁴ This was not immediately apparent in his statement, perhaps as a result of San Dwe’s distressed state, or because of the language barrier between himself and the police. But it is clear in a later iteration of his description of the argument, see: TNA, HO 144/16132: File 527852/19

⁵ TNA, CRIM 1/446: ‘Statement of San Dwe’, 25 Aug. 1928.

attended by an acquaintance—a fellow young Karen man called San Po Lwin, a law student in the city—San Dwe elaborated on his story, and altered it. He revealed how, over the previous months, an English man regularly met him whilst he was busy training the elephants in the zoo. The man, always dressed in a trench coat and a trilby, slipped him coins for information on Ali’s stash of money. Apparently home-sick, and against his better judgement, San Dwe agreed to give this man access to their shared room by leaving the door open on the night of the murder. But having spent the afternoon with a colleague at a music hall, he forgot to do this, and so, when the man arrived with an accomplice, they had to force the door. He said that it was these men who then killed Said Ali.⁶

Circumstantial evidence was heavily against San Dwe. On top of this, his story was inconsistent. In his first account there were four men, in his later account only two. The mysterious man who had been scheming against Said Ali could not be found, and San Dwe’s description of him was unhelpfully vague. He was charged with murder shortly after the interview. The newspapers pounced on the story.⁷ The tragedy was easily shaped into a sensational tale that incorporated madness, intrigue and orientalism. It came complete with foaming mouths, clandestine meetings with unknown men in trilbies, and exotic characters from the East. It also followed hard on the heels of other tragedies that surrounded the zoo’s elephants. A year earlier, two of their elephants,

⁶ TNA, CRIM 1/446: ‘Deposition of Henry Heywood, Detective Sergeant’, 13 Sept. 1928, recalled 20 Sept. 1928; and ‘Deposition of San Po Lwin’, 28 Sept. 1928.

⁷ As is clear from the files containing newspaper clippings maintained by the Home Office, see: TNA, HO 144/16132: File 527852/1 and File 527852/4.

including the children's favourite Indiarani, had died from an undiagnosed disease. Either anthrax or poisoning were suspected.⁸ This was then followed by the same strange illness afflicting the elephant keepers themselves, though fortunately they all recovered.⁹ The press followed the case as it went to trial, emplotting it within a wider story that brought the empire, and its imaginaries, into the familiar setting of the Zoological Gardens in Regents Park. The Burmese 'curse of the white elephant' was the motif of choice. Pa Wa, the white elephant that San Dwe had originally accompanied to London, had died in Calcutta at roughly the same time as Said Ali had been murdered. It was reported as more than a coincidence.¹⁰ Soon other events were linked with this elephant's inauspicious presence. The General Strike, that had begun just as Pa Wa returned to London in 1926, was blamed on the curse. As was an apparent hunger strike of the animals in New York's zoo, also reported to have begun when Pa Wa turned up there.¹¹ The supposedly 'Oriental superstition' surrounding the white elephant became a central element in the reporting of the murder by the British newspaper press.

In ways that this sensationalist reportage only hints at, the investigation into Said Ali's murder, and the subsequent fate of San Dwe, were both entangled with British imperialism. The evidence that witnesses brought to bear in the case were shot

⁸ London Metropolitan Archive, London, hereafter LMA: Standard Bank Collection, CLC/B/207/MS40476/001, 'Letters relating to diseases in elephants', Johnston to Macnaughten, 4 Jan. 1927.

⁹ Daily Mail, 27 Aug. 1928.

¹⁰ See: Sunday News, 26 Aug. 1928, and 9 Sept. 1928; and Sunday Dispatch, 26 Aug. 1928.

¹¹ Daily Mail, 31 Aug. 1928.

through with normative understandings of race, gender and sexual conduct. In other words, imperial discourses shaped the ways that judgements of character and motives were rendered into legal evidence.¹² Through these discourses, San Dwe emerges within the archive as a sympathetic figure. Depictions of his close connections to animals, drawing as they did on popular imaginings of the close relationship colonized people were often thought to have with the natural world, served to render him as a gentle and timid person in both the police investigation and in court.¹³ Portrayals of San Dwe also built on colonial ethnographic knowledge which represented Karen communities as deferential and loyal. In spite of the horror of the crime of which he stood accused, the version of San Dwe that was documented in the archive was one that certain people in interwar Britain could feel for. He was somebody that could be sympathised with. And, as his case progressed through the courts, San Dwe's plight attracted greater and greater sympathy.

Along with police and court paperwork, the cardboard binders holding the relevant Home Office files are swelled with memorials received from people across the

¹² Ranajit Guha, "Chandra's Death," in *Subaltern Studies V: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: OUP, 1987), 135–65; Ann Laura Stoler, "'In Cold Blood': Hierarchies of Credibility and the Politics of Colonial Narratives," *Representations*, no. 37 (1992): 151–89.

¹³ For some recent historiography locating the place of the animal in empire through post-colonial historical analysis, see: Philip Armstrong, "The Postcolonial Animal," *Society & Animals* 10, no. 4 (2002): 413–19; Shefali Rajamannar, *Reading the Animal in the Literature of the British Raj* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Aaron Skabelund, "Animals and Imperialism: Recent Historiographical Trends," *History Compass* 11, no. 10 (2013): 801–7; Rohan Deb Roy, "Nonhuman Empires," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 35, no. 1 (2015): 66–75.

Empire who felt sympathy towards San Dwe. The young elephant driver found himself supported by a disparate group of individuals. These included Baptists and Anglicans, especially his co-religionists in the East End and his family home of Toungoo in Burma. His case was also taken up by a network of Karen activists, including San Po Lwin, the student who visited him during the investigation. These London-based, elite, educated, young men called themselves the ‘Loyal Karen People of Burma’.¹⁴ They were part of a broader movement to lobby the British government to grant the Karen communities a measure of constitutional protection against Burmese majority rule in any planned democratic structures for the colony.¹⁵ In addition, retired Indian Civil Servants responded to his situation by lending their own support for his case on the basis of their first-hand experience of Burma and time-earned acquisition of colonial knowledge. Through their letters and petitions, these groups of individuals also articulated arguments about character and motive within normative imperial understandings. Karen nationalists, in particular, mobilized notions of imperial masculinity in ways that sought to demonstrate their similarity to the British, and thus establish their loyalty to Britain.

¹⁴ TNA, HO 144/16132: File 527852/22.

¹⁵ Indeed, San Dwe and the white elephant, Pa Wa, had originally been brought to Britain by prominent elite Karen individuals to display their loyalty to the crown at the Wembley Exhibition. San C. Po, *Burma and the Karens* (London: Elliot Stock, 1928), 41, 46–9; Helen M. Sidebotham, *Round London's Zoo* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1928), 185–6; For more on the national politics of these imperial displays, see: Anne Clendinning, “Exhibiting a Nation: Canada at the British Empire Exhibition, 1924-1925,” *Social History* 39, no. 77 (2006): 79–107.

If, as Ann Laura Stoler has argued, archives are the products of affect, then this particular set of documents are as much the product of sympathy as they are the product of the judicial system. By reading ‘along the archival grain’ of these case files the contours and limits to sympathy in the Empire during the interwar years can be uncovered.¹⁶ Through the history of this murder and its aftermath, this article makes the case for the methodological utility of historicising and analysing sympathy. However, sympathy is a conceptually slippery term. Some social psychologists and neurologists conceive of it as a predominantly human, innate, pre-cognitive response to the suffering of others, albeit unevenly evoked.¹⁷ Such a definition is limiting because of its pretension to universality. It leaves no space for cultural specificity in how sympathy is

¹⁶ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Commonsense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); for other approaches to the archive as an effect of psychological drives, see: Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Ben Kafka, *The Demon of Writing: Powers and Failures of Paperwork* (New York: MIT Press, 2012); and for approaches to reading archives so as to uncover and critique their epistemic basis, see: Warwick Anderson, “The Case of the Archive,” *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 3 (2013): 532–47; Joan W. Scott, “Storytelling,” *History and Theory* 50, no. 2 (2011): 203–9; Matt Houlbrook, “Thinking Queer: The Social and the Sexual in Interwar Britain,” in *British Queer History: New Approaches and Perspectives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 134–64.

¹⁷ George Loewenstein and Deborah A. Small, “The Scarecrow and the Tin Man: The Vicissitudes of Human Sympathy and Caring,” *Review of General Psychology* 11, no. 2 (2007): 112–26; Jean Decety and Thierry Chaminade, “Neural Correlates of Feeling Sympathy,” *Neuropsychologia*, 41, no. 2 (2003): 127–38.

expressed or understood in different times and places.¹⁸ For historians, sympathy is not usefully conceived of as a species of affect. Nor is it best considered to be a simple expression of affective ties. Put plainly, sympathy is not itself an emotion. Instead it is a pathway for affect to move between people. Sympathy allows the feelings of one to incite emotions in another. Conceptualised this way, historical approaches to friendship are instructive.

Just as Jacques Derrida has argued regarding friendship, there is a politics to sympathy. Like friendship, sympathy is simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. It forms connections between some at the expense of others. And, also like friendship, its shifting terrain is historical. In different contexts certain people were more sympathetic to particular groups or individuals than to others. However unlike friendship, as Derrida analysed it, sympathy does not necessarily rely upon or inculcate a sense of democratic fraternity.¹⁹ Taking up this levelling potential in friendship, Leela Gandhi has shown how colonial boundaries were negotiated and breached through affective ties between

¹⁸ For more on sympathy as a culturally specific social phenomenon that structures the flow of feeling between people, see: Candace Clark, *Misery and Company: Sympathy in Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 1–23 although it does unhelpfully suggest that sympathy is an emotion and one that can not be traced historically because of a lack of “data”; for a historical study of sympathy in legal settings, see: Martha C. Nussbaum and Alison L. LaCroix, eds., *Subversion and Sympathy: Gender, Law, and the British Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and for a study of the changing historical imaginings of sympathy, its nature and effects, see: Mary Fairclough, *The Romantic Crowd: Sympathy, Controversy and Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, “The Politics of Friendship,” *American Imago* 50, no. 3 (1993): 353–91.

anti-imperialists, vegetarians and other fin-de-siècle radicals.²⁰ By way of contrast, sympathy does not intrinsically upset or undermine hierarchies between people. It need not be ambivalent. It was perfectly possible for unreconstructed imperialists to have sympathy for a colonised individual, such as San Dwe, without disrupting the social and ideological divisions of Empire. Intangible as it may seem, sympathy might be best understood to be structuring the flow of affect. In other words, it has a normative power to inform who could feel for whom.

Historicising sympathy can shed light on the place of emotions in complex, interlinked processes. In this sense, it is an approach that builds on studies that simultaneously uncover the political history of emotions and the emotional history of politics.²¹ Analysing the politics of sympathy at play in the case of San Dwe draws out the emotional and imperial norms operating in the British justice system. Moreover, it reveals how flows of affect, networks of empire and notions of justice were subtly intertwined. And, through a critique of different actors' sympathetic engagements with his case, it traces wider shifts in national identities and related ideational conceptions of

²⁰ Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

²¹ For two such studies, see: Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2006); Susan Kingsley Kent, *Aftershocks: Politics and Trauma in Britain, 1918-1931* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); and for studies based in the British Indian context, see: Ranajit Guha, "Not at Home in Empire," *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 3 (1997): 482–93; D. K. Lahiri Choudhury, "Sinews of Panic and the Nerves of Empire: The Imagined State's Entanglement with Information Panic, India c.1880–1912," *Modern Asian Studies* 38, no. 04 (2004): 965–1002; Kim A. Wagner, "'Treading Upon Fires': The 'Mutiny'-Motif and Colonial Anxieties in British India," *Past & Present* 218, no. 1 (2013): 159–97.

masculinity. Beyond the case under study here, the politics of sympathy has a wider analytical purchase. Following Monique Scheer and treating emotions as a form of practice—as things people do and not merely things they have—the politics of sympathy can be thought of as disciplining, distributing and inciting affective ties.²² Conceptualised in this way, it enables historians working with emotions to map their movement and mobilisation without privileging particular emotional states, spaces, or conceptions of the human psyche.²³ Rather than excavating embodied emotional experiences in the past, analysing the politics of sympathy shifts the focus to the

²² Monique Scheer, “Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion,” *History and Theory* 51, no. 2 (2012): 193–220; the politics of sympathy could be considered an aspect of the normative standards shaping the expression of emotion, as discussed in Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, “Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards,” *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (1985): 813–36; at the same time, it was part of what enabled people to be sensible to affective ties, and in this it is closer to Joanna Bourke’s approach to the history of emotion, see: Joanna Bourke, “Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotion in Modern History,” *History Workshop Journal* 55, no. 1 (2003): 111–33.

²³ For some of the debates over these issues, see: Adela Pinch, “Emotion and History. A Review Article,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 1 (1995): 100–109; Michael Roper, “Slipping Out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History,” *History Workshop Journal* 59, no. 1 (2005): 57–72; Jan Plamper, “The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns,” *History and Theory* 49, no. 2 (2010): 237–65; Susan J. Matt, “Current Emotion Research in History: Or, Doing History from the Inside Out,” *Emotion Review* 3, no. 1 (2011): 117–24; Nicole Eustace et al., “AHR Conversation: The Historical Study of Emotions,” *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 5 (2012): 1487–1531; Joan W. Scott, “The Incommensurability of Psychoanalysis and History,” *History and Theory* 51, no. 1 (2012): 63–83.

relations between people (and, sometimes, animals).²⁴ It encourages historians to critique affective ties and to explore their limits. It is a mode of analysis attentive to the ways sympathy has informed the structure and content of archives, and might continue to influence historical narratives.²⁵

San Dwe's case was heard in the Old Bailey in November. The case against him largely rested upon the material evidence uncovered by the police, particularly their forensic analysis of the murder weapons and the crime scene. At the same time, the prosecution pointed out the inconsistencies in San Dwe's version of events, and the lack of any material evidence to support his claims. In contrast, the evidence that they presented against San Dwe was strong. Although the door had been forced open with the same sledge hammer that was used to murder Said Ali, blood was found in the marks that the tool had left in the damaged frame. This gave rise to the police's theory that the killer had left the room and locked the door after committing the murder, only then forcing the door open to make it appear that the room had been broken into. This put San Dwe squarely under suspicion. Added to this was evidence of San Dwe's fingerprints on a lampshade beside Said Ali's bed, that had been dislodged during the attack, and a

²⁴ For an examination of the affective ties between humans and animals in colonial Asia, see: Jamie 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.

²⁵ I have been particularly influenced in my thinking on this by Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2011).

smashed electric light bulb that appeared to have been thrown from the room. It was suggested that this evidence showed that the murderer had acted to darken the room prior to the crime. San Dwe's defence solicitor, Mr Freke-Palmer, did not offer any counter evidence. Instead, he attempted to demonstrate that the prosecution's evidence was circumstantial. The fingerprints, he reasoned, may have been on the lampshade for any number of innocuous reasons, since they occupied such cramped quarters together. It was also pointed out that the blood in the indentations made by the hammer had not been identified as Said Ali's.²⁶ Under cross-examination the staff of the London Zoo admitted that it would have been quite possible for a member of the public to have concealed themselves within the grounds after the gardens had closed and to have moved around inside undetected by the remaining staff working the night-shift.²⁷ The Crown's case against San Dwe was not conclusive but, lacking any counter evidence, competing suspects, or a convincing, alternative explanation of events, the odds were firmly stacked against him.

Yet, in spite of this, San Dwe was represented in much of the evidence as a sympathetic character. In the course of the investigation and the trial, the police and prosecutors singularly failed to find a motive that they could ascribe to the young man, so universally described as timid and peaceable. During the trial the testimonies of several of San Dwe's white male co-workers, that had been taken by the police, were

²⁶ TNA, Mepol 3/1640: 'Police Report No. 729, trial of San Dwe', 29 Nov. 1928.

²⁷ TNA, CRIM 1/446: 'Deposition of Geoffrey Mar Vevers, Superintendent of London Zoo', 4 Sept. 1928; 'Deposition of Dennis Robert Hopper, Engineer at London Zoo', 13 Sept. 1928; 'Deposition of Frank Norman Tunnock, Stoker at London Zoo', 13 Sept. 1928.

scrutinised in court. As well as giving an account of the events that occurred on the evening of the murder, they were questioned about their opinion of his character. All of those questioned described him as polite and timid, and the only two witnesses who were cross-examined on this point reinforced this perception of him with anecdotes about his affinity with animals. Charles Harwood, a veterinary assistant at the zoo, testified to San Dwe's 'friendly disposition'. Under further questioning he supported this by recalling that San Dwe was 'very fond of the baby elephant' in his care and that he 'used to lie for hours, playing with it, teaching it tricks, and playing music to it.'²⁸ Charles Hicks, an assistant superintendent at the zoo, noted San Dwe's 'very kindly disposition', and during re-examination illustrated this by recalling the time he 'saw [the] prisoner walking in the gardens with two young pigeons on his shoulders while Said Ali was laughing at him.'²⁹

This evidence deployed these interactions as signs of San Dwe's intimacy, playfulness and affection in his relationship with the zoo's creatures. These were not representations lauding his mastery over animals. His skill as an elephant rider was not mentioned. The emphasis was instead on his kinship with non-humans. This contrasted with Said Ali's widely-acknowledged abilities as a trainer of elephants. It was because of this reputation that when Ali arrived back in the zoo from his home in Calcutta (he worked the summer period for most years during the 1920s), he was given

²⁸ TNA, CRIM 1/446: 'Deposition of Charles George Harwood, Veterinary Assistant at London Zoo', 13 Sept. 1928.

²⁹ TNA, CRIM 1/446: 'Deposition of Charles Henry Hicks, Assistant Superintendent of London Zoo', 13 Sept. 1928.

responsibility for the two adult Burmese elephants that had hitherto been San Dwe's charge.³⁰ But Said Ali's character was not discussed during the trial, only whether their relationship had been amicable. On this point, the only evidence that even obliquely hinted at tensions existing between them was that of John Maycock, one of the zoo's watchmen. He reported that on several occasions since Said Ali had moved into the room above the tapir house with San Dwe, he had seen San Dwe in various parts of the zoo during the night. On asking him why he was not in his room but in the baby elephant's enclosure, San Dwe reportedly replied that 'he would rather sleep with the elephant than the man.'³¹

This portrayal of San Dwe as being particularly affectionate towards animals can be situated within a wider politics of sympathy. As Hilda Kean and Joanna Bourke have uncovered, having compassionate interactions with animals was a marker of humanitarianism in Britain by the late-nineteenth century, although not a straightforward one. Many forms of cruelty persisted in the face of concerted activism against them. And, the compassion that some animals received was also used rhetorically by some social reformers to draw attention to societal toleration of the suffering experienced by even less fortunate humans. There was something of a 'limited

³⁰ TNA, CRIM 1/446: 'Deposition of Geoffrey Mar Ververs, Superintendent of London Zoo', 4 Sept. 1928.

³¹ TNA, CRIM 1/446: 'Deposition of John Maycock, Watchman and Stoker at London Zoo', 19 Oct. 1928.

economy of sympathy' in operation.³² This played out in particular ways in British colonies in the early-twentieth century. Colonized populations in India, east Africa and China were deemed to be less civilized on the basis of their apparent cruelty towards animals.³³ During this same period, anti-colonial thinkers—including activist Buddhist monks in colonial Burma—placed compassionate relations with animals within their wider ethics, practices and rhetoric.³⁴ Unusually within imperial discourse, the Burmese were portrayed as having overly sympathetic attitudes. This was said to be the result of Buddhism and their belief in reincarnation.³⁵ This excessive sympathy, it was believed

³² Hilda Kean, *Animal Rights: Political and Social Change in Britain since 1800* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998); Joanna Bourke, *What It Means to Be Human: Reflections from 1791 to the Present* (London: Virago, 2011), 93–123.

³³ 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; Shuk-Wah Poon, “Dogs and British Colonialism: The Contested Ban on Eating Dogs in Colonial Hong Kong,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 42, no. 2 (2014): 308–28.

³⁴ Alicia Turner, *Saving Buddhism: The Impermanence of Religion in Colonial Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 91–94; Sandra Swart, “‘It Is As Bad To Be a Black Man’s Animal As It Is To Be a Black Man’: The Politics of Species in Sol Plaatje’s Native Life in South Africa,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 40, no. 4 (2014): 689–705; Aishwary Kumar, “Satyagraha and the Place of the Animal: Gandhi’s Distinctions,” *Social History* 39, no. 3 (2014): 359–81.

³⁵ This was an inaccurate portrayal. As well as response to the perceived threat of colonialism to Buddhist practice, vegetarianism was an ecological practice informed by wider socio-economic contexts. See: Michael W. Charney, “Demographic Growth, Agricultural Expansion, and Livestock in the Lower Chindwin in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” in *A History of Natural Resources in Asia: The*

by colonial officials, led to what the British deemed to be forms of cruelty, since they were apparently disinclined to kill ill or maimed beasts, particularly street dogs.³⁶ In this, the Karen community was differentiated from the wider Burmese population. They were portrayed as ‘wild hunters’ without the excessive compassion for animals but with a greater affinity with the natural world.³⁷ Sympathy in human-animal relationships was terrain upon which the ideas of difference in empire played out.

Burmese elephant drivers, called oozies, held an exemplary place within these contested imperial discourses. Drawing upon experiences of elephant labor in the colony’s well-established and growing timber industry,³⁸ the relationship between a good oozie and their elephant was heavily romanticized in the writings of imperial officials. They mostly tended to emphasize the independent sagacity and dexterity of the elephants themselves by neglecting to mention the oozie, making it appear that the animals worked the timber-yards of their own accord. When their riders were discussed

Wealth of Nature, ed. Greg Bankoff and Peter Boomgaard (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 227–44.

³⁶ National Archives of Myanmar, Yangon, hereafter NAM: 1/15(E) 3939, 1915, file no. 3m-17.

³⁷ For two very different examples from the early twentieth century, the first ethnographic, then second literary, see: Harry Ignatius Marshall, *The Karen People of Burma: A Study in Anthropology and Ethnology* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1922); Arthur Eggar, *The Hatanee: A Tale of Burman Superstition* (London: J. Murray, 1906).

³⁸ For an overview of the growth and scale of this trade, see: Raymond L Bryant, *The Political Ecology of Forestry in Burma, 1824-1994* (London: Hurst, 1997).

it was often said that there was an innate relationship between them.³⁹ Because of their experiential knowledge and affectionate ties, it was believed that they could communicate with these charismatic animals in ways that others, particularly Europeans, could not.⁴⁰ Even officials who derided the work ethic and honesty of oozies acknowledged that their tactile connection with elephants was indispensable and could not be taught by others, only learned through experience.⁴¹ This was an Orientalizing portrayal of a human-animal connection, one perhaps best and most lastingly popularized through Rudyard Kipling's 1893 short story about the fictional young Indian elephant driver, Toomai.⁴² The enduring popularity of this tale led to it being made into the film *Elephant Boy* in 1937. The Empire Marketing Board's advertisement for Burma teak also drew on this romantic imagery in its posters portraying work in the

³⁹ This was especially the case in the nostalgic reminiscences of Europeans in the timber trade, see: J. H. Williams, *Elephant Bill* (London: Hart-Davis, 1950); J. H. Williams, *Bandoola* (London: Rupert Hart-Davies, 1953).

⁴⁰ R. Talbot Kelly, *Burma, Painted and Described* (A. and C. Black, 1905), 86; Sainthill Eardley-Wilmot, *The Life of an Elephant*, (London,: E. Arnold, 1912); J. G. Scott and Geraldine Mitton, *The Life Story of An Elephant* (London: A & C Black, 1930); For more on the racial politics operating in these differentiated sensibilities, see: Jonathan Saha, "Among the Beasts of Burma: Animals and the Politics of Colonial Sensibilities, c.1840-1950," *Journal of Social History* 48, no. 4 (2015): 933–55.

⁴¹ George H. Evans, *Elephants and Their Diseases: A Treatise on Elephants*, 2nd ed. (Rangoon: Superintendent government printing, Burma, 1910).

⁴² Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Book* (Project Gutenberg, 2006), <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/236>.

colony's timber industry.⁴³ Elephants working at Rangoon timber-yards were a very popular scene for postcards. San Dwe was himself integral to some of the public dissemination of this close relationship with elephants. As well as performing with them to audiences in the zoo (before Said Ali took over this role), he was filmed by British Pathé getting Pa Wa, the white elephant, to perform tricks for camera in 1926.⁴⁴ Reporting on the murder, the Daily Mail printed a photograph of San Dwe feeding a baby rhinoceros, a baby goat and a baby elephant.⁴⁵ The testimonies of witnesses, by describing San Dwe as kindly through citing past examples of his affectionate relationships with the zoo's animals, were building on this broader set of sympathetic images that, through their portrayals of human-animal tactility, tacitly reinforced ideas of colonial difference.

The day-to-day routines of the zoo were based on and reified these same discourses of difference, as the trial statements made by the staff brought to light. This was clearest in their repeated references to the non-white staff as 'natives', with the unacknowledged irony that most, if not all of them, were from various overseas colonies. These witnesses' testimonies suggested a distance between the so-called 'native' keepers and the white staff at the zoo. The former lived in the zoo and their

⁴³ TNA, CO 956/534: "Empire Marketing Board: Posters. A Teak Forest in Burma; Artist: Keith Henderson," 1926-1939; TNA, CO 956/696: "Empire Marketing Board: Posters. Timber Stacking; Artist: Ba Nyan," 1926-1939.

⁴⁴ British Pathé Archive, Film ID: 496.20, 'A Real White Elephant', 20 June 1926.

⁴⁵ 'Picture Gallery', Daily Mail, Aug. 27, 1928.

roles were confined to directly handling the animals.⁴⁶ The association made between possessing an intimate affinity with animals and racial other-ness was reinforced through this division of labour. The separation of the white and the ‘native’ staff was also reflected in their social lives. San Dwe was known by some of the zoo employees as ‘Sandy Wee’.⁴⁷ This corruption of his name, apparently affectionate, was a domesticating and diminishing one that worked to infantilise him, and not only in the zoo.⁴⁸ ‘Sandy Wee’ was also how he was more widely known to the public. Newspaper reports commonly referred to him by this version of his name.⁴⁹ And, in the initial transcript made of his second interview, the police officer transcribing the conversation also had this as his name.⁵⁰ It appears that San Dwe was a largely well-liked colleague, was to some extent familiar to the wider public, and was someone who was looked upon with affection prior to the murder. This knowledge of him was limited. He had not made any friendships with his English colleagues. His trip to the music hall on the day of the murder was one of the very few occasions in which he had interacted with the white staff in a social capacity, outside of his weekly attendance at church. The trip itself was specifically intended as an outing for San Dwe and another keeper from Africa, and San

⁴⁶ As well as the court records, something of this arrangement is apparent in the role of mahouts in managing and training elephants, see: Sidebotham, *Round London's Zoo*.

⁴⁷ A recent history also notes this nick-name, although it is taken as straightforwardly “affectionate”. See: J Barrington-Johnson, *Zoo: The Story of London Zoo* (London: Robert Hale, 2005), 90–1.

⁴⁸ The nick-name may also have been a play on his complexion and stature, but this speculative.

⁴⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 28 Aug. 1928; *The Times*, 30 Aug. 1928; *Daily Mail*, 28 Aug. 1928.

⁵⁰ TNA, Mepol 3/1640: ‘Shorthand notes taken by Henry Hayward’, 25 Aug. 1928.

Dwe recalled his invitation as a generous act of kindness, rather than a routine event. In a subtle fashion, without open hostility, San Dwe, and his fellow ‘native’ keepers, were divided from their white colleagues. This was apparent in the generous yet superficial nature of the zoo employees’ evidence on his character. Revealing the law’s complicity with this arrangement, the non-white staff were not questioned. It was only members of the local Baptist community that were close enough to San Dwe to recall, in evidence gathered after the trial, that they had seen a change in his usually polite and easy-going nature in the weeks leading up to the murder.⁵¹

This view of San Dwe as kind, timid and polite is one that also appeared in San Dwe’s own reflections on his character. In a heart-breaking letter that he penned to his parents from his prison whilst he awaited trial, San Dwe considered that he was perhaps too diffident and obedient. He recalled that Said Ali had once told him that if anyone caused him trouble, to tell Ali who would ‘slap his[the culprit’s] face.’ He described Ali as a ‘big man’ who ‘will not put up with nonsense from anyone’. In contrast, he described himself as someone who always put himself ‘beneath other people’ and would ‘never dare to answer anyone boldly’. He ended his letter reminding them of his love of animals, and told them how in prison he missed being among his non-human companions.⁵² San Dwe was no doubt attempting to inform his parents of his situation in a gentle a way as possible, whilst reassuring them of his innocence. At the same time,

⁵¹ TNA, HO 144/16132: File 527852/19.

⁵² TNA, Mepol 3/1640: ‘Translation of a letter, from Karen to English, written by SAN DWE, on 30th August, 1928, at Brixton Prison, and addressed to Naw Aye Ber, Pa Ku Karen High School, Toungoo, Burma, India’, 11 Sept. 1928. Copies of the originals are not preserved.

his letter, much like the comments on his character made by witnesses, chimes with wider colonial and missionary discourses on the Karen character.⁵³ By the 1920s, these ethnographic understandings were feeding back into elite Karen politics.⁵⁴ Dr San Crombie Po, the sole Karen member of the Legislative Council of Burma, emphasized the importance of politeness and disciplined obedience in his book advocating for, and setting out the politics of, loyalist Karen nationalism. However, like San Dwe, he too was concerned with the limits to their toleration of overly obsequious Imperial etiquette.⁵⁵ Whilst San Dwe was not a member of the Karen elite, through his Christianity, literacy and associations with nationalists, he too may have been drawing on these sources in his writing.

San Dwe's version of events is also worth dwelling on since it demonstrates how he used his experiences of interwar London to narrate an explanation that was

⁵³ Donald Mackenzie Smeaton, *The Loyal Karens of Burma* (London: Paul Kegan, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1920), 138–40; Marshall, *The Karen People of Burma: A Study in Anthropology and Ethnology*, 22–9.

⁵⁴ San C. Po's important book on the Karen quotes extensively and at length from colonial authorities in his section on "The Karen Character", see: San C. Po, *Burma and the Karens*, 22–32; For studies on the historical formation of the Karen ethnic identity, see: Ananda Rajah, "A 'Nation of Intent' in Burma: Karen Ethno-Nationalism, Nationalism and Narrations of Nation," *The Pacific Review* 15, no. 4 (2002): 517–37; Jessica Harriden, "'Making a Name for Themselves': Karen Identity and the Politicization of Ethnicity in Burma," *Journal of Burma Studies* 7, no. 1 (2002): 92–102; William Burgess Womack, "Literate Networks and the Production of Sgaw and Pwo Karen Writing in Burma, c.1830-1930" (University of London, 2005).

⁵⁵ San C. Po, *Burma and the Karens*, 86–94.

credible, even if it was deemed inconsistent and ultimately dismissed in court. It is a rare narrative in that it offers a view of London from the perspective of a colonized subject residing within an exemplary imperial exhibit.⁵⁶ The most salient element he included was the wider threat of racist violence. His claim that English men had beaten Said Ali to death was one that, despite its improbability given the evidence in the case, was nonetheless plausible. It may have been particularly believable because of the subtle implication made in his statement, which went unnoticed by the police and the press, that Said Ali had gone to the street following his verbal altercations with the white men who were having sex there. Following the exchange, San Dwe recalled that he fell to sleep, waking briefly to see that Said Ali was no longer in bed, intimating that Ali had slipped down to the street for sex himself.⁵⁷ In the years after the Great War, the so-called ‘threat’ of interracial sex between white women and men of colour was used to explain and justify episodes of racist violence.⁵⁸ After the trial, San Dwe was more

⁵⁶ Histories of zoos have often struggled to uncover the history of the animals’ human companions from various parts of the empire, except for where they were also part of the display. Certainly their perspectives have not been much discussed. See: Nigel Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo* (Baltimore: London: John Hopkins University Press, 2002); Helen Cowie, *Exhibiting Animals in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Empathy, Education, Entertainment* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); uncovering colonized peoples’ discourses around animals remains a challenge for animal history more widely, see: Skabelund, “Animals and Imperialism.”

⁵⁷ TNA, CRIM 1/446: ‘Statement of San Dwe’, 25 Aug. 1928.

⁵⁸ Lucy Bland, “White Women and Men of Colour: Miscegenation Fears in Britain after the Great War,” *Gender & History* 17, no. 1 (2005): 29–61; Kent, *Aftershocks*, 45–55; Many of the riots around this “threat” targeted Arabs and drew on stereotypes underpinning fears of Muslims mistreating English

explicit than in his previously coded description of what was going on in the street outside the zoo. He also mentioned times when Said Ali had brought white women from the city back to their room. This was supported by statements made by witnesses, again after the trial, that claimed Said Ali had an interest in pursuing ‘pretty English girls’, despite having a wife and children in Calcutta.⁵⁹ However, this evidence was no longer being used to support the claim that Said Ali had died at the hands of a group of white men, but to call into question Said Ali’s character.

San Dwe’s pejorative references to public sex reveal the multiple layers of activity and meaning at play in London’s urban landscape. Regents Park, like the other public gardens in the city, was a site where British imperial reach and grandeur could be witnessed and consumed by the metropolitan populace. Empire was projected through the very built environment, not least through the presence of the zoo with its exotic non-human inhabitants originating from around the planet. The park was located just north of the then recently rebuilt Regents Street, where imperial architectural motifs and shop displays showcasing imperial wares and colonial-inspired advertising, vied for visibility and prominence from the pavement.⁶⁰ Yet, as San Dwe’s narrative demonstrates, the

women, see: Humayun Ansari, *The Infidel Within: Muslims in Britain Since 1800* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2004), 94–120.

⁵⁹ TNA, HO 144/16132: File 527852/19.

⁶⁰ Felix Driver and David Gilbert, “Heart of Empire? Landscape, Space and Performance in Imperial London,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 16, no. 1 (1998): 11–28; David Gilbert, “‘London in All Its Glory—or How to Enjoy London’: Guidebook Representations of Imperial London,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 25, no. 3 (1999): 279–97; Erika Rappaport, “Art, Commerce, or

park was also part of London's sexual geography. Many parks were venues for both homo-sex and hetero-sex during the interwar years—as were tow paths—, particularly for lovers meeting in the bustle of the West End. Since the zoo is located within a park, on the further fringe of the West End, and alongside Regents Canal, it may well have been a site for such fleeting intimate encounters. San Dwe's description of public sex, and his reporting of Said Ali's altercation resulting from it, also demonstrates the growing view of such conduct as immoral. Parks in particular served as a rallying point for morality and purity campaigns during the 1920s.⁶¹ As a regular parishioner at the Baptist Chapel in Barking, San Dwe would have been aware of this moral politics. The Baptists, along with other nonconformist Protestant churches, saw a peak in their numbers in the mid-to-late years of the decade, and their influence should not be dismissed. Protestants were having a wider, subtle impact on shaping the content of 'Englishness' as it was being redefined in wake of the Great War, coming to incorporate the puritanical characteristic of restraint.⁶² San Dwe's further elaboration on his original explanation, that under the cloud of his miserable homesickness he allowed himself to be brought into a conspiracy with the mysterious man in a trilby hat, again shows his awareness of London's polyvalent character. His story was one of furtive exchanges and

Empire? The Rebuilding of Regent Street, 1880–1927,” *History Workshop Journal* 53, no. 1 (2002): 94–117.

⁶¹ Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 45, 52–56, 59, 67.

⁶² Matthew Grimley, “The Religion of Englishness: Puritanism, Providentialism, and ‘National Character,’ 1918–1945,” *Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 4 (2007): 884–906.

clandestine meetings, hidden in plain sight. It recognised that the city could be a spectacle, whilst also being shady and sinful.⁶³ Overall, San Dwe's narratives of London sought to elicit sympathy by presenting himself as a vulnerable stranger navigating a threatening and potentially immoral city.

On November 27, the jury were sent to make their decision. The judge who was presiding over the trial, the appropriately named Justice Swift, explained to them that just because evidence was circumstantial, it did not mean that it was inherently insufficient. He pressed upon them that circumstantial evidence could be so strong that it could be considered an almost 'mathematical' proof.⁶⁴ The jury took just fifteen minutes to come to an unanimous verdict. San Dwe was found guilty of murder and he was sentenced to the death penalty. Unbeknownst to the jury, less than twenty-four hours earlier San Dwe had made a full confession to a medical officer in Brixton Prison. The doctor asked San Dwe whether he had ever been sodomized. At this, San Dwe told the medical officer that Said Ali had forced him into sex a week before the murder. He then broke down in tears and admitted having murdered him. Dr Brisby, the medical officer who conducted the examination, felt that this confession should be treated as one given in confidence, but still believed that the court should be made aware of it.⁶⁵ Upon

⁶³ I have been influenced here by the vivid descriptions of tumultuous Soho, not far from the zoo, in Judith Walkowitz, *Nights Out: Life in Cosmopolitan London* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2012), 1–15.

⁶⁴ TNA, HO 144/16132: File 527852.

⁶⁵ TNA, CRIM 1/446: 'Francis Herbert Brisby, Medical Officer, H.M.Prison, Brixton', 26 Nov. 1928.

seeing this evidence, Justice Swift ruled that it should not be heard.⁶⁶ The rape was not mentioned in court, and it was not reported in the newspapers.

San Dwe was transferred to Pentonville Prison pending execution, arranged for December 18. During the weeks that followed his sentencing, as knowledge of the rape spread through private channels, Karen nationalists, Baptists and former colonial officials petitioned the Home Secretary to grant him a pardon. The campaign was a success. Four days before he was due to be hanged, San Dwe's sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.⁶⁷ In defending San Dwe, the arguments of these different groups mobilised sympathy through deploying normative understandings of masculinity and racial difference. Said Ali, whose character had not been discussed in the trial was now scrutinised. He was portrayed as an arrogant, bullying Muslim against whom the meek, Christian nature of San Dwe was contrasted. This was rhetoric that echoed the language surrounding fears of miscegeny associated with the Arab Muslim populations residing in British ports during the interwar years.⁶⁸ Interactions with animals were again deployed to support this characterisation, with Said Ali being reported as killing one of San Dwe's trained pigeons.⁶⁹ However, at the same time as reinforcing these imperial tropes, the claims of Karen loyalist nationalism challenged foundational assumptions

⁶⁶ TNA, HO 144/16132: File 527852.

⁶⁷ TNA, PCOM 8/419: File 68182/10 and File 68182/13.

⁶⁸ See: Ansari, *The Infidel Within*, 94–120.

⁶⁹ TNA, HO 144/16132: File 527852/19.

about the supposed racial differences between the British and their Asian subjects, particularly around masculinity and sexuality.⁷⁰ San Dwe too participated in this campaign, offering an ostensibly more candid account of the events that led to the murder.

San Po Lwin and three other English-educated Karen men calling themselves the ‘Loyal Karen People of Burma in England’, sent a petition on December 8 urging that San Dwe be shown mercy. The petition played upon supposed differences between the British and the Karen peoples. It also attempted to differentiate themselves, as Karen, from Indian Muslims. They argued that the innate pride of the ‘primitive Karen race’ had been the cause of San Dwe’s failure to disclose the fact that Said Ali had raped him. In the petition they also used the supposed particularity of Karen beliefs to show that Said Ali’s other provocations were felt more acutely by San Dwe. Said Ali’s habit of swearing at San Dwe, they argued, was made worse by the ‘very objectionable’ nature of foul language in Burma. Claims that Said Ali committed adultery with a white woman on San Dwe’s bed and blankets were represented as being especially unpleasant

⁷⁰ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 14–34; 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; Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The “Manly Englishman” and the “Effeminate Bengali” in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); and, as Sinha has shown in her later work, these notions were also being challenged in the interwar period in colonial Asia itself, see: 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.

to San Dwe because it was ‘considered to be an insult by the eastern people and the Karen people’. And they added that his sensitivity to Said Ali’s insults were heightened because his ‘Oriental physique’ was weakened by the British weather.⁷¹ To support their claims that these actions were more hurtful towards San Dwe because of his ethnicity, and to demonstrate the historical loyalty of the Karen, they forwarded four books on the Karen. These included Karen nationalist Dr San Crombie Po’s *Burma and the Karen*, the missionary Harry Marshall’s ethnographic study of a number of Karen ethnic groups, and colonial official Donald Smeaton’s *The Loyal Karen of Burma*. During the interwar years these texts were in the process of becoming canonized as authoritative sources on Karen ethnic identity by Karen elites themselves in their loyalist-nationalist project.⁷² Through their petition, the group circulated colonial knowledge in the imperial metropole, but so-doing they did not present it as governmental knowledge, but as self-knowledge. As they circulated, the texts were being re-articulated as evidence of a distinctive Karen selfhood.⁷³

⁷¹ TNA, HO 144/16132: File 527852/22.

⁷² Rajah, “A ‘nation of Intent’ in Burma”; Harriden, “‘Making a Name for Themselves,’” 92–102.

⁷³ As David Scott argues, colonial knowledge reshaped the underlying “political rationalities” of empire. See: David Scott, “Colonial Governmentality,” *Social Text* 43 (1995): 191–220; and on the appropriation of colonial knowledge and its repurposing for nationalist campaigns, see: David Ludden, “Orientalist Empiricism: Transformations of Colonial Knowledge,” in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, ed. Carol Appadurai Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 250–78.

As well as re-articulating wider colonial and missionary discourses of difference, the Karen nationalists used their Christianity to engender British sympathy for San Dwe.⁷⁴ They drew attention to claims that Said Ali had forced San Dwe to salaam to him, and to worship him. In this they emphasized Ali's faith in Islam. They reinforced their positive portrayal of San Dwe through their negative depiction of Said Ali, writing that the 'deceased was a big bully of 40 and was a Mohammedan and Sandwe is a quiet and modest Christian boy of 22.'⁷⁵ As Smeaton and San Crombie Po's books both suggest, practices of showing obeisance to superiors were a point of tension for Karen elites, particularly in their interactions with government officials. The low, full-body bow, called the shikho, that was commonly used in such encounters in colonial Burma, was deemed by some Karen to be an action too close to the bodily comportment of Christian prayer for comfort.⁷⁶ British colonial officials expected this gesture from their Burmese staff and, although there was apparently some awareness that it was offensive to Karen officials, often they failed to distinguish between different ethno-national groups in demanding it.⁷⁷ San Crombie Po notes that the issue had become such a sensitive one among the Karen, that attempts had been made to develop

⁷⁴ For more on the emergence and tensions of missionary views of the colonized, see: Esme Cleall, *Missionary Discourses of Difference: Negotiating Otherness in the British Empire, 1840-1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

⁷⁵ TNA, HO 144/16132: File 527852/22.

⁷⁶ San C. Po, *Burma and the Karens*, 86; Smeaton, *The Loyal Karens of Burma*, 145–6.

⁷⁷ Similar concerns about the shikho, and other aspects of etiquette were also controversial for Burmese Buddhists, see: Turner, *Saving Buddhism*, 110–135.

a distinctive national costume so that British officials could immediately recognize them and exempt them from this greeting. He then went on, in the appendix to his book, to outline alternative formal and polite ways to respectfully address superiors; etiquette that he encourages the Karen to adopt.⁷⁸ In the petition it was claimed that San Dwe's 'maniacal' devotedness to his Christian faith led to Said Ali's demands to be received with a shikho destabilizing his mental state.⁷⁹ In San Dwe's own statement, attached to a different petition, being forced to shikho and worship Said Ali also features prominently.⁸⁰

For these Karen nationalist petitioners, San Dwe's predicament could almost have been an allegory of their wider political predicament. San Dwe was loyal to his employers, but abused by a bullying, more powerful, Asian neighbour. His obedience and discipline were pushed to the limit. In the context of the interwar years in Burma, this loyalism was more than rhetorical. In the widespread rebellion that engulfed the colony in 1930—the biggest revolt to hit British India since 1857—groups of Karen people were levied by the state and British firms to protect their European staff and interests.⁸¹ Whilst the rebellion can not be considered as a straightforward expression of Burmese nationalism, the context for it was one of increasing anti-colonial agitation in

⁷⁸ San C. Po, *Burma and the Karens*, 86–92.

⁷⁹ TNA, HO 144/16132: File 527852/22.

⁸⁰ TNA, HO 144/16132: File 527852/19.

⁸¹ LMA: Standard Bank Collection, CLC/B/207/MS40228/001: H.F.Burke to Phillips, 3 July 1931; Report on the Rebellion in Burma up to 3rd May, 1931 (London: India Office, 1931).

both rural and urban areas.⁸² Loyalist Karen leaders were attempting to negotiate this turbulent political climate in ways that mirrored the strategies of the anti-colonial nationalists themselves. The networks that some of these emerging anti-colonial nationalist activists used linked Burmese students in London to sympathetic radicals from Britain, Asia, and beyond.⁸³ San Po Lwin's mobilisation of Karen students in the city reveals a similar network for loyalist politics, one that sought out British sympathy not only for San Dwe but also for their larger cause.

The petition puts greatest emphasis on the rape as the main mitigating factor for San Dwe's murderous actions. In this section of the petition, the writers express their utter condemnation of homosexual sex, citing and endorsing both the biblical punishments for sodomy and the penalties sanctioned under English law for 'unnatural offenses' to show their familiarity and agreement with British attitudes. They also claimed that sodomy is 'unknown among Karen people.' Here the tension between their claims to be different from the British, and their claims to be similar to the British, were most pronounced. In the margins of the petition, the Home Secretary, or a member of his staff, expressed their doubts in an annotated comment. Referencing a passage from

⁸² See: Patricia M Herbert, *The Hsaya San Rebellion, 1930-1932, Reappraised* (Melbourne, Australia: Monash University, 1982); Ian Brown, *A Colonial Economy in Crisis: Burma's Rice Delta and the World Depression of the 1930s*, RoutledgeCurzon Studies in the Modern History of Asia 28 (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005); Maitrii Aung-Thwin, *The Return of the Galon King: History, Law, and Rebellion in Colonial Burma* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011).

⁸³ Su Lin Lewis, *Cities in Motion: Urban Life and Cosmopolitanism in Southeast Asia, 1920-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Forthcoming) especially chapter five, that covers the movements of Burmese students and the networks linking Rangoon to the world.

Marshall's *The Karen People of Burma*, one of the books that had been forwarded with the petition, the writer has scrawled, 'It is not so common as among Burmese—but it is certainly not unknown!'⁸⁴ Homosexuality was a contested marker of colonial difference within the petition. San Po Lwin was claiming to be similar to the British through the non-existence of homosexual practices. The British reader was maintaining their difference on the basis of its presence.⁸⁵ The annotated comment was also symptomatic of an amorphous imperial curiosity regarding homosexual practices among Asians. The ambivalence of this imperial curiosity has left the colonial archive largely absent of empirical evidence, but it nevertheless generated general assumptions that homosexual practices were present outside of the written record. Anjali Arondekar has shown how this interplay of absence and presence inculcated a desire to know about sexuality during the colonial period (as well as outlining how it continues to inform historians' approaches to the colonial archive).⁸⁶ This imperial desire to find evidence of Asian homosexuality had a great bearing on the course of San Dwe's case. Dr Brisby, the medical officer at Brixton Prison to whom San Dwe confessed, stated in his evidence

⁸⁴ TNA, HO 144/16132: File 527852/22.

⁸⁵ For more on the racial othering of homosexuality, see: Sean Brady, "Homosexuality: European and Colonial Encounters," in *A Cultural History of Sexuality in the Age of Empire*, ed. Chiara Beccalossi and Ivan Crozier, *A Cultural History of Sexuality* 5 (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2011), 48–9; Ross Forman, "Race and Empire," in *Modern History of Sexuality*, ed. H. G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook, *Palgrave Advances* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 112–3.

⁸⁶ Anjali Arondekar, "Without a Trace: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14, no. 1/2 (2005): 10–27.

that he had only examined San Dwe to confirm his belief that sodomy was widely practiced among the Burmese.⁸⁷

Discussions of sodomy were inseparable from representations of masculinity.⁸⁸ For instance, the referenced passage from Marshall's book describes hetero-normative relationships between two men, one performing roles gendered female, with the partners living as married couples.⁸⁹ Marshall was attempting to place homosexuality within Karen gender norms, as he saw them. The petition of San Po Lwin sought to disavow the existence of any such practices among the Karen and at the same time portray Said Ali's assault on San Dwe, not primarily as an act of sexual violence, but as an aberration of masculinity. In this it draws on the same normative understandings of masculinity as the petition of San Dwe's defence solicitor, Mr Freke-Palmer. Enclosed with this second petition were the notarised statements of several further witnesses in the case, including a new statement by San Dwe. This evidence focussed upon Said Ali's acts of adultery and miscegenation. It was also claimed that Said Ali had threatened to use San Dwe 'like a woman'.⁹⁰ These portrayals of Ali's seeming lack of control over his hyper-masculine sexual desire played into a wider belief that unrestrained sexuality was an attribute of racial inferiority.⁹¹ It was also part of an

⁸⁷ TNA, CRIM 1/446: 'Francis Herbert Brisby, Medical Officer, H.M.Prison, Brixton', 26 Nov. 1928.

⁸⁸ Brady, "Homosexuality: European and Colonial Encounters," 50–1.

⁸⁹ Marshall, *The Karen People of Burma: A Study in Anthropology and Ethnology*, 21.

⁹⁰ TNA, HO 144/16132: File 527852/19.

⁹¹ Louise A. Jackson, "Sex, Religion, and the Law: The Regulation of Sexual Behaviours, 1820-1920," in *A Cultural History of Sexuality in the Age of Empire*, ed. Chiara Beccalossi and Ivan Crozier, A Cultural

emerging narrative of threat that construed homo-sex as a practice performed by men of a predatory character.⁹²

At the same time, it is clear that one of the primary reasons for the successful eliciting of sympathy in the campaign for a pardon, was that the rape was read as a crime against masculinity. The Home Secretary was given a list of ‘recent cases of murder, by men of good character, of worthless persons’ by his staff, in order to provide precedents for San Dwe’s reprieve. In thirteen of the fifteen cases listed, a man had murdered a woman who had allegedly wronged him either by committing adultery, being an alcoholic, or through blackmail. Of the remaining two cases, in one the victim was a landlord who had slept with the accused’s wife, and in the other the victim was a man who had attempted to ‘commit indecency’ with his male murderer. San Dwe’s name was added to this list.⁹³ It was not rape per se that was being given as a reason for a pardon, but specifically the rape of a man. Concern over the fragility of masculinity implied by this list of cases resonates with concerns expressed in the wider imperial politics of the time. Gender relations were a key battle ground upon which imperialist and nationalist claims to legitimacy were contested in late-colonial British India. The

History of Sexuality 5 (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2011), 85; Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England Since 1830*, 2nd ed (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2000), 195–6; these associations between race, sexuality and masculinity are also explored in, Shruti Kapila, “Masculinity and Madness: Princely Personhood and Colonial Sciences of the Mind in Western India 1871-1940,” *Past and Present* 187, no. 1 (2005): 121–56.

⁹² Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 227–232.

⁹³ TNA, HO 144/16132: File 527852/28.

alleged brutality of Indian men's treatment of their female relatives, popularised in Katherine Mayo's polemical *Mother India*, was used in attempts to undermine Indian nationalism by questioning Indian masculinity. As Mrinalini Sinha has shown, this very rhetoric was then challenged by Indian nationalist feminists who pushed gender reforms further than the colonial state was willing to go.⁹⁴ In Burma, nationalists' concerns over what they deemed the licentious behaviour of young women, and particularly their mixing with Indian men, reveals the perception that masculinity was under threat in the colony. This was a threat that was thought to undermine the future of the Bama race, the Buddhist religion and the Burmese nation.⁹⁵ The ways in which San Dwe's case mobilised sympathy exposes the shared hetero-normative basis for these concerns over masculinity and the associated threat to the viability of nationhood.

San Dwe too navigated these discourses through his own writings, particularly those pertaining to religion and race. In his statement, enclosed with his defence solicitor's petition, he described his life with Said Ali in the months that led up to the murder, and situated this time in a fuller biographical account. His account creates a picture of a claustrophobic and hostile atmosphere festering in the small flat above the tapir house. San Dwe pointed to their religious differences as the main cause of tension. Said Ali would apparently become angry with San Dwe when the latter cooked bacon, or cooked with lard. San Dwe, for his part, was upset by Said Ali turning the electric

⁹⁴ Mrinalini Sinha, "Refashioning Mother India: Feminism and Nationalism in Late-Colonial India," *Feminist Studies* 26, no. 3 (2000): 623–44.

⁹⁵ Chie Ikeya, *Refiguring Women, Colonialism, and Modernity in Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011) see especially chapters five and six.

lights off whilst he was reading his bible. Overall, San Dwe's account portrays Said Ali as a powerful, self-possessed and intelligent man, who was capable of bursts of violence and cruelty. Said Ali spoke Burmese, and it was in this language that they conversed, and in this language that Ali would swear and insult San Dwe. One of the English zoo-keepers testified that Said Ali could speak many of the 'native' keepers' languages and that he would use his linguistic talents to order them to perform menial tasks for him.⁹⁶ From San Dwe's account, it appears that he was effectively Ali's servant. Coupled with his demands that San Dwe shikho to him, this description of his actions makes Said Ali appear in the text as a man painfully aware of the liminality of his social status. His labour was more valued than the other 'native' keepers,⁹⁷ but he was still beneath the zoo's white employees. San Dwe stated that Said Ali had disliked the English, and that Ali had boasted that 'Even the Vice President of the Zoo respect me and a small boy like you must respect me.'⁹⁸ Hierarchies of race were evidently at play in the zoo, and the tensions arising from them emerge in San Dwe's writings as he sought sympathy for his fight to avoid the gallows.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ TNA, HO 144/16132: File 527852/19.

⁹⁷ Mepo 3/1640: "Police Statement of John William Millbourne, Elephant Keeper", 25 Aug. 1928; "Police Statement of Geoffrey Marr Vevers, Superintendent of Zoo", 29 Aug. 1928; Sidebotham, *Round London's Zoo*, 187–9; L. H. Brightwell, *The Zoo Story* (London: Museum Press, 1952), 204.

⁹⁸ TNA, HO 144/16132: File 527852/19.

⁹⁹ In his letter to his parents, San Dwe mentions the respect and authority that Said Ali held among the English in the Zoo: TNA, Mepo 3/1640: 'Translation of a letter, from Karen to English, written by SAN

Unsurprisingly, animals feature throughout San Dwe's narratives, both materially and figuratively. Firstly, they appear as real creatures with whom he worked and developed companionship. As we have seen, during the spell in which he attempted to avoid living with Said Ali, San Dwe spent his nights with his baby elephant Chang,¹⁰⁰ and witnesses often reported his affectionate ties with the elephants. It was not only in San Dwe's letters home that he remarked on his feelings of loss at being separated from animals, but in his later petitions for clemency sent from prison.¹⁰¹ These may have been relationships that ran deeper than any strategic attempt to elicit sympathy. His interactions with animals were perhaps akin to the 'significant otherness' of companion species discussed by Donna Haraway. As she shows, a person's sense of self can interdependently develop through relationships with animal partners.¹⁰² At the same time, animals also appear in his texts as a category of beings apart from humans. For San Dwe, as much as it has been for celebrated philosophers, 'the animal' was a discursive Other for defining, and denying, what counts as human.¹⁰³ In places, this

DWE, on 30th August, 1928, at Brixton Prison, and addressed to Naw Aye Ber, Pa Ku Karen High School, Toungoo, Burma, India', 11 Sept. 1928.

¹⁰⁰ TNA, CRIM 1/446: 'Deposition of John Maycock, watchman and stoker at London Zoo', 19 Oct. 1928; HO 144/16132: File 527852/19.

¹⁰¹ TNA, Mepol 3/1640: 'Translation of a letter', 11 Sept. 1929; HO 144/16132: File 527852/31.

¹⁰² Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

¹⁰³ Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 2 (2002): 369–418; Bourke, *What It Means to Be Human*; Erica Fudge, "A Left-Handed

appears through his reporting of Said Ali's speech. Watching the English men and women having sex in the street, Ali described them as animals. In a dialogue with San Dwe about his experiences at his church, Ali apparently remarked on San Dwe's self-confessed inability to understand the service, by stating that he was 'like a dog'. These passages reveal a shared understanding of animals as instinctual and imitative. This fluid divide between the animal and the human is most powerful in San Dwe's description of the murder itself: 'I did not think of anything. When I got back to the room I did not see Sayaid Ali but an animal or beast on the bed. I shut my eyes and struck. I do not know how many blows I struck.'¹⁰⁴ The consequences of the slippage between human and animal could be profound.

Along with San Dwe's statement, Mr Freke-Palmer enclosed statements from San Dwe's fellow worshipers at the Barking Baptist Church, former colonial officials and white zoo staff, all of whom reinforced the overarching story of Said Ali's abuse and San Dwe's good character. Located within this context, the petition of the 'Loyal Karen People of Burma' and the testimony of San Dwe contributed to a network of sympathetic parties seeking a reprieve. All implicitly relied upon normative understandings of race and religion to support San Dwe's cause. Within this network, specific colonial ethnographic knowledge about the Karen was circulated. Some writers, such as a former Deputy Commissioner in Burma, Bryan Ward Perkins, espoused transparently colonial attitudes. Perkins wrote that without knowledge derived from

Blow: Writing the History of Animals," in *Representing Animals*, ed. Nigel Rothfels (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 3–18.

¹⁰⁴ TNA, HO 144/16132: File 527852/19.

direct experience of the ‘Hill Karens’, San Dwe’s behaviour was ‘incomprehensible’.¹⁰⁵ But a close reading of the texts reveals deeper tensions and greater complexity. The differences between colonizer and colonized were both confirmed and subtly contested through these petitions. Within them we can see elite Karen nationalists in London attempting to fashion a loyalist politics. We can also see San Dwe himself attempting to reconstruct and understand the crime that he committed, building on the discursive resources available to him. And it is not only Karen selfhood that we can see in flux through San Dwe’s case. We also get a glimpse into different attitudes to sex in interwar Britain. We have Baptists condemning Said Ali’s miscegeny and adultery, and an account of group sex on the path that ran between Regent’s Canal and London Zoo. Notions of race, masculinity and sexuality were being iterated and altered in these documents revealing a hetero-normative, Protestant and loyalist politics of sympathy.

The sympathetic network around San Dwe continued to function and expand whilst he served his prison sentence. Although he did not have regular visitors, individuals from local Christian and educational groups in Kent—where he was confined—brought him books, sent him letters, and petitioned on his behalf.¹⁰⁶ With their aid San Dwe learnt new skills, such as playing the mandolin, and after a couple of years he became a tinsmith, an occupation he hoped would make him useful for

¹⁰⁵ Perkins argued that as a ‘Hill Karen’, San Dwe might have been influenced by the movie that he saw at the musical hall, or by the death of the white elephant, reinforcing notions of the Karen as childlike. He also wrote that he could gain further information of the psychology of the Karen from past superintendents of Rangoon Lunatic Asylum. *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ TNA, PCOM 8/419: File 68182.

improving the lot of the Karen people. His letters suggest that his experiences of Britain, first from inside the zoo and then from inside prisons, had inculcated in him a concern about what he saw as the comparative underdevelopment of the colony, and of the Karen in particular.¹⁰⁷ After two years in prison, San Dwe joined the Salvation Army. Thereafter he petitioned to be transferred to the Andaman Islands, where he hoped he would be able to help with timber extraction as an oozie.¹⁰⁸ The Salvation Army was already operating on the penal colony attempting to discipline and ‘save’ criminal tribes, and the regime on the islands had become more liberal.¹⁰⁹ He stated in his petitions that he desired to be back among wildlife, in a more familiar climate. Although this petition was declined, a connection with the Prison Commissioner Alexander Paterson led to San Dwe’s eventual release on licence, and his return to Burma. Paterson had been sent to the colony in the mid-1920s to investigate its faltering penal system, and he made the unorthodox suggestion that all long-term prison sentences should be discontinued. He argued that because of the supposedly impulsive nature of Burmese crimes, lengthy spells of imprisonment had little effect in reforming

¹⁰⁷ TNA, PCOM 8/419: File 68182/28.

¹⁰⁸ TNA, PCOM 8/419: File 68182/24.

¹⁰⁹ Rachel J. Tolen, “Colonizing and Transforming the Criminal Tribesman: The Salvation Army in British India,” *American Ethnologist* 18, no. 1 (1991): 106–25; Taylor C. Sherman, “From Hell to Paradise? Voluntary Transfer of Convicts to the Andaman Islands, 1921–1940,” *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 2 (2009): 367–88.

the criminal.¹¹⁰ His radical recommendation that there should be a blanket two-year maximum sentence was rejected, but these ideas may have had an influence on how he dealt with San Dwe's case. In 1932, San Dwe was released. As a gesture of gratitude, he posted Paterson a silver cigarette lighter with a letter of thanks. This token, that because of the rules of the prison service Paterson could not accept, was a sign of the continuing sympathy that San Dwe's case elicited years after the murder.¹¹¹

In a letter to Gladys Driver, a parishioner of the Baptist Chapel in Barking, written a week before he was due to be hanged, San Dwe expressed his remorse at murdering Said Ali. He wrote, 'today the young Karen killed the big and strong Indian in the city of London.' This simple statement encapsulated the imperial drama of his circumstances. He was situating himself geographically at the centre of the British Empire and within a specific power relationship, one that resonated with the wider concerns of Karen nationalism. He was also trying to come to terms with the magnitude of his sinful act. Reflecting on his earnest, devote life before his crime, he confessed, 'I think I am too good till I am too bad.' He told her that whilst in prison he had been studying chapter thirteen of Corinthians with his minister, a passage in which Paul discusses the nature of Christian love and the importance of self-knowledge. He believed that he now understood its meanings better than he had when he first heard it during a sermon in the East End. San Dwe was trying to know himself, not 'through a

¹¹⁰ Ian Brown, "A Commissioner Calls: Alexander Paterson and Colonial Burma's Prisons," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 38, no. 2 (2007): 293–308.

¹¹¹ TNA, PCOM 8/419: File 68182/28.

glass, darkly', but as fully as possible. To understand the 'few minutes' in which he became 'the worst man in the world.'¹¹²

Just as San Dwe attempted to do in this letter, Said Ali's murder should be situated within a wider historical context. The case was imbricated in discourses and networks that were in operation across the British Empire. In the resulting Home Office files concepts of race, animality and masculinity were iterated and subtly reshaped by actors in both Britain and Burma in the aftermath of the First World War. Homosexual sex had a problematic place within these competing claims. As well as these aspects of the history of imperial ideologies, the surviving sources reveal the social connections that existed between actors located in far-flung places. These connections linked a missionary school in Toungoo to a Baptist Church in Barking, and loyal Karen nationalists to London Zoo. People, animals and knowledge circulated through these networks. Yet, despite being connected to these networks that spread across the Empire, for the most part San Dwe was not a freely mobile agent. Instead, he was mostly located in exemplary sites of confinement: first the zoo, and then the prison. Moreover, despite his case playing out in London, the normative discourses being mobilised and contested through it were those which historians usually deem to be foundational to colonial contexts.¹¹³ As such, San Dwe's case inspires reflection on imperial geographies.

¹¹² TNA, HO 144/16132: File 527852/25.

¹¹³ Taking a wide definition of colonial societies: Ann Laura Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties : The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies," *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (2001): 829–65.

Over the last two decades the old, staid centre-periphery model has given way to a proliferation of new ways of mapping the spatial arrangements of empire. Networks and webs, and circulations and flows, are now the terms in currency with imperial historians.¹¹⁴ But, as Antoinette Burton and Tony Ballantyne have argued, the implicit focus on mobility within these studies can unintentionally reify colonized spaces as static, along with the societies inhabiting them. To counter this, they frame the intimate relationships and places engendered by imperialism as ‘trans-local’, showing through their discussion the ways in which intimacy made possible (and limited) mobility and imperial aspirations to be able to move uninhibited across global space.¹¹⁵ San Dwe’s case bears the hallmarks of the tensions of these trans-local intimacies—after all, at its heart, it is a case about the strains and violence of the asymmetrical domestic power

¹¹⁴ For some early approaches, see: Alan Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001); David Lambert and Alan Lester, eds., *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial Career in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); John Darwin has made networks and flows into a general theory of empires in global history *John Darwin, After Tamerlane: The Global History of Empire since 1405* (London: Allen Lane, 2007); And this has inspired greater overlap between imperial and global histories, see: Martin Thomas and Andrew Thompson, “Empire and Globalisation: From ‘High Imperialism’ to Decolonisation,” *The International History Review* 36, no. 1 (2013): 142–70; For an engaged critique of these trends, see: Simon J. Potter and Jonathan Saha, “Global History, Imperial History and Connected Histories of Empire,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 16, no. 1 (2015): np.

¹¹⁵ Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette M Burton, “Introduction: The Politics of Intimacy in an Age of Empire,” in *Moving Subjects: Gender, Mobility, and Intimacy in an Age of Global Empire*, ed. Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette M. Burton (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 1–28.

relations that supported an imperial institution—but it is a case set in central London. Whatever residual heuristic or descriptive use the terms ‘metropole’ and ‘periphery’ retain, it is clear that they have little analytical utility for the case at hand. Instead, trans-locality should be conceived of as a relational concept, one as potentially applicable to London as much as it was Toungoo.¹¹⁶ San Dwe’s case necessitates that historians treat the Empire as a single analytic framework; a position that has long been advocated by New Imperial historians.¹¹⁷ But this is an approach the utility of which is easier to assert than it is to apply. It is a methodological commitment requiring engagement with a range of historiographic debates, multiple disciplinary subfields, and seemingly disparate geographical sites. Defining the limits to what might reasonably be considered to be ‘relevant’ historical connections or comparisons has never been more challenging, particularly as distinctions between the ‘imperial’ and the ‘global’ are increasingly elided.¹¹⁸ To this end, interrogating the politics of sympathy may be useful. By mapping the affective ties and excavating the imperial discourses at work in archives, historians can identify with more precision where trans-local relationships of colonialism operated

¹¹⁶ This takes further the point made by Felix Driver and David Gilbert that London might be better considered one of the “limbs” of empire, rather than its heart. See: Driver and Gilbert, “Heart of Empire?”

¹¹⁷ Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1–56; Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, eds., *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹¹⁸ Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties”; Antoinette Burton, “Not Even Remotely Global? Method and Scale in World History,” *History Workshop Journal* 64, no. 1 (2007): 323–28.

in the past, as well as which imperial sites and actors were connected in a particular event. Reading ‘along the archival grain’ to historicise sympathy helps to define the contingent shape, texture and extent of the imperial context.

The disparate places, actors and intersectional discourses that are apparent in the case files concerning San Dwe were brought together by a politics of sympathy that was particular to the late-colonial moment. Central to this politics was loyalism.¹¹⁹ This was a characteristic of sympathetic ties during the interwar years that comes into relief when read against the anxieties of British anti-imperial imperialists when they gestured towards their solidarity with anti-colonial nationalist movements, attempting to reach across the racial divide. In his 1936 essay, ‘Shooting an Elephant’, that was published in the anti-fascist periodical *New Writing*, George Orwell wrote of these anxieties. He detailed his internal conflict as a colonial policeman. He secretly supported the Burmese nationalists’ campaign but, in the atmosphere of constant, petty animosity, much of it directed towards him as a representative of the state, he simultaneously hated them—harbouring a desire to ‘drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest’s guts.’ He explained how, under the pressure of an expectant Burmese audience, he unwillingly performed the role of a white imperial despot. So as not to be laughed at by the crowd surrounding him, he shot the elephant that had rampaged through the town of Moulmein, trampling to death what he coldly referred to as a ‘black Dravidian coolie’. Doing so, he suppressed his immediate distaste at killing the animal, brought on by its ‘grandmotherly air’.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ There is a longer link between loyalism and sympathy that could be further explored, see: Fairclough, *The Romantic Crowd*, 227.

¹²⁰ George Orwell, ‘Shooting an Elephant’, *New Writing*, 2, Autumn 1936.

Imperial discourses on masculinity and race, as well as perceptions of animals, are deployed, affirmed and contested in Orwell's account. It is a text ridden with ambivalence. For Ranajit Guha, the essay was an acknowledgment of an unresolved anxiety lying at the heart of imperialism: the irreconcilable tension between imperialists' liberal ideology and their despotic rule.¹²¹ Set against San Dwe's case, the essay probes some of the contours of late-colonial sympathy. Orwell was exploring the limits of the colonizers' ability to sympathise with the nationalist cause, with the crushed body of an Indian labourer, with an elephant in its painful, protracted death.

Orwell was not the only one-time imperial official to test the boundaries of late-colonial sympathy during the interwar years. In 1922 the retired Indian Civil Servant who had spent his celebrated career in the Burma Commission, Bernard Houghton, deployed Freudian psychoanalysis to critique the unconscious 'mind of the Indian Government'. In a tract written in England and published in India, he argued that human behaviour most closely resembled that of pack or herd animals. People were like wild dogs or cattle. They too came together in fear and aggression as a group against a common enemy. Directly comparing the unreasoned, unjust 'passion and welter of blood' as nations fought in the First World War to the repressive attitude of the imperial government towards Burmese nationalism, he argued both revealed signs of collective 'paranoia or delusional insanity.' For Houghton the barrier stopping colonizers being able to sympathise with, or behave justly to, the colonized was a psychological one. It was the 'war-mind of Simla'; the group mentality of Europeans in the Empire.¹²² The

¹²¹ Guha, "Not at Home in Empire."

¹²² Bernard Houghton, *The Mind of the Indian Government* (Madras: Ganesh and Co, 1922).

trauma of the war and the uneven popularisation of psychoanalytic concepts across the empire enabled Houghton to voice his disillusionment into a direct attack on British imperialism.¹²³ Like Orwell, he emphasized the defensive and aggressive dynamics of the colonisers' psychology, aspects of a mentality that chime with those that commentators today refer to as 'white fragility'.¹²⁴ These writings sought to expose the fault-lines of late-colonial sympathy and they reflect the tensions that emerged as rising nationalism began to challenge imperial authority.

Reading the case files on Said Ali's murder in the UK national archives is an affecting experience. It would be hard to remain unmoved by the events detailed in the Home Office records. Difficult to avoid being affected by the disclosure of the rape and the brutality of the murder. Sadness clings to San Dwe's tragic letters to supporters and family in Britain and Burma. The relief expressed when he was granted a last-minute reprieve is palpable in the texts. The emotional power of his case has not gone, and it

¹²³ For some studies of emergence and development of psychoanalysis in imperial contexts, see: Erik Linstrum, "The Politics of Psychology in the British Empire, 1898–1960," *Past & Present* 215, no. 1 (2012): 195–233; Warwick Anderson, "The Trespass Speaks: White Masculinity and Colonial Breakdown," *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (December 1997): 1343; Shruti Kapila, "The 'Godless' Freud and His Indian Friends: An Indian Agenda for Psychoanalysis," in *Psychiatry and Empire*, ed. Sloan Mahone and Megan Vaughan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 124–52; Jacqueline Rose, "Freud in the 'Tropics,'" *History Workshop Journal*, no. 47 (April 1, 1999): 49–67.

¹²⁴ For an introduction to the term, see: Robin DiAngelo, "White Fragility," *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 3, no. 3 (2011): 54–70.

demands acknowledgement.¹²⁵ The narrative structure of this essay has sought to convey the affective traces of the case. But the reasons for his emergence as a sympathetic figure in the archive must also be historicised and analysed. There was a politics to the sympathy that he received, a politics entangled in imperial discourses and networks. It was a conservative, hetero-normative, loyalist politics that reinforced racial boundaries and gender stereotypes more than it transgressed them. His case exposes some of the affective colonial architecture informing who could feel for whom in interwar Britain.

¹²⁵ I have attempted in this article to convey something of the affecting nature the case in this article and to avoid the “the ‘curiously detached’ feel... [of] many cultural histories.” See: Roper, “Slipping Out of View,” 61–62.