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Abstract

Drawing on interviews with curators of Scotland’s military museums and fieldwork ethnographies, this article explores how *the Scottish Soldier* is enacted through curation and how, through artefacts and stories, curators (re)produce the Scottish Soldier within and through their museums’ spaces. This article identifies three intertwining curatorial practices: (a) Production of a Scottish warrior ‘dreamscape’ through a dual technique of displaying symbolic representations of Scots-as-warriors while simultaneously reframing the controversies of Scotland’s contribution to British colonial wars and recent conflicts; (b) Construction of classed, raced, and gendered hierarchies through the curation of war-informing artefacts (uniforms, medals, and weaponry) - all of which sustain the dominance of warrior-like masculinity deployed in the service of the British state; and (c) Humanization of soldiers via the disruption of stereotypical warrior codes and the making visible of personalised and locally based war stories working towards decontextualisation and sentimentalisation of war. We argue that these curatorial practices enable the reproduction of a sacrificial Scottish Soldier and through this process they assist in the normalisation of Britain’s wars.

Key words: Curation, Scotland, Warrior, Military, Museums

Introduction

In Britain, there are over 140 military museums, yet Britain's prolific military heritage is often seen as a 'niche heritage industry' populated by military history enthusiasts (The Army Museums 2018). Truth be told, we came to this projectⁱ with similar assumptions. However, our research revealed the critical role of military museums in the meaning-making of Britain's wars.

Since the late-2000s, a set of government initiatives worked towards improving the public image of the British Armed Forces after controversies of British military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan via cultural, educational and policy means (Kelly 2012; Ingham 2014; Basham 2016b; Dixon 2018). The most notable practices included the introduction of Armed Forces Day, home coming parades for British troops, large-scale commemoration events, and military ethos initiatives in British schools. Although the majority of military museums in Britain are not directly linked to active military structures, nor do they currently receive funding from the Ministry of Defence (MoD), the MoD positions museums as key institutions which should 'preserve military heritage [while] acting as the bridge between communities and the Army' (Farmer 2017; MoD 2017, 26-27).ⁱⁱ This policy highlights the 'inherent ambivalence of "cultural" and/or "military" identity of military museums' which are placed in-between the military and civilian worlds (Daugbjerg 2017, 54). Considering that Scottish military museums attract thousands of domestic and international visitors, organise numerous programmes for local communities across Scotland, and engage at least 9,000 Scottish children on an annual basis, in this article we explore how museums participate in the (re)production of a sacrificial Scottish Soldier and through this process assist in the normalisation of Britain's wars.

Our approach to the curation of military museums draws on interdisciplinary literature from International Relations (IR), the sub-discipline of Critical Military Studies (CMS) as well as Scottish politics and critical museology literature. Although critical scholars identify museums as cultural institutions which are involved in the production of power/knowledge hierarchies through ordering and reordering of artefacts and stories (Gray 2011; Longair 2015), until recently, British military-themed museums 'have received virtually no critical attention' (Malvern 2000, 178). Moreover, during the last two decades, scholarly attention focused on the representation of wars in London's Imperial War Museum (Noakes 1998;

Malvern 2000; Whitmarsh 2000; Winter 2012; Parry and Thumim 2016; Reeves 2018) - with the existence of over a hundred additional military museums being overlooked. Equally, within IR and CMS, most research has focused on museumification practices relating to World Wars I and II, genocides, 9/11 and other mass casualty terror attacks carried out during the Global War on Terror (GWoT) (Edkins 2003; Williams 2007; Silvester 2009; Heath-Kelly 2017). While museumification practices in the majority of British military museums have been little studied, many scholars have identified that ‘the image of the soldier hero is a robust and highly influential form of idealised masculinity, particularly in the contemporary Western world’, and that ‘it pervades popular culture (toys, comic books, films, TV series, museum exhibits and video games)’ (Basham 2016a, 30; see also Dawson 1994). Indeed, over the last two decades, there has been an expanding scholarship which explores ‘the myth of the magnificent warrior’ in Western liberal societies through the reimagining of combat and martial violence (Millar and Tidy 2017, 150), analyses meanings ascribed to warrior-like masculinity found in military memoirs (Duncanson 2009; Woodward and Jenkins 2018), and interrogates the role of the sacrificial warrior in war commemorations (e.g. Åse and Wendt 2019). Building on Enloe’s premise that ‘most war museums are inspired not just by men’s memories, but by masculinised memories’ (2004, 196), a point which also resonates with some curators’ concerns about their museum’s management preference for a sanitised and masculinised reading of conflict, we investigate how curatorial practices are guided by, and co-constitutive of particular visions of the Scottish Soldier’s masculinities, and specifically, Scots-as-warriors.

This article is based on extensive empirical work conducted at 11 Scottish military museums between March 2016 and August 2018. Our research sample includes the National War Museum in Edinburgh and 10 regimental museums associated with Scotland. In designing our research, we selected museums with unrestricted public access, considering them as key spaces within which society has a glimpse into Britain’s war-making. Importantly, all museums in our sample cover a range of conflicts, from the British colonial wars to World Wars and modern conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan taking place under the banner of the GWoT. As it transpired during our fieldwork, the organisation of exhibitions along both chronological and thematic lines projects a continuous narrative of warrior-like masculinity which transcends the chronological (or otherwise) representation of specific conflicts. In other words, it is common for museums to tell a story of Scotland’s role in Britain’s wars

through constant intertwining of historical and contemporary narratives - a technique which is also frequently utilised in war commemoration (e.g. Ashplant et al 2000; Danilova 2015).

During fieldwork we interviewed curators, participated in guided museum tours, recorded the spatial organisation of exhibitions, analysed the positioning of artefacts and commentaries ascribed to objects, observed the patterns of interaction of visitors with exhibitions, visited gift shops, and critically analysed advertising materials and comments posted on TripAdvisor. In this article, we draw upon this broad ethnographic work, while concentrating on our analysis of semi-structured interviews with curators. Crucially, with the role of curators under-explored in studies of international politics exercised through museums (e.g. Enloe 2004; Sylvester 2009), this article makes a further contribution due to our curator participants' emphasising the restrictions imposed on their curatorial agency. These curatorial restrictions are perceived as multiple and various - as stemming from conservative museum management, limited resources, and often the conflicting interests of visitors, boards of trustees, volunteers with military background and a historically ingrained system of martial values operating within the museums and amongst their key stakeholders. The majority of curators in our sample also saw their role as firmly dissociated from politics claiming that: 'I don't think that it's our business to be political' (Curator 7), 'we don't look at the whys and wherefores, it's not our job' (Curator 8), 'what you won't see here is us talking much about the morality of war,... we don't go down this road,... because we don't have to, people have views about that anyway' (Curator 1).ⁱⁱⁱ Recognising the complexities of curation and the fact that military museums function as complex spaces with ambivalent cultural/military identities, we draw on critical museology literature (Winter 2012; Longair 2015) to identify the figure of the curator as fundamentally and unavoidably political. Indeed, as our findings demonstrate through specific curatorial choices, curators instil and disrupt dominant geo/biopolitical, gender, class, and race-based hierarchies within exhibitions.

This article proceeds as follows. The first section discusses historical and contemporary ambivalences associated with the discursive construction of Scots-as-warriors. We demonstrate how the convergence of ambivalent (Scottish/British) nationalisms sustains the ideal of Scots-as-warriors. The following section interrogates the utilisation of stereotypical warrior markers and omissions, notable in the curation of Britain's colonial wars as well as modern conflicts. To substantiate the engendering of Scots-as-warriors within museum spaces, we focus on how curators engage with the three most common, war-informing

artefacts (uniform, medals, weaponry), and explain how each of these artefacts works towards prioritising the military rationality and aggressive combat masculinity thereby (in)visibilising other war experiences. In the final section, we analyse a recent trend towards the ‘humanisation’ of the Soldier through curatorial attempts to disrupt the stereotypical warrior codes and introduce previously omitted war stories. Although this third noted style of curation introduces the alternative reading of soldiering, it nonetheless reinstates the dominance of white sacrificial masculinity, and through the stories about ‘local lads’ perished, and/or injured, it enables decontextualisation, sentimentalisation, and the normalisation of conflict.

Scots-as-warriors

For centuries, ‘one of the key and abiding icons of Scottishness was the Scottish soldier’ (McCrone 2001, 15; Devine 2012, 626-7; Allan 2015; McCrone 2017). However, this popular observation has rarely led to a systematic analysis of contradictions embodied in this figure. As our research suggests, it is misleading to approach martial Scottishness as inherently oppositional to Britishness and attribute this opposition to either centuries-long internal colonisation by the English (e.g. Mycock 2014) or an increasing association with Scotland as a unique political entity, observed in the 2000s (e.g. Leith and Soule 2012). Instead, we argue that Scottish Soldier reflects a particular combination of historical and contemporary discourses of Britain’s war-making.

The Scottish Soldier identified in this article emerges from a unique historical/political context – namely the fact that most military museums in Scotland host collections associated with a post-Union history, with most Scottish regiments having undergone a substantial reorganisation after the 1715-1746 Jacobite Rebellions, and the 1881 Cardwell military reforms (Spiers 2006). From the late eighteen- and throughout the nineteenth-centuries, British authorities in order to increase the effectiveness of Scottish regiments, utilised the ideology of ‘martial races’ representing Scots and Highlanders, in particular, as ‘men who are biologically or culturally predisposed to the arts of war’ (Street 2004, 1). This construction reflects a specific configuration of colonial geo/biopolitics directed at the management of increasingly racialised populations within the British Empire (Foucault 2003^{iv}, Basham 2013, 124-7). To add further contextual nuance, due to the fact that soon after their inception the Highland regiments could not recruit enough Highlanders to form the main bulk of their forces, they were forced to attract ‘poor, urban Lowland Scots, mixed in which smaller

percentages of English and Irish recruits’, and as such, these regiments lacked the ‘ethnic purity’, with the Highlander ‘martial race’, progressively evolving to mean a shorthand for the exceptional (‘racial’) military capabilities of all white British men (Streets 2004, 11). Equally, the Lowland regiments (e.g. King’s Own Scottish Borders) recruited over 50 per cent of its soldiers from England and other ‘white’ Dominions of the British Empire.

Outlined thus far, this historical and political context enabled a progressive blurring of martial Highland, Scottish, and British identities with the resultant mixture working in a two-fold manner. On the one hand, this ‘martial race’ mythology of being a ‘naturally born’ Highland-warrior, or being made into one through military service in Scottish regiments, allowed for the obscuring ‘more than double mortality rates’ in these frontline infantry regiments in comparison with other units of the British Imperial Army, particularly during colonial wars (Streets 2004, 227). On the other hand, a peculiar convergence of Scottish/British martial identities and most importantly, their ‘whiteness’, worked to legitimise British imperial conquest through the positioning of soldiers’ masculinities as “‘naturally” braver, more professional and more disciplined than the masculinity of the men in the colonised nations’ (Duncanson 2009, 73).

Basham’s more recent analysis demonstrates the contemporary poignancy of this geo/biopolitical ‘martial race’ discourse as she extrapolates the idea of martial Britishness to ‘island race’ (the whole of the UK) and demonstrates how the modern British state utilised the institutional and cultural privileging of white martial Britishness as a means to sustain the hegemony of traditional (white) aggressive heterosexual masculinity within the British armed forces during the GWOt (2013, 122-3). However, Basham’s analysis omits the historically-associated fusion of martial Scottishness and Britishness, nor does it comment on its contemporary implications. This article posits that the discourse of Scots-as-warriors constitutes a key missing element in the analysis of Britain’s war-making.

Since devolution of powers from the UK to the Scottish government in the late 1990s, cultural entities in Scotland have promoted ambivalent (Scottish/British) nationalisms with Scots-as-warriors emerging as one of the exemplary constructs of this process. This warrior-centric Scottishness draws on a peculiar ensemble of warrior-figures, including William Wallace and Robert the Bruce, the Jacobite rebels, soldiers fighting at the Battle of Culloden both for and against the British Crown, the Highlanders serving in the Victorian-era

regiments, and modern infantry soldiers serving in the ‘Scottish’ units of the British Army and deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. This mixture of warrior-figures is revived during the many annual Highland Games throughout Scotland, alongside historical re-enactments (Hesse 2014), fostered by government- and privately sponsored tourist advertising campaigns (e.g. *VisitScotland* and *Scotrail*), and also enacted through cultural performances (e.g. Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo), and various international cinematic productions such as *Highlander* (1986), *Braveheart* (1995), *Outlander* (2014), and *Outlaw King* (2018) (e.g. McCrone 2017, 423-31). Although allegiances of these historical, contemporary, real or fictional characters display ambivalent (Scottish/British) nationalisms, all these figures function as symbolic bricks in the timeless construction of Scots-as-warriors.

Paradoxically, despite turbulent political changes in Scotland, between devolution, the 2014 Independence Referendum, and the 2016 Brexit vote, support for Scots-as-warriors has been one of the few points of political consensus. Throughout the 2000s, politicians from opposing political parties joined their efforts in campaigns for the preservation of the historic Scottish regiments. In 2005-6, the cross-party panel, including the representatives of the SNP, a party which is often seen as a voice to the uniquely Scottish readings of history and identity politics (Mycock 2012), lobbied against the creation of the Royal Regiment of Scotland (RRS), going as far as promising to restore the historical (Scottish) regiments in the event of a successful independence referendum (Scottish Government 2013). When the SNP took a clear stance against the 2003 Iraq War, a move which subsequently gave support for the perception of ‘British warriors’ being opposed by ‘anti-war-minded Scots’ (Elcheroth and Reicher 2017, 215-6), and has traditionally been the party which for decades lobbied against nuclear weapons, it did not question Scotland’s contribution to the British (conventional) military forces. Instead, it advocated for an expansion, or at least the preservation of, the military recruitment rates throughout Scotland in order to preserve the historical association between Scotland and the British Army.^v The 2014 Independence Referendum and the marking of the Centenary of WWI, 2014-18 provided additional stimuli to celebrate Scots-as-warriors, reinforcing the idea of ‘Scotland’s central contribution to the defence of the UK in its hours of need’ (Cameron 2018, 67). This historical and contemporary context sets important boundaries on how museum professionals engage with the ambivalent (Scottish/British) nationalisms and the evolved concept of Scots-as-warriors.

Curating Martial Scottishness/Britishness

During interviews, curators were often baffled by our questions on martial Scottishness – that is, on what makes the Scottish Soldier *Scottish*. We were told that the museum has ‘little on Scottishness’, and were even asked in reply, ‘how do *you* define Scottishness?’, or ‘what is the difference between the Scottish and British infantry soldier?’. Indeed, curators found our questions revolving around martial Scottishness intriguing and would repeatedly refer to this construct throughout their interview. Such curatorial responses reflected our own confusion about the ambivalent representations of soldiers’ national identities. In most museums we visited, soldiers were ascribed a compound identity with different displays and museum halls describing them through their association with either specific regiments/battalions (e.g. Seaforth, Cameroonians, Black Watch, Gordon Highlanders, the Royal Highlander Fusiliers) or simply identifying them as Scottish or/and British infantry soldiers at the same time, without many comments on soldiers’ actual origins. Our interviews revealed the salient and silent points in the curation of this ambivalent construct.

Based on our interviews, it appears that curators use material signifiers of martial Scottishness which encompass the nineteenth-century Highlander ‘martial race’ myths highlighted by Streets’ (2004), ‘romantic and romanticised’ imagery of the Highlands populated with ‘noble savages’ in kilts as discussed by McCrone (2017, 406-7, 431) and hints at the post-colonial nostalgia that Basham (2013) notices in the broader British context. Curators place these decorative artefacts on display, and in doing so, construct a Scottish warrior as if straight out of the Victorian romantic novels of Walter Scott or cinematic productions such as *Braveheart* and *Outlander* (see Image 1).

Image 1. National Museum of War, Edinburgh Castle, photo courtesy of Robert Lenfert, 2016.

...What people expect when they come to a Scottish regimental museum, they see the feather bonnets, they see the bagpipes, that’s the difference between ourselves and an image of the British Army as such. [...]. We’re almost selling the myths of Scottishness and the Highlander. (Curator 6)

...it is a Scottish regiment. Therefore, you have to put in the odd piper and some tartan, otherwise people are a bit peeved. [...] I suppose some of the traditions are quite Scottish, but on the whole [...] I think it’s a bit of dressing. (Curator 7)

Despite their reliance on tartan and bagpipes as display case fillers, most curators acknowledge the limitations of such decorative representations, commenting that they do not reveal much about soldiers' origins (e.g. whether soldiers were recruited from Scotland, England or other corners of the British Empire or later the Commonwealth), physical appearances, nor their war experiences. However, this discrepancy between a romanticised ideal of the Highlander and Scotland as a home for Scots-as-warriors is seen by many curators as a necessary technique to attract visitors.

...I think that's an important thing to do [in the museum] in order to reach a wide audience. [...] So, for example, there's one [picture] where we see a soldier stood distracted meanwhile there's a woman who has dropped her basket of apples and is bending down to pick those apples up and is trying to look up the soldier's kilt. [...] It's the romantic idea of the Scottish Highlander who's gone to fight, and look at how brave they're being, and they must be these bold, strong men with muscles... And, these people...you know, were just as scrawny as everybody else [laughs], malnourished, emancipated [sic]. (Curator 5)

This quote highlights the nexus between curation and a wider self-branding of Scotland as a country of reliving 'warrior dreams' (Hesse 2014). Indeed, capitalising on the wider trend of 'seeing' and 'selling Scotland' through presenting the 'Scottish dreamscape' as a space which is: 'familiar; it promises pleasure; it is charged with ideas about heroism and valour' (McCrone 2017, 442), curators attempt to entice modern audiences with the romantic ideals of Scots-as-warriors. However, if in the nineteenth-century 'the common belief that Highland soldiers wore nothing under their kilts drove a whole genre of Victorian jokes and innuendoes suggesting that even respectable women were driven by desire to discover the truth' (Streets 2004, 209), the focus on similar sexualised imagery and stories about physically fit and brave Scottish warriors in museums not only marginalise soldiers' experiences, it assists in the romanticisation of British imperial legacy.

This nexus between British Empire and martial Scottishness is widely acknowledged in the literature on Scottish history (Spiers 2006; MacLeod 2010; Devine 2012; Wilkie 2014). However, we found that this association of martial Scottishness with British Empire and Britain's colonial wars in which most Scottish regiments were involved, to be one of the most marginalised stories within Scotland's museums. When asked about their approach to the

representation of British colonialism, curators often responded with such comments as ‘oh, this is awkward’, ‘this is a strange one’, ‘a wee bit uncomfortable’, ‘it’s complex... but we don’t make value judgements about that’. Partially, their evasive responses reflect that ‘the relationship between Scotland and the British Empire in the twentieth century was both wide-ranging and highly complex’ (MacKenzie and Glass 2015, 1) and that Scottish society did not experience critical reflection on Scotland’s role either in colonial wars or the larger British imperial project (Allan 2015). Admittedly, the British Empire is one of the most marginalised topics in the national museums, including the British Museum (Sylvester 2009; Procter 2018). Reflecting this trend, the MoD website for the RRS refrains from mentioning British colonial wars, and instead indicates that ‘fourteen Scottish Infantry regiments were in service for Great Britain’ (MoD 2018). Acknowledging this wider context, we argue that the interpretations voiced by curators contribute towards collective amnesia through the promotion of a one-sided, celebratory and uncritical story of British colonialism.

...I would hope that, if a visitor came through here, they could not fail to understand that Scottish people were heavily participating and benefiting from British imperial expansion and the garrisoning of foreign parts and the wealth that came back. (Curator 1).

...this colour was presented by the East India Company because of the Battle of N^{vi}..., which was essentially taking more ground for them. So, we were part of it, you’re part of the colonial wars, what can you do? I don’t really understand why people get upset about this. It’s part of history, it’s done, I didn’t do it [laughs]. (Curator 7)

As quotes including the above demonstrate, although curators recognise that this celebratory representation of British colonialism opens itself up to criticism and could potentially make some people ‘unhappy’, it was much less evident from interviews how these concerns relate to the exercise of violence on the behalf of the British Empire against local populations. Throughout our project, we consistently found that Scotland’s military museums were invisibilising the local populations of former British Colonies as faces, bodies, and experiences were often entirely absent from museum displays. Instead, museums reframe these Other locations as either ‘empty’, resource-rich spaces or ‘violent places in need of

taming' (Dalby 2008, 440). Crucially, both representations are built on the reproduction of a geo/biopolitical order which normalises and romanticises Britain's colonial conquest.

Our analysis of contemporary exhibitions suggests that curators utilise similar geo/biopolitical hierarchies in the framing of modern 'expeditionary warfare in defence of Britain and British interests "somewhere or other"' (Basham 2013, 126). This is achieved through particular imagery (photos, videos, mannequins) depicting young, 21st-century predominantly white, male infantry soldiers perfecting combat skills in unidentified desert-looking locations, participating in extreme sports, standing in British infantry uniform placed in a combat ready position, holding rifles directed at visitors (see Image 2), and/or marching in homecoming parades through the streets of Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Aberdeen. In the rare cases when photos and videos include local (non-white) populations, they are usually depicted dressed in traditional (African or Middle Eastern) outfits, unarmed, and an expression of gratitude on their faces, standing alongside the armed British infantry soldiers in the full combat gear. Although some exhibition materials identify that, throughout the 2000s, soldiers from the RRS participated in peacekeeping operations, the context of these operations is obscured from museums' spaces and instead, the accompanied imagery and commentaries showcase soldiers' ability to engage in combat, and 'kill the enemy' (as explicitly stated in the museums with modern collections). This representation suggests that military museums do not currently function as spaces for less-warrior-centric, 'softer', peacekeeping masculinity observed by Duncanson (2009) and prioritise the image of 'rough, tough, combat-ready' British infantry soldier (Higate 2003; Basham 2016a).

Image 2. Museum for the Royal Regiment of Scotland, Edinburgh castle, authors' photo, 2017.

The traditional warrior-centric masculinity on display within the Scottish military museums we visited also came across via self-representational narratives voiced in the video recordings of active and former members of the RRS and incorporated in two museum exhibitions. Notably, in the Museum of the RRS, soldiers were asked to finish the sentence: 'A Scottish infantry soldier is...' while in the museum's collections of two disbanded regiments, soldiers from the RRS comment on what it means to be a Highlander as well as a Scottish and British infantry soldier. Analysis of their replies reveals a fusion between ambivalent (Scottish/British) nationalisms, martial race discourse and traditional traits attributed to British infantry soldier.

‘...To wear that kilt, proud to be Scottish, but we are also proud to be British...’
‘... To be a Scottish soldier is to be a natural born warrior.’
‘... For me, being a Scottish infantry soldier is hung on the tenets of being proud, fearless and professional, but underpinning that as well, we have a sense of humility and definitely a sense of humour’;
‘...I think it’s warrior spirit and it’s that sense of family...We come from Scotland. We are part of Scotland. We are in the fabric of the nation’.

In the museum videos, these narratives are voiced by white, male soldiers whose ‘natural-warrior’ identity is authenticated by their belonging to a ‘Scottish’ regiment of the British Army. This representation obscures the experiences of a considerable proportion of soldiers who are most likely not Scottish by origin (MoD 2012) and over 14.5 per cent of personnel serving in the RRS having non-White backgrounds, with most soldiers being recruited from the Commonwealth (MoD 2014). This obscuring allows the reinstating of the white warrior-like masculinity of the British Army whilst simultaneously representing soldiers serving in the RRS as ‘a fierce and proud’ vanguard of British war-making, ‘ready for all conflicts present and future’ (MoD 2018).

Curation through war-informing artefacts

For the large group of curators we interviewed, topics which can or cannot be discussed in the museums depended upon the availability of material objects and physical spaces for exhibitions to be housed in. Indeed, we found that many permanent collections and tours are structured around the three war-informing artefacts: military uniform, weaponry, and medals.

Military uniforms encode the organizational, hierarchical culture of the military, and through this process enact a specific construction of military masculinities, revealing ‘how war is lived and embodied’ (Tynan 2017, 305). In our study, the displays of uniforms both produce and obscure rank-, and class- and experience-based hierarchies of war. For example, we found curators often utilising regimental tartans as one of the key material signifiers of Scots-as-warriors. This representation draws on the ‘warrior’ mythology of tartan, which is linked to both the imagining of Scotland as a country of ‘Brave-hearts’ and the standardisation and mass production of regimental tartans in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (McCrone 2017). Whereas ‘distinctive forms of military dress for colonial [non-white]

soldiers heightened ethnic differences’ and sustained the racialised order within the British Imperial Army (Tynan 2017, 311), regimental tartans worn by (white) soldiers serving in Scottish regiments transformed them into more relatable, ‘splendid’ and ‘pictorial troops’, admired by the Victorian-era elites (Spiers 2006, 2). This ‘fetishisation of the Highland soldier’ during the era of British imperialism (Archibald 2006, 11) allows obscuring and normalise the geo/biopolitical hierarchies.

Museums sustain this pictorial representation of Scottish troops through their focus on high ranking officers’ uniforms - often worn by members of the Scottish and English aristocracy. One curator described curation in a ‘typical old-style’ military museum: ‘this is an officer’s jacket that belonged to officer such-and-such and it was donated by blah blah blah...’ (Curator 6). In all examined museums, officers’ uniforms occupy centre-stage. These items are usually highly decorated, softly lit, and presented in ‘mint’ condition - displayed as works of art. Although the treatment of military uniform as an aesthetic object is common in studies of material culture, this approach ‘often fails to situate them [uniform] within a broader social or cultural context’ (Tynan 2017, 304). In the museums we analysed, the aesthetisation and, we must add, the availability of officers’ uniform and the almost complete absence of rank-and-file tunics from the era of colonial wars and up to WWI marginalises the experiences of rank-and-file soldiers whose stories are typically introduced through art works, romanticised Victorian-era postcards, recruitment posters with rare examples of actual soldiers’ uniforms being placed at a lower level in dimly lit display cases, or made simply ‘unavailable’ by the ‘wear and tear’ of war.

As most military collections held in Scottish museums originated from collections amassed by officers (Tythacott 2015; see also Kavanagh 1994), the focus on ‘available’ uniform both reproduce and obscure this historical context, replacing rank-and-file soldiers with warrior mythologies or simply making them invisible to visitors. Considering that officers’ uniforms are more likely to be personalised through accompanying trinkets, the experience of rank-and-file soldiers is systematically marginalised within museum spaces. The focus on nicely presented uniform enables aesthetisation and de-sensitisation of warfare which one curator eloquently summed up by stating, ‘when I feel sad, I talk about soldiers’ uniform and things like that, rather than the death’ (Curator 5).

Logics of aesthetisation, de-sensitisation and subsequent rationalisation of war come to the fore in the curation of weaponry. Although weapons displays were prominent in all surveyed

collections, many curators commented on challenges to introduce weapons. Some curators felt that guns ‘lack a personal touch’, especially in the instances where the ownership of weaponry has not been established, others felt that they lack specialised knowledge, whereas some felt that too much talk about swords, rifles and machine guns can invite an ‘unhealthy’ excitement with weapons, an argument voiced particularly by curators conducting educational tours. To negotiate these pitfalls, most curators from our sample introduce weapons used by the British Army throughout the ages as illustrations of ‘technology, proliferation and all that sort of thing’ (Curator 1). In several instances, curators provided minimal details about weaponry and invited visitors to study these artefacts by themselves. This invitation is particularly common for the pieces of foreign weaponry which are often displayed without provenance or described through euphemisms such as being ‘obtained’ and ‘acquired’. These practices of curation enable the dominant representation of ‘British rule as an agent of progress’, which is both reflective of the historic colonial discourse and symptomatic of the post-colonial nostalgia (Basham 2013, 125-6) discussed early in this article.

If the curation of uniform and weaponry enable the de-sensitisation and rationalising of war, we found in the curation of gallantry awards and, in particular, the substantial collections of Victoria Crosses (VC) exhibited, a situation in which war is rationalised through emotionally charged stories centred on heroic combat-ready masculinity.

...Charles was a private during WWI, and we have his Victoria Cross on display. [...] so, Charles came out of his trench... ran across no man’s land, survived, his rifle had broken, and he was unable to get the bayonet back on it. So, he just took his bayonette, jumped into the enemy trench, killed many enemy soldiers, jumped out of the enemy trench, ran back along no man’s land, survived, and went back into his trench. [...] And when he was interviewed after the war, they asked him why did you do it? [...] he said, I thought my men were behind me, I didn’t realise I was the only one going over. [...] Now it depends how you tell that story that brings over some controversy. If you tell that story, and think yeah, he killed lots of people and that was great, I would probably be like [laughs]...that’s a bit of an interesting way to tell it. (Curator 5).

The extract above reveals three important framing devices utilised by curators displaying soldiers' decorations. First, although the Victoria Cross, the highest award in the British Army, was introduced by Queen Victoria during the Crimean War (in 1856) and is as such historically linked to British imperialism, a systematic marginalisation of the political/historical context of British Empire in the museums allows for the Cross to be discursively dissociated from its origins. Second, the story above is particularly telling of the curator's attempt to dissociate the Cross from the act of killing 'lots of people'. This reframing not only romanticises trench warfare, it misrepresents a specific context which underpinned the awarding of the VC during this conflict. As Smith's meticulous study reveals, WWI signified a crucial shift in the British institutional heroism, when military decision-makers under the leadership of the British Field Marshal Earl Douglas Haig, replaced the romantic – Victorian-era - notion of a 'self-sacrificing compassionate hero' with the 'aggressive man-killing hero' whose actions could provide an 'example of desired behaviour' during industrial-era warfare (2008, 204-5). This aggressive, combat-ready type of hero reflected elites' attempt to preserve the masculine purity of the Cross through the exclusion of women from consideration for the Britain's highest military honour (Smith 2008, 205). Finally, the story above does not provide much information on what happened to Charlie after he received the Cross. This omission – of post-war life/death - is common amongst museum displays which offer more information about the heroic deed, which led to the Cross, but not its human cost in the form of ill health, injury, or death of the hero-soldier. Considering that 'during WWI, VC winners experienced a lethality rate at most three times greater than that of the rest of the military establishments as a whole', and in WWII, 'the lethality rate among Cross winners was over ten times greater than that of the armed forces as a whole' (Smith 2008, 188), death and horrific injuries were a typical outcome for most VC recipients, while *shell shock* (now known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) used to describe what veterans went on to experience after serving in the trenches. In the museums, this marginalisation of physical and psychological injury and death enables a key reframing of Britain's wars as a scene of 'overcoming the fear of death, or injury' (Curator 1; Curator 5; Curator 8). This interpretation places the sacrificial figure of the masculine courageous soldier at the heart of Scotland's positionality within Britain's wars, and as such it (re)produces the affective and deeply gendered rationalisations of warfare utilised in war commemorations (Millar 2017; Purnell 2018; Åse and Wendt 2019).

'Humanising' the Soldier

Most curators in our study perceive their role as one of story-telling - indeed, throughout our research we found the particular stories told by curators indicative of their particular approaches to curation. If some curators prioritise the telling of stories through war-informing artefacts, signposted by stories about VC winners (i.e. ‘there’s no point telling people, “they [soldiers] went to barracks, they had a sleep, and they went home”’ (Curator 3)), a smaller group of curators engage with alternative sources (archives and local community collections), and through these sources curators attempt to ‘humanise’ the Soldier. Crucially, we found that these ‘human’ stories are most commonly foregrounded within temporary exhibitions rather than within permanent displays. In being fleetingly humanised within such temporary spaces, these alternative readings of soldiers’ experiences both challenge and reinstate the dominance of the sacrificial soldier.

... For us [...] it was the archive that we have and the photographic collections, not so much the physical objects, because they were, you know, few and far between. But what we have written accounts, or we have letters from soldiers who maybe went off to war and didn’t come back... I say soldiers, a lot of them were *civilians* who were actually called into the war for different reasons – it’s once they [visitors] can start to *empathise* with those kind of experiences that we find, people who were never interested in the history of the regiment, you’re not using those objects from a soldier’s point of view, there’s a *human story*, you start to think about fathers, brothers, uncles, you start to think about how they feel leaving, you know mothers, wives, families at home. (Curator 4; authors’ italic)

The pursuit of ‘human’ stories leads curators to focus on the idea of *sameness* between soldiers and civilians. This ‘human’ sameness is achieved through stressing of similarities between lived experiences of soldiers and civilians. Curators establish these similarities through everyday-artefacts, emotionally charged stories about the lives and deaths of locally-born soldiers or food preferences (i.e. ‘the most popular exhibit that we’ve got... is a case with rations in... every morning our cleaner has to clean off hundreds of finger prints. It’s obviously – people can identify with the soldier who, you know eats Mars bars’ (Curator 8)). However, as feminist scholars have repeatedly pointed out, this idea of ‘human’ *sameness*, particularly in terms of society’s ability to feel compassion and grief is underpinned by particular embodied – gendered and raced experiences and geopolitical hierarchies, which are all critical in the (re)production of the politics of war (Butler 2004; Ahmed 2004; Åhall

2016). In the museums we visited, modern audiences are encouraged to empathise with experiences of mostly white ‘local lads’ and with the losses experienced by Scottish local communities, thereby positioning these groups at the centre of the ‘human’ story of war. This technique does not only invisibilise contributions of non-Scottish soldiers who served in Scottish regiments through the ages, it also makes invisible experiences of many others whose lives were affected by Britain’s wars. This invisibilisation of the Other is enhanced through dissociation of these ‘human’ war stories from specific, often complex historical and political circumstances which made these ‘human’ losses possible.

Crucially, our analysis of modern collections demonstrates how curatorial attempts to ‘humanise’ the Soldier reframes (Scottish/British) civilian communities from (un-) to willing participants of Britain’s war-making. This reframing is enacted through the concepts of ‘care’ and support. Traditionally, hegemonic, infantry-based, masculinity in the British military was underpinned by the combination of aggression, violence and ‘sharing ethos’ among military recruits, with civilian society being placed outside of this ‘caring/sharing’ ethos (Basham 2016b; Higate 2003). Duncanson in her work on modern British military masculinities posits that ‘sharing/caring’ ethos can evolve to encompass ‘caring’ for the Other, reflecting peacekeeping masculinity of British soldiers deployed on overseas missions (2015, 243). Our analysis of museum exhibitions and interviews with curators does not support Duncanson’s hypothesis, and instead it highlights the reverse emotional economy of ‘caring/sharing’, with this ethos being extrapolated from the British military to (Scottish/British) civilian communities thereby placing members of non-British communities outside of this ‘caring/sharing’ cycle. The quotation below illustrates the reframing of ‘care’ and ‘support’ through curation.

...I very much wanted to look at something that would represent the past ten years of what [this military unit] had actually been up to and we struck on this idea of looking at *support that our soldiers give but also receive*... So badly wounded in Afghanistan and it was just a very powerful story, and the female medic was very good at expressing what happened on that particular day... So, I had picked up on the story and thought ‘ooo, that’s quite an interesting one that might be suitable’, and I met them [British soldiers from the RRS], and I interviewed them, and it was all just really good. [...] I wasn’t really thinking about the complexities of Afghanistan, I was thinking more about ‘what’s the strongest story, what stories will people go ‘oh,

that's, I want to listen to this, I want to understand this *person's experience* of this conflict, which I've probably only heard about on the news and in the newspapers and so on.' (Curator 2; authors' italic)

The story above hints at two curatorial reframing techniques. The first technique enacts a gender polarised representation of soldiering, with a female Royal Navy Reserve medic appearing as the only woman in the video who provides urgent medical treatment to an injured (white) male infantry soldier. This gender polarised representation is typical for contemporary war commemorations in Scotland, the setting, which simultaneously brings forth the argument about gender equality in war/soldiering whilst systematically marginalising and often stereotyping women's contribution in war efforts (Danilova and Dolan 2019). The second technique redefines the idea of sameness between civilian and military communities through a link between people's interest in 'personal' stories told by British soldiers and their possible readiness to reciprocate 'support' and 'care' delivered by the British Army towards them. This reframing, in turn, works on two distinctive levels. First, it reiterates the message sent by the British military to non-military communities within the Armed Forces Covenant to 'support!' – a command particularly prominent from the late 2000s onwards (McCartney 2010; Ingham 2014). To communicate this 'support!' message, curators utilise self-censored stories voiced by soldiers. As one curator summed up, it is 'better to have soldiers telling their tales' because telling the story of 'how they're fighting against the Taliban or whatever it is, actually not that easy' (Curator 7). The use of soldiers' voices attempts to create 'the authentic' war story as well as 'the authentic' demand for support. Simultaneously, these stories of hardship, injury and day-to-day activities experienced and performed by British soldiers on overseas missions enact another important geo/biopolitical affective dynamic by making invisible say, 'the hardships of Afghan civilians' through the depiction of 'the suffering of our own soldiers', implying that through soldiers' traumas and losses, we can be 'informed of Afghans' plight' (Welland 2015, 123; Parry and Thumim 2016, 107; Daugbjerg 2017, 64). In other words, these stories obscure and erase violence enacted by British infantry soldiers, representing them as 'caring', 'suffering' and, 'innocent' subjects 'deserving of the comfort compassion brings' thereby systematically obscuring the suffering and losses of the Other (Welland 2015, 123; see also Zehfuss 2009). Through this appropriation of the losses accrued within the opposing population the 'humanisation' of the Soldier assists in placing a sacrificial figure of Scots-as-warriors back in the centre of the meaning-making of Britain's wars.

Conclusion

A visitor to one of Scotland's military museums would most likely could try on a kilt, buy postcards, magnets, mugs, and other merchandise emblazoned with the images of highly decorated, tough-looking and sexy Scottish Soldiers. Through these experiences, museum visitors participate in a carefully curated spectacle of (Scottish/British) soldiering and war, with museums fostering a sense of pride and amazement at soldiers' heroic exploits, compassion in response to heart-breaking accounts of local lads perished, one that teaches the audience about the importance of *supporting* the British Army for its work on behalf of the global community during British Empire and today. Through these museum experiences, visitors are encouraged to reposition their identities and literally to take sides through, for example, the act of taking a selfie with and on the same side as mannequins dressed in British infantry uniform, armed with rifles (Image 2). This physical positioning of a visitor within museum spaces reinstates particular readings of conflicts based on historical and contemporary geo/biopolitical hierarchies, gender, race and class distinctions of visible and invisible war experiences, all of which work towards the normalisation of Scotland's contribution in Britain's wars.

Although in Scotland's military museums curators see their work as placed outside the politics of war, similarly to curators of military museums in other Western liberal democracies (e.g. Daugbjerg 2017), in this paper we have systematically demonstrated that curators act as custodians of institutions where power/knowledge hierarchies about conflicts are mediated and consistently (re)produced. Through martial race discourse, the ideal of Scots-as-warriors, aesthetisation, de-sentivisation, rationalisation, disembodiment, de-contextualisation of conflicts, and the reverse emotional dynamics of 'care' for 'our boys' versus the invisible Other, museums assist in the meaning-making of Britain's wars. This said, any change in the representation of conflict in Scotland's museums would require a broader public discussion about how the romanticised vision of Scotland's military heritage, British colonial wars, and modern conflicts relates to Scotland's self-positioning as a *modern* progressive and inclusive political entity (Strachan 2007). Through our interrogation of curatorial practices, we hope to encourage cultural industry professionals and policy-makers not only in Scotland but throughout Britain and across Western liberal democracies, to engage in a broader debate over the role of military museums in the politics of war. Crucially,

this will involve curators acknowledging the ultimately political work that they do to make the warrior-soldier (re)appear as a 'natural' and forever-enduring figure.

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Notes

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ⁱⁱ The reorganisation of regiments has had a direct impact on Scotland's military museums. In 2017, the MoD provided a financial support for 67 museums across the UK, by 2030, the MoD will fund 36 museums, only those that are linked to active regiments. In Scotland, only the Museum of Royal Regiment of Scotland (RRS) will receive the MoD backing.

ⁱⁱⁱ The identities of curators were obscured during the coding process due to ethical concerns. In the article, we use a numeric identification to identify curators.

^{iv} As Foucault (2003, 254-55) describes it, when power functions in the biopolitical mode 'the distinction among races, the hierarchy of races, the fact that certain races are described as good and that others, in contrast, are described as inferior: all this is a way of fragmenting the field of the biological that power controls'.

^v Although the SNP Youth wing has lobbied in coordination with Forces Watch (Scotland) to increase recruitment age from 16 to 18 years old, and in 2017, it received support from the SNP leadership, this debate focused on the rights of young people rather than on the positionality of Scotland's towards Britain's military policies (Forces Watch, 16 Oct 2017, <https://www.forceswatch.net/blog/making-it-18-%E2%80%93-snp-votes-yes-raising-age-recruitment> (accessed 12/06/2019).

^{vi} The name of the battle was redacted as part of anonymisation process.