The Female Other:

Images of Malay Women in Selected Colonial Texts about Malaya

Submitted by

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Summary

In this thesis I explore and analyse representations of Malay women in selected texts written during the period of British colonisation of Malaya between 1874 and 1957. My thesis is that representations of Malay women as savage, cruel, sexually immoral and degenerative are produced and signified within the Eurocentric grand narrative of the female Other as savage, exotic and erotic. I extend Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of the dialogical nature of a text to include the dialogue between (colonialist) text and (indigenous) reader. This analytical strategy serves as a means of problematising the colonialists’ Eurocentric conceptualisation of Malay women’s identities and subjectivities.

I have selected a range of colonialist writings in various genres - travel narratives, novels and short stories - by writers as prolific as Joseph Conrad, Isabella Bird and Somerset Maugham and relative unknowns such as Frank Swettenham, John Thomson and Emily Innes. What unifies their writings is the thematisation of the debased nature of Malay women either directly or indirectly stated. Malay women are not only represented as typical Oriental exotics and sexually promiscuous but they are also viewed, particularly in texts by Conrad and Maugham, as being the cause of the moral degeneration of any European man who dares love them. The conclusion of this thesis reveals the power of Eurocentric discourse in shaping images of the Malay female Other which are then articulated and presented as reality.
Statement of Authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no materials published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma.

No other person’s work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

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Lajiman Janoory
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INTRODUCTION

Let me begin this thesis with an anecdote told by the early twentieth-century Lebanese philosopher, poet and artist, Kahlil Gibran:

Once there ruled in the distant city of Wirani a king who was both mighty and wise. And he was feared for his might and loved for his wisdom.

Now, in the heart of that city was a well whose water was cool and crystalline, from which all the inhabitants drank, even the king and his courtiers, for there was no other well.

One night when all were asleep, a witch entered the city, and poured seven drops of strange liquid into the well, and said, "From this hour he who drinks this water shall become mad."

Next morning all the inhabitants, save the king and his lord chamberlain, drank from the well and became mad, even as the witch had foretold.

And during that day the people in the narrow streets and in the market places did naught but whisper to one another, "The king is mad. Our king and his lord chamberlain have lost their reason. Surely we cannot be ruled by a mad king. We must dethrone him."

That evening the king ordered a golden goblet
to be filled from the well. And when it was brought to him, he drank deeply, and gave it to his lord chamberlain to drink.

And there was great rejoicing in that distant city of Wirani, because its king and its lord chamberlain had regained their reason.¹

This simple story captures the thematic centrality of hegemony and discourse and how power in discourse perpetuates our conception of reality and truth by influencing the value formation of any society. The king, wise and knowing as he is, gives in to the hegemonic discourse of the majority of his people and to their normative idea of reason as opposed to his own perceived madness. In the Foucaultian conception of power and discourse, the idea of reason is established, not because it manages to withstand rigorous investigation and debates, but because it is determined as such by the power of numbers - the majority of the people that subscribes to certain values as truth. Madness, as Foucault suggests, "was essentially connected with the ... fundamental view of madness as a rejection of reason that left no place for the mad in rational society."² In this sense, rational society does not indicate the given (and essentially rational) content of the views of a given society but rather that particular rationality which represents the view of the majority of that society.

Similarly, in this anecdote the discourse of the majority prevails, not because it holds the most revered cup of reason as an antidote for madness but rather because of the dominance of a particular discourse of reason itself. Reason (or truth or morality, whatever we wish to name these fundamental human values) is determined by the prevalence and prestige of the discourses in which it is articulated and perpetuated and not in the essence of the forms and content of those values.

There is another manifestation of power in discourse that has the same effect of inclining our perceptions to its persuasive discursive mould: the power of supposed empirical and objective knowledge as propounded by Western cultural representation of the Eastern world termed Orientalism. Orientalism should be challenged due to its monolithic representations of a world diverse and complex in its nature, and due to the dominance of its discourses in essentialising those representations. My purpose in this thesis is to analyse and reveal Eurocentric representations by addressing specifically the images of Malay women in selected colonialist texts. For that purpose I use Bakhtin’s theory of the dialogical nature of texts to deconstruct discursive tropes. The theory replaces the idea of a univocal narrative by highlighting the contestatory and counter-hegemonic voices within any given text. The theory helps to break down the
“genteel mystification of the metropolis”\textsuperscript{3} that claims to produce a normative discourse of Otherness.

Power in discourse has been and will always be an integral part of human communication. Not that power and discourse are strange and undesirable bedfellows: both help shape and structure our social being into tolerable and cohesive existence. However, at the same time power and discourse also rationalise and codify certain aspects of human relationships into normalising ideas as though they reflect the real essence of that relationship. Civilised/barbaric, good/evil, mature/childish, rational/irrational are some of the normative oppositional categories that one society employs to describe itself positively and differentiate itself from a stigmatised other. Jacques Derrida explains that these binary oppositions are founded on the shifting ground of interpretative uncertainties as meaning and rationality are subjected to vigorous scrutiny and investigation regarding their definitiveness.\textsuperscript{4} By extending the implications of this argument to Eurocentric representations of the relationship between the colonising West and the colonised East, one is bound to find ruptures and inconsistencies in Western


discourses of the Other.

The Western world’s relationship with non-European societies provokes scrutiny and raises questions as to the essentialising and normative practices of its interpretation of them. And the instrumentality of discourse as part of the colonising effort should never be taken lightly. As Lennard Davis notes of colonial expansion:

[a] country must do more than simply steal another country: a series of explanations, representations, and rationalizations must intervene to justify political action. Even the inhabitants of the targeted colony must, for a successful colonisation, accept the domination of the language and symbols of this takeover. To win hearts and minds, one must occupy hearts and minds - in the dominant as well as the occupied countries.⁵

Discourse (or colonial discourse in this case) serves as an ideological instrument for rationalising the harsh reality of the relationship between coloniser and colonised into the, then, acceptable and normative themes of the white man’s burden on the one hand, and degenerate indigenes that are in need of salvation, on the other.

In this thesis I analyse colonial discourses of the Other by transposing the temporality of history to a specific

spatiality: British colonial intrusion into the Malay world and the perpetuation of the grand narrative of imperialism that followed political and physical, and to a greater extent, cultural domination of it. I explore linguistic and ideological formations and the ways in which power is inscribed in discourse in a one-sided narrative about the subjected indigenes. I focus especially on colonialists' discursive positions in relation to textual images of Malay women during the era of British imperial rule over the Malay world from 1874 to 1957.

This analysis is undertaken with the view that colonialist narrative was generally written by European authors for European readers. As Rana Kabbani clearly explains:

The traveler [writer] begins his journey with the strength of a nation or an empire sustaining him (albeit from a distance) militarily, economically, intellectually and, as is often the case, spiritually. He feels compelled to note down his observations in the awareness of a particular audience: his fellow-countrymen in general, his professional colleagues, his patron or his monarch. Awareness of this audience affects his perception, and influences him to select certain kinds of information, or to stress aspects of a country that
find resonances in the culture of his own nation.  

Under such circumstance, colonial authors were much closer to their European audiences as intended readers than the indigenes who are the subjects of their narratives. With that being the case the author is relatively “unconcerned with the truth-value of its [fictional or otherwise] representation.”

Since, historically, native readers, presumably, had little or no direct access to the text that colonial writers produced they could neither validate nor invalidate the truth-claims of the narratives. Compounded by the fact that European readers themselves had little access to indigenous literatures, colonialist texts remained the only source from which knowledge of the indigenous women and their subjectivity could be gleaned. Zdzislaw Najder, for example, argues that Conrad selected Borneo as the literary background of his Malay texts due to his conviction that he knew the locales better than his readers. This being the case, “colonialist discourse commodifies the native subject into a stereotyped object and uses him [or her] as a resource for colonialist fiction.”

The representations of the indigenous peoples, however, would not differ substantially from ideas of Others which drew

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8 Hellena Krenn, *Conrad’s Lingard Trilogy: Empire, Race, and Women in the Malay Novels* (New York: Garland, 1990), xxii.
9 Ibid. 64.
on pre-existing European epistemological discourses, thus serving to further strengthen the Manichean allegory that divides the European and Others. Hence, the representations of the colonised will be solely dictated by the imaginings of authors who, more likely than not, subscribe to the Eurocentric idea of the exoticism of the Eastern world. For example, when a historian as prominent as V.G. Kiernan makes a fallacious statement about Malay rulers who conferred on themselves "preposterous titles like Sultan of China," only an indigenous reader could detect the incongruity with historical facts. Any indigenous revision of those texts is bound to find loopholes, contradictions and silences with regard to indigenous characters. In those texts one will find impulses of the Western gaze looking down at Others, as well as female Others, as Edward Said notes, like "a sort of surrogate and even underground self." 

At this juncture, however, I wish to sound a note of caution regarding common assumptions about the constructions of the East within a general Western general episteme. In our great enthusiasm to project alternative interpretations of what we in the Eastern world feel are demeaning colonial discourses of the East, we must not succumb to the notion that this epistemology about the East, that derived its strength

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11 Qtd. in Peter Barry, Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 192.
from centuries of Western empirical and observational power, is always conspiratorial. That is to say, Orientalist discourses did not, initially, always or only serve hidden agendas or devious designs to ensure the hegemonic political status quo of West over East. It is equally valid to see Orientalism as an epistemology that initially primarily served the intellectual (and eventually political) curiosity of Europe as it collided with and then overcame the world that had always been in its collective consciousness. It is only in the later phases of colonialism, when capitalism became the driving force of imperialism that "Western intellectual production" became "complicit with Western international economic interests." It is at this moment of history that one finds further contradictions in the binary poles as Western representations of its Others collude with Western economic and political interests.

Fear and contempt on the one hand and respect and admiration on the other have always alternated in European portrayals of the East, reflecting the anxieties and authority

12 To argue that Western epistemological understanding of the East is conspiratorial makes a very compelling but complicated argument. For John M MacKenzie, Orientalism has always been an apolitical and even sympathetic study of the East. But Samir Amin, however, posits that there is a conspiratorial aspect of the European genealogical construct of its thought and philosophy as having ancient Greek origins free from any Eastern civilisational influences in the shaping of those philosophical formations. See Samir Amin, Eurocentrism (London: Zed, 1989). See also the Preface in John M MacKenzie, Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), xi-xxii.
in particular texts.\textsuperscript{14} But, with the advent of Europe as a rising civilisation from the fifteenth century on, and with its self-confidence increasing, the formulation of Orientalism as an epistemology served a less conspiratorial but equally disturbing master: the assumption of racial superiority that accompanied Europe’s manifest material, cultural, and political ascendancy over the non-European. Eventually its authority became contagious even to the colonised Others themselves. Thus, Kahlil Gibran’s story may be used to illuminate the power of hegemonic discourse. Unlike the king who is aware of his subjective consciousness but (in the urgency of self-preservation) gives way to the discourse of the majority, readers (in both East and West) are drawn into acquiescing in the truth of the discourse of Western writers due to its persuasive and normative discursive authority.\textsuperscript{15}

My thesis focuses on representations of Malay women in colonialists’ texts about Malaya. My core argument is that representations of the Malay female Other in these texts are shaped by Eurocentric views combined with colonial patriarchal ideology. This is what differentiates stereotypical assumptions about the Malay female Other from colonial

\textsuperscript{14}Miles Ogborn, "Writing Travels: Power, Knowledge and Ritual on the English East India Company’s Early Voyages", \textit{Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers}, NS, 27/2 (2002), 156.

\textsuperscript{15}The indigenes’ sense of denigration is referred to by JanMohamed as the “native’s internalization of Western culture” in the “hegemonic phase” after political decolonisation. It becomes apparent when indigenes attempt to measure their scale of civilisation using the colonisers’ economic and cultural yardsticks. This period “marks the formal transition to hegemonic colonialism”. See JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory", 62.
perceptions of the Malay world as a whole. Representations of her blend stereotypes of female exoticism, eroticism and sexual immorality, as well as suggest her infallibly degenerative influence on the morality of European men. I place these representations in the broader context of colonial representations of the Malay world to draw out what is particular to them. Therefore, in each chapter of textual analysis I address a rather elaborate broader context of colonial assumptions of the Malay world before dealing with the specificities of representations of and assumptions about the Malay female Other.

At this stage I wish to clarify the scope of my use of the word 'indigenous' in this thesis. When I consider myself as an 'indigene' of the Malay Archipelago it is more of a generic term in response to the definitions and assumptions made by colonial writers such as Frank Swettenham and travel writers such as Isabella Bird. These writers defined the people they assumed to be 'Malay' people for their readers with reference to their obvious physical attributes and not to their more refined cultural and physiological differences.

The question of Malay identity is complex and deserves a study of its own. Historically, the 'Malay' as a category of people was limited to those affiliated to the Johor-Melaka polity.\textsuperscript{16} The Malays were different from other ethnics such as

\textsuperscript{16}Even then the definition of what constitutes Malayness was ambiguous. See Timothy P. Barnard, "Texts, Raja Ismail and Violence: Siak and the
the Bugis, Minangs and Achehnese people who possessed their own cultural and even physical identities. This concept of exclusive Malay identity prevailed throughout Portuguese and Dutch intrusions as the European powers did not manage to colonise the whole of the Malay world and as local powers identified by ethnic identities tried to reassert their predominance after the demise of the Malacca sultanate. Therefore, power politics and diplomacy remained part of the political features of those eras whereby each ethnicity would attempt to assert its dominance and control by making allegiances and treaties with one or other local and foreign powers in order to subvert its enemies.

It was only during the British total colonisation of Malaya that the 'Malay' as a concept took on a new definition. By the turn of late nineteenth century Malaya was not only home to the different local ethnicities but also to immigrants from China and India whose physical characteristics were markedly different from the indigenous inhabitants. In order to ease racial identification for the purpose of governance, the British simply categorised these peoples under its rule by classifying them as Malays, Chinese and Indians. Thus, a new concept of the 'Malay' which prevails up to the modern era arose. It is this Malay definition that I use as my subject position and the subject position of the Malay women found in

The thesis comprises five chapters. Chapter One is a literature review that serves as groundwork for textual analyses. In this section I discuss the spatial and temporal nature of European racial ideology from the fifteenth to the late twentieth century, from the European Renaissance to post-1945 decolonisation. I also discuss key concepts such as colonialism, racism and Orientalism and their consequences for the formation of Eurocentric ideology and imperialist understandings of gender. In outlining understandings of gender in British imperialist ventures I show how a British sense of masculinity is tied to the arbitrary construction of the emasculated Other. Finally, I discuss representations of the female Other and her positioning within a general European discourse of difference.

In Chapter Two I elaborate the methodology that I employ to dissect selected colonial texts. I draw on Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism to read as well as deconstruct these texts. Basically, dialogism proposes the idea that any text is dialogical in nature and thus not subject to the sole ideological authority of the author. I reformulate Bakhtin’s concept by proposing an application of dialogism beyond the interplay of author and text to an ideological collision between writer and reader. By applying dialogism as a methodological approach in my thesis I investigate selected colonial texts with the purpose of finding narrative cracks
and fissures in order to tease out and reveal the underlying Eurocentric ideology obscured in seemingly neutral representations.

In Chapter Three I discuss travel narratives by British writers in which Malaya is the colonial setting. I have included travel narratives among my selected colonial texts to study, along with colonial fictions, because of the pseudo-objective nature of the writings. Unlike fiction, travel narrative is sometimes regarded as being in the same vein of truth to life as history and the natural sciences. In this chapter I discuss works by four British travel writers - two men and two women - whose professions and lengths of stay vary considerably. Frank Swettenham was a colonial official par excellence whose administrative experience spans thirty years and who was in his last official position the first Resident-General of the Federated Malay States. I analyse particularly his sketches of the Malay nation and his assumptions about Malay women in a range of sketches and stories: A Nocturne and Other Malayan Stories and Sketches (1895), Malay Sketches (1895), The Real Malay (1899), and Footprints in Malaya (1942). The other male colonial writer is John Thomson who was a surveyor and engineer in Malaya and Singapore from 1838 to 1853. Over ten years later, while a resident of New Zealand, Thomson wrote his reminiscences of the Malay nation in Glimpses into Life in Malayan Lands (1864) and Sequel to Some Glimpses into Life in the Far East (1865).
The two other colonial travel writers that I have selected are women. There is a particular reason for this gender-specific selection. Analysis of their work serves as a means of comparing their colonial outlooks with the more securely patriarchal writings of their male counterparts. Their status as visitors to Malaya and the lengths of their Malay experience vary. Isabella Bird was a celebrated writer whose fame preceded her five-week sojourn in the Malay world. She later relates her Malay experience in *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither* (1883). Looking at the text as a blend of the genres of the letter and the postcard, I focus especially on her assumptions about the indolence of Malay women and her sense of the shallowness of their intellectual capacity. The last travel writer, Emily Innes, stayed for almost six years in Malaya, and had bitter memories of her time there that impacted on her *The Chersonese with the Gilding Off* (1885). She was the wife of an official and felt that her husband, who resigned from his post, was unjustly treated by his superiors. I discuss her general assumptions about Malay women and also her stereotyping of a particular woman, Tunku Chi, as a representation of the Malay female Other.

In Chapter Four I explore the fictional Malay worlds of Joseph Conrad in *Almayer's Folly* (1895) and *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896). In developing an understanding of his ideology, I acknowledge that Conrad appears more problematic
due to his conflicting ideas of the grand narrative of imperialism, especially his doubts about the essentialised and normalised civilising discourses that it propounds. Moreover, like all great texts his novels encompass multiple layers of meaning and interpretative possibilities. He consciously writes them as a way of voyaging into and questioning our taken-for-granted understandings of human values such as morality, courage, truth and rationality. But at the same time those writings reveal the Eurocentric ideology that underpins his representations of Others. In the first part of the analysis I discuss how the two texts relate Malay piracy to a gendered stereotype of natural savagery. In the second part I study *Almayer’s Folly* and examine how Mrs. Almayer is represented as a savage conceptualised within a notion of the linearity of human history. In the final part I discuss *An Outcast of the Islands* and study Conrad’s notion of Aïssa as representative of the degenerate and degenerative Malay female Other who is detrimental to the moral wellbeing of wayward white men.\(^{17}\)

In Chapter Five I analyse two short stories written by Somerset Maugham. Maugham’s texts, in part due to their genre, are different from other colonial texts selected for the purpose of this research. Representations of Malay culture or

\(^{17}\)As a signpost, I have included Aïssa, who is of Arab and Malay heritage and the partner of Willems, as part of a study of colonial representations of the Malay woman because of my view that she is depicted by Conrad, not as an Arab, but as a Malay woman through his rendering of her subjectivity as consonant with the degenerative nature of the tropical jungle of Malaya.
characters are only incidental to the main focus of his fiction. In all his Malaysian short stories he conjures indigenous characters merely as textual background to his preoccupation with European characters and conflicts. I study in depth two of his short texts, “The Force of Circumstance” and “The Four Dutchmen”, while also making reference to other relevant stories by him. I open the chapter with a discussion of the notion of white prestige and its attendant issue of miscegenation. The next phase of my analysis is a brief discussion of the narrative technique of character distancing evident in the two short stories selected. Character distancing defines the limits of the accessibility of Maugham’s characters’ inner feelings and motivations to the reader. In the analysis of the short stories I show that the narrative technique constructs the voiceless Malay woman as immoral and villainous from the perspectives of readers.

A discerning reader might question my selection of travel narratives and fictions, especially my exclusion of writers as prolific as Hugh Clifford or Anthony Burgess. Admittedly, Hugh Clifford’s travel narratives and Anthony Burgess’ fictions are in my reading list and I had initially intended their representations of the Malay female Other to be part of the general critical analysis of colonial ideology. But like a weaver who needs enough threads to weave his clothes, a critic requires considerable subject matter to make a decent analysis. Upon further reading of their narratives I found
that they did not cast enough of a glance at Malay women to justify a deep and substantial analysis of them.

Eventually I intend this research as a model of reading practice. While the subjects of my analysis are Malay women in colonial Malaya, my thesis is not merely an exercise in interpretation of colonial texts with postcolonial strands. My thesis strives more to offer contestatory voices of the marginal over the more dominant and normative discourse in the broader dialectical struggle over interpretation and subjectivity. This thesis offers a model of discursive resistance to significations of otherness conceptualised within any discursively totalising and alienating regime. It celebrates multiplicity of voices over a singularly authoritative and hegemonic discourse.
CHAPTER 1  LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter contextualises my research by providing an overview of European political, material and military ascendancy and its relationships with the development of important intellectual and ideological formations such as Eurocentrism, Orientalism and racism. We need to understand these formations as they underpin ideas of biological difference that inform representations of the cultural divide between Europeans and their Others. Next, I discuss ideas of gender that have structured the power dynamics of the Western world and its Others. Since Europe itself was culturally patriarchal the view of the East as feminine was subsumed under the comparably patriarchal ideology of looking at Eastern women as the inferior other. The main assumption was that the West was masculine as much as the East was feminine; it was rational as opposed to the irrationality of the Orient. As such, Westerners viewed themselves as standing on the high moral pedestal from which they surveyed and observed foreign cultural landscapes of anarchic eroticism and emasculated Others. Finally, I focus on specific representations of the female Other in Europeans’ gendered history of colonialism. The Eurocentric discourse shapes normative assumptions of the exotic and erotic female Other into articulations of sexual and cultural differences and envisions them as actual female subaltern subjectivity. These stereotypes permeate
representations by colonial writers of the Malay female Other.

1.1 EUROCENTRISM, RACISM AND ORIENTALISM

The orient, seen as the embodiment of sensuality, is always understood in feminine terms and accordingly its place in Western imagery has always been constructed through the simultaneous gesture of racialization and feminization.¹⁸

The human being is a social animal. Like some of the lower animal species we have always found living in groups as irresistible as meeting our physical and sexual needs. Evidently the ability to communicate provides the most obvious reason for our inclination to socialise with each other (even though questions of cause and effect can be blurred over these categories). There is also often a sense of strength in numbers against harsh nature as well as against other groups of probably hostile humans. Arguably, it might be that once humans began to prosper numerically as well as materially (and different groups of humans progressed differently) there were tendencies towards affiliations between individuals with closer blood ties, the same ethnicity, or similar idealisms or culture. Over time clashes of interests between groups of humans, probably over more fertile lands or maybe due to some

grandiose aspirations of some militaristic leaders, led humans to protracted but constant wars throughout their history.

Wars and clashes of cultures undoubtedly led to perceptions of differences between peoples and cultures, producing a history of differences that culminates in the ideology of racism. However, my present concern is not to analyse the perceptions of difference of various civilisations that have created ripples in the pond of human history (although I believe that in one way or another every dominant civilisation must have had the idea of the superiority of its idealisms and culture over lesser contemporary civilisations embedded in its collective psyche). This research is more concerned with a particularly recent dominant civilisation that developed ideas of cultural difference and a sense of the superiority of its values and culture in relation to those of Others, but with a new perspective.

The advent of Europe as a dominant civilisation has been a relatively recent phenomenon in the history of humankind. The history of European domination began when Christopher Columbus discovered the New World in 1492 and Vasco da Gama found the sea route to Asia via the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa in 1497. From that moment, successive waves of European powers set sail for the Americas, Asia and Africa in search of Glory, God, and Gold, or in less grandiose terms, with objectives that were "military, missionary, and
Europe’s physical domination of the world loosened after the World War of 1939-45 with the loss of both prestige and empire as a consequence of the war. Aspirations of colonised indigenous peoples for independence led to the gradual dismantling of empires right up until 1997 with the British handover of Hong Kong to China that ended an official history of European colonialism that had lasted approximately five hundred years. Only a small part of the world still remains colonised. Examples are the French New Caledonia and Gibraltar, which is under British rule. But what lingered and prospered in the European collective consciousness during colonialism was the idea of the racial superiority of Europeans.

Racism is a relatively new ideology. The word race or similar terms\(^{20}\) in languages other than English did not gain wide currency until around the late eighteenth century\(^{21}\) or early nineteenth century.\(^{22}\) The word found its way into European vocabularies as an attempt at explaining Europe’s superior material stature in comparison with the non-European


\(^{20}\)David Theo Goldberg, on the other hand, claims that the word race first came into usage in English in 1508, although the notion of we as collective European peoples was recorded in the mid-fifteenth century in papal letters. These social differentiations, Goldberg asserts, marked the beginning of a European racial sense. See his "Modernity, Race and Morality", Cultural Critique, 24 (Spring 1993), 198.


\(^{22}\)Kabbani, Europe’s Myths of Orient, 62.
world. The great technological divide between Europe and the rest of the world, especially during the Romantic era that followed the Enlightenment, helped buttress the idea of biological differences between peoples. The idea was accompanied by the assumption that humankind lives out a history that is linear in nature with Europe at the forefront of civilisation. As Michel Leiris puts it, "a phase in the history of humanity [is] analogous to that of childhood in the life of the individual," with Europeans being at the adult stage.

The philosopher Friedrich Hegel conceptualises history as "the development of Spirit in time" and regards the history of humanity as "an advance to something better, more perfect," as opposed to the unchanging and cyclical processes of Nature. However, according to Hegel, only a nation that has acquired the knowledge that the "Spirit-man as such-is free" will be able to reach the height of civilisational perfection. He indicates the superiority of the free individual over other forms of freedom. However, Hegel states that the Orientals (or Others) have never achieved such revelation. As he explains:

The general statement ... of the various grades in the consciousness of Freedom - and which we applied

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2Qtd. in ibid. 209.
2Qtd. in ibid. 195.
in the first instance to the fact that Eastern nations knew only that one is free; the Greek and Roman world only that some are free; while we know that all men absolutely (man as man) are free - supplies us with the natural division of Universal history.\(^{27}\)

Universal history, in this Hegelian sense, is the history of humankind and the development of its free will. However, the assumption by Hegel is testimony to the idea of degrees of enlightenment of peoples and cultures, with Eastern political history as mostly despotic and totalitarian at one extreme, and the West as benign and democratic at the other.

European history was understood as “a progression from Ancient Greece to Rome to feudal Christian Europe to capitalist Europe,”\(^ {28}\) with capitalist economic and liberal democratic principles being viewed as the social pinnacle of human values. As Peter Fritzsche notes, in Francis Fukuyama’s \textit{The End of History and the Last Man} (1992), “[t]he last man left standing is a democrat and a capitalist. And once there is a winner, there is no longer a contest. This Last Man has concluded History.”\(^ {29}\) In this context, Fukuyama is merely picking up and echoing the theory of the linearity of history with Europe in the perennial front row of human progress. In

\(^{27}\)Qtd. in ibid. 197.

\(^{28}\)Amin, \textit{Eurocentrism}, 90.

\(^{29}\)Peter Fritzsche, review of Francis Fukuyama, \textit{The End of History and the Last Man}, \textit{American Historical Review}, 97 (1992), 817.
tandem with the same theme, Fukuyama claims that we have reached the finishing line of the history marathon and there is no more running to do since "[h]istory with a capital H has come to an end, although the lower-case history of births and deaths and private aspirations persists."30 It is a history of humanity in which Europe proclaimed itself to be "the master race par excellence."31

From the view of the non-Western world, however, there was a familiar and pervasive theme in the interaction with this overwhelming and domineering alien civilisation that had settled in their midst. It was the non-Europeans’ feeling that Europeans regarded and conducted themselves as superior to non-Europeans. There seemed to be a collective memory and perception of Europe with regard to the Other with respect to its power of intellectualism and depth of wisdom analogous to the way Shakespeare’s Prospero’s racial ideology and magic dominates the othered Caliban and Sycorax. Western explorers, conquerors, administrators, missionaries, colonists and philanthropists, whether evil or benign, imperious or otherwise, generally possessed a singleness of view about the superiority of their civilisation and the inferiority of Others. Whenever and wherever the European and non-European worlds collided, the non-European world was generally looked down upon as in need of salvation from the darkness of

30Ibid.
31Kabbani, Europe’s Myths of Orient, 62.
barbarism that could only come from the more enlightened Europe. Thus, it fell to Europe to shoulder the burden of ushering the rest of the world into a modern civilisation.\textsuperscript{32} The inferior civilisations that Europe encountered needed to be transformed into its image of civility and modernity or risked being eradicated from the face of the earth for being a hindrance to humankind’s “great scheme of perfect happiness.”\textsuperscript{33} This idea alludes to the evolutionary processes of natural selection proposed by Charles Darwin in his \textit{Origin of Species} (1859) whereby hardier species would replace weaker ones. This Darwinian moral justification seeped into Western historical, political, cultural, as well as literary discourses; it still needs to be dismantled to expose the real nature of colonialism and imperialism and the fallibility of racial ideology.

Orientalism as a European epistemological understanding of non-European worlds helped shape its relationship with them as well. This is in view of the fact that European colonisation of most of the world, as an aggressive imperial expansion, could never achieve such prolonged sustainability with mere men-o-war as the driving force of empire amidst some resentment at home and in the face of constant local resistance in the colonies. The vitality and strength of such endeavour came as much from the moral conviction of the

\textsuperscript{33}Sven Lindqvist, \textit{Exterminate All the Brutes} (London: Granta, 1998), 8.
righteousness of Europe’s conduct and from the belief in its rightful position as the master of humankind as from the might of its military muscle. It had strong faith in its moral responsibility to mould the world to its idea of civilisation. This conviction and an almost religious faith in its righteousness are derived from Orientalism that assumed "Oriental despotism, Oriental splendour, cruelty, sensuality." In this sense Orientalism was ever ready and available as the reference for moral re-fashioning to Europe’s ideological advantage.

Charting the development of this ideology forms the basic analytical trajectory of Said’s seminal *Orientalism* (1978). Orientalism, as an epistemology of the East, is basically an ideological construction of the East from a superior European moral and social vantage point. This ideology formed in the Western consciousness from dissemination of the vast works of Western scholars who studied diverse non-European societies but with invariably general themes of Eastern exoticism, backwardness and ignorance of their own cultures. Founded on study and understanding of the East as a monolithic Other Orientalism became an important part of Western intellectual and sociological understanding of its Self. By constructing images of Others as base and benighted, Europe projected itself as progressive and civilised and eventually "gained strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient.

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as a sort of surrogate and even underground self.”35 Said’s *Orientalism*, admittedly, focuses on Europe’s contact with its most adjacent Other – the Middle Eastern and Islamic world. However, as the tentacles of European imperialism spread to other worlds in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and as the centre of power shifted from Europe to the United States in the twentieth, Orientalism as a Western way of understanding formerly incomprehensible Others began to encompass all newly colonised lands and peoples. *Orientalism* analyses representations of the Orient and Islam in a corpus of work embracing Western scientific, diplomatic and literary discourses. The most conspicuous defining feature of much of the Orientalist discourse was the claim to neutral scholarly objectivity as a method of observation.

Using Michel Foucault’s proposition of knowledge as the producer of power and power as the producer of truths, Said analyses the implications of the Western construction of the Orient as an object of knowledge. For Said, Orientalism embodies the West’s desire to set boundaries between itself and its Other and serves as a means to impose its will to power, especially during the period of colonial expansion. This period reached its climax in the nineteenth century; its completion required not only political will and military strength, but also, and more importantly, moral justification to make the enormous endeavour sustainable.

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35Ibid. 3.
Orientalism as a body of knowledge about the East was based on Europeans’ sense of confidence and superiority and “a predetermined set of ideas and prejudices.”\footnote{Sarah Graham-Brown, *Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East 1860-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 6.} The process of empirical Orientalism depends on and sustains erroneous assumptions at both ends of the binary pole. Notably, the Orient is systematically characterised as feminine, exotic, erotic, despotic, backward and irrational, thereby producing images of the West as advanced and rational, masculine, familiar, moral and just. The Eastern cultures, despite some of them having a long historical, cultural and literary genealogy, are assumed to be ignorant of their own histories and cultures. Thus, Western historians took upon itself the responsibility to fill in a perceived historical void, to write the truth of the East’s own cultures and histories.\footnote{Frederick N Bohrer playfully refers to exoticism as “a Western attempt to flirt with Western expectations.” See Frederick N Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture: Imagining Mesopotamia in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11.} As a body of knowledge produced by the Occident about the Orient, Orientalism bypasses Oriental sources in a process of legitimisation that asserts the white man’s burden of speaking for and eventually ruling over the Eastern world.

In our dealings with postcolonial issues we cannot help but retrace the significant moments of change in European history that have led to this moment in our history. This is
necessary above all in order to understand the various historical dynamics that led to European material strength relative to the non-European world. In perspective, the very term *colonialism* conjures images of war, oppression, exploitation, master and subject races. Thus this research is contextualised within the spatial and temporal boundary of European colonisation of the world beginning in the fifteenth century with Portuguese exploratory expeditions down the West Coast of Africa and Columbus’s and Vasco da Gama’s voyages as they opened the routes for waves of European imperialism conducted by Spanish and Portuguese sea fleets (soon to be followed by the Dutch, French, British and other lesser European powers).

These voyages and discoveries were catalysed by the spectacular European Renaissance (circa 1500-1650 A.D.) with its new vigour for knowledge and adventure. The Renaissance saw the blossoming of knowledge in many spheres of European life, especially in arts, science and philosophy, knowledge that draws on revolutionary humanist methods and concepts for understanding humans and their environment. Although Renaissance thinkers on the whole did not reject entirely the fundamental doctrines of Christian theology, in actual fact the era can be seen retrospectively to bear the seeds of humanism (and secularism) that would lead to the declining influence of religion in almost all aspects of Western life. Humanism stressed the centrality and individuality of the
human subject and so gradually replaced theology as the fundamental philosophy of human existence. The repercussions reverberated into other spheres of European life. The persuasive power of science and reason became "central to the ways in which Western Anglo-European culture understands its own history." Rationality and the authority of science seriously displaced theologism during the Enlightenment period (circa 1650-1789 A.D.); at the same time this change also sealed the fate of unsuspecting worlds beyond Europe's old borders in the form of imperialism unprecedented in the pervasiveness and breadth of its power of domination, destruction and persuasion.

The importance of the shift from theology to humanism as a worldview in the Western world can never be overstressed. The repercussions of humanistic philosophy in the Western scientific world, alongside the phenomenal flowering of knowledge in all spheres, led directly to the scientific categorisation of the non-Western world. The Renaissance, however, did not directly lead to racism as an ideology of difference that privileged Europe and made sense of its relationships with non-Europeans. The Renaissance was but part

\footnote{Mary Klages, \textit{Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed} (London: Continuum, 2006), 11.}

\footnote{There are two distinct approaches to humanism in the Western historical context. The first was the literary humanism of the Renaissance and the other the scientific humanism of the Enlightenment era. Leela Gandhi explains these two chronologically distinct but ideologically similar forms of humanism. She posits that while both valorised the human subject they also suggest the racial inequality of different peoples. For further explanation see the chapter "Postcolonialism and the New Humanities" in Leela Gandhi, \textit{Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction} (St Leonards, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 1998).}
of the social progression of the Western world towards a higher level of materialism based on an economic structure now known as the capitalist system. Once the capitalist ideology developed in Europe during the Renaissance it blossomed into a system of ideas unprecedented in history in its formative influence on European civilisation. Capitalism in Europe marked the Renaissance as the beginning of a new modern era different from the medievalism it left behind. Eventually, Europe sensed its material strength relative to other civilisations. It was the beginning of an idea, in the collective consciousness of Europeans, that "the conquest of the world by their civilisation is henceforth a possible objective." The material strength developed into an idea of the cultural and social superiority of Europe vis-à-vis non-Europeans. This idea of superiority is what we refer to as Eurocentrism but it was yet to develop into racism as an ideology based on perceived biological differences.

Eurocentrism is constituted by "beliefs that postulate past or present superiority of Europeans over non-Europeans." Eurocentrism can be said to develop out of Orientalism as a body of knowledge of the Europeans about the East while always maintaining European culture on the higher civilisational scale. Eurocentrism and Orientalism are much more complex than a mere prejudice or bias of Europe against its Others.

41 Amin, *Eurocentrism*, 73.
Orientalism itself is an accumulation of knowledge of the East over hundreds of years that eventually produces a set of beliefs based on empirical suppositions and observations that become truths after a period of time. These truths are then picked up by later academicians and intellectuals as the bases for further academic investigations and explorations. And the same knowledge becomes established as an epistemological thread from which Europeans weave their understanding of Eastern worlds.

Racism as an idea of difference was buttressed during the Romantic period of the eighteenth century and the subsequent era of New Imperialism (circa 1871-1939), when the Industrial Revolution widened further the technological divide between Europe and its Others. The Industrial Revolution underpinned Europe’s material achievements while Romantic nationalism as a political philosophy articulated European racial ideology vis-à-vis the non-Europeans. It was an era when the seeds of nationalism began to take shape within European political thinking after the French Revolution of 1789 that saw political competition among the different European nations turning to an assertion of national identity to buttress each other’s claim to racial superiority. Paradoxically, the Romantic period was an era of philosophical contradiction in the European consciousness as far as the idea of humanity was concerned. Inwardly, after the social and political turmoil of the French Revolution the mood was for social equality as
peasant masses revolted against the old class-based and semi-feudal society. The idea of Republicanism, emanating from the euphoria of the French Revolution, threatened the traditional power structures in the rest of Europe in favour of power for the masses at the cost of the ruling elites. The Revolution indicated the beginning of an end to feudalism in Europe as political power was redistributed to the lower echelons of French (and later European) society. Having tasted power for the first time and driven by the idealisms of national identity and democracy the revolutionaries considered themselves the beacons of hope and inspiration for the oppressed and downtrodden. What the Revolution smashed was the notion of pre-ordained claims to royal authority to rule over the masses. The French people, and eventually other Europeans, realised that given the opportunity they had as much ability to rule and to rule effectively. Egalitarianism was in the air with “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité” as the main slogan. The triumph of liberty over tyranny would turn into a passion for liberation for “all enslaved humanity.” But such ideals of freedom for “all enslaved humanity” were meant exclusively for Europeans. Beyond the borders of Europe, however, the Romantic racial thought took the opposite humanistic route as Romantic philosophers reemphasised the Greek traditional heritage of Europe, as a way of solidifying its racial instincts. Consequently, European scientists “began to rank races

according to their innate abilities,"⁴⁴ thereby solidifying the latent strains of racism prevalent in the European collective consciousness.

European colonisation of the world saw European adventurers and voyagers setting out on explorations in search of new lands. These voyages, besides enriching European capitals with treasures from the conquered worlds, also produced an enormous number of published accounts of indigenous lands and peoples, which during the Enlightenment period, that "saw science emanating from the rational mind of man unfettered by emotion or superstition,"⁴⁵ stimulated the categorisation of humans as part of the scientific classification of the natural world. These classifications conceptualised nature as a hierarchical structure that systematically assigned the flora and fauna of the natural world to a set position and status. This categorisation of humanity created the Manichean binary of good/bad, superior/inferior, civilised/barbaric, moral/immoral where Europeans were always on the positive side of the differentiating pole whereas all other cultures were relegated to the negative. Consequently, these pseudo-scientific categorisations consolidated the perception of Europe as civilised and the non-European world as barbaric in its

perceived “carnal, untamed, instinctual [and] raw nature.” More than anything else, science became the instrument for the classification of humankind into degrees of humanity and morality.

The perceived inequality between civilisations in terms of their relative scientific advancement was the precursor to the racial ideology that justified the colonial political goals and economic interests of European imperialism. It prompted the delineation of biological differences as a pseudo-scientific method of categorising humankind. Thus David Hume, the philosopher and historian of the Scottish Enlightenment mused:

I am to suspect the negroes and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any other individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the whites, such as the ancient Germans, the present Tartars, have still something eminent about them, in their valor, form of government, or some other

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particular.  

Such confident views prevailed not only among the general European populations of the Enlightenment and subsequent Romantic period, but especially among those who had first-hand encounters with the non-European worlds. It was even accepted as a valid fact among the intelligentsia of Western society, including the likes of Immanuel Kant, Herbert Spencer, Friedrich Hegel and John Locke.  

But the Enlightenment period was merely a transitional phase of racial rationalism. It was not until the nineteenth century, when social Darwinism became an intellectual force, that pseudo-science became a justification for biological racism. This Darwinian intellectual force, in turn, made possible systematic and scientific analyses of the Oriental Other as a subject. No longer was the Orient described subjectively as the inferior Other. Finally "science, medical expertise and medical jurisprudence could be summoned to impose a civilizing order upon a barbaric traditional society."  

Thus, humanism, with material rationality as its fundamental philosophy and social Darwinism as its intellectual force, enabled apparently more supposedly objective investigations, analyses, categorisations, and  

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48 Kant, the German Enlightenment philosopher, for example, concluded that the skin colour of the Africans was indicative enough of their low mental capacity. See Goldberg, "Modernity, Race and Morality", 212.
descriptions of the Orient. These scientific and objective observations eventually buttressed and confirmed long-held, ever-present but unverified perceptions of the dark worlds beyond Western borders. In short, racism as justified by pseudo-scientific rationalisation had become part of an ideology of European othering of the non-Western world. This justification, in turn, lubricated European colonial ideologies as Europe imposed its brand of civilisation on subjugated territories.

At this juncture in my discussion, an elaboration of the idea of race as a categorising factor is important. An understanding of the ideological ground on which Europeans stood or their views of the hierarchical differences that positioned them as different from Others can be illuminating in analysing the texts that European writers produce. As this research will show the racial ideology that developed during the Enlightenment and Romantic eras was influential in the formation of ideas of racial superiority reflected in European narratives and discourses concerning the Others.

There can be two grounds on which a person from one culture surveys, attempts to comprehend and forms biases concerning another culture. This perception and understanding can be based on differences in cultural practices (ethnocentrism) or it can be derived from a purportedly scientific biological-based prism (racism). Over the course of their evolving material progress, Europeans, at certain
moments in their history, chose the biological-based prism in their attempt at understanding their superior material position in relation to the Other.

Ethnocentrism is the general belief in the superiority of one’s culture and the inferiority of another. This definition of ethnocentrism puts differences in cultural practices and values as the basic foundation of prejudice. As such there is a likely tendency in terms of one culture accepting and assimilating individuals or people of different cultures into its fold. Skin colour and the circumference of the cranium were never hindrances to acceptance into the dominant culture. Racism, on the other hand, is an ideology that places biological differences as the underlying factor and assumes the superiority of one group of people over another based purely on their physical characteristics. It is the belief that humankind can be categorised hierarchically into superior or inferior races based on the difference of their biological features. Joseph-Arthur, Comte de Gobineau, the most important purveyor of Aryan racial superiority, explained human inequality in his essay “The Inequality of Human Races”:

Do all men possess in an equal degree an unlimited power of intellectual development? In other words, has every human race the capacity for becoming equal to every other? The question is ultimately concerned with the infinite capacity for improvement possessed by the species as a whole, and with the equality of
races. I deny both points.  

To Gobineau only Europeans possessed the capacity for intellectual progression and in this developmental capacity they were unsurpassed. The term species that Gobineau applied as a form of differentiation, appealed to the Enlightenment era’s pseudo-scientific attempt at explaining the material divides between Europe and its Others. This ideology, for example, posits that children of biologically inferior parents can never achieve the same level of intellectual capacity as biologically superior adoptive parents.

Thus, racism does not allow for the possibility of inclusiveness that ethnocentrism might. The individual is intellectually trapped by his or her biological determinants. As Charles Hirschman further argues, "[t]he former [ethnocentrism] permits the absorption of subject peoples; the latter [racism] creates caste lines." Consequently, non-whites can never achieve a greater mental capacity, not because of the cultural environment that helps shape their habits and modes of thinking, but because their physical and biological imperfections prevent them from attaining that higher intellectual competence of a civilised being.

With reference to colonialism, racism was buttressed by three factors that mark the delineation between Europeans and

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51Hirschman, "The Origins and Demise of the Concept of Race", 389.
the Other: 1) the practice of slavery in the Americas; 2) European colonisation of the greater part of the world, especially to include Asia and Africa in the nineteenth century; and 3) the development of social Darwinism as an explanatory theory of the superiority of Europeans over other peoples, again in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{53} Seen from this perspective, racism as an ideology developed out of the political expediency of colonialism and the subsequent exploitation of colonised lands and subjects.

Nineteenth-century biological theories of racial hierarchy were not new in stressing racial difference.\textsuperscript{54} Social Darwinism\textsuperscript{55} merely extended a theory by Charles Darwin whose theory of the evolutionary change of organism through a survival of the fittest process was extended to include social competition in human societies. As a social theory, this appealed to European scholars and administrators during the period of High Imperialism because it supported arguments that justified the complete colonisation of the non-Western world: the white races even thought it a duty to conquer humans and nature. As Homi Bhabha explains:

\textbf{[t]he objective of colonial discourse is to construe}

\textsuperscript{53}Hirschman, "The Origins and Demise of the Concept of Race", 392.
\textsuperscript{54}Philippa Levine, "Sexuality, Gender and Empire", in Philippa Levine (ed.), Gender and Empire (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 136.
\textsuperscript{55}Peter Dickens argues that the theories of race were discussed even before Darwin published the \textit{Origin of Species by Natural Selection} (1859). In fact, other theorists such as John Lubbock and Herbert Spencer dealt with the issue of social evolution years before Darwin’s own theory was published. See Peter Dickens, Social Darwinism (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), 15-19.
the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.\textsuperscript{56}

In colonial history the extermination of indigenes and the atrocities committed against local populations were explained away in the Darwinian sense as the ecology of nature striving towards perfection. The Darwinian logic was that "[m]an was a part of nature and in nature even destruction is normal."\textsuperscript{57}

But racism was never objective in its stated approach to scientific categorisation of humankind. It was merely part of a discourse of difference and othering through superficial observations and assumptions. As Patrick Wolfe explains, as a discourse, the idea of race is a concept with two main strains:

First, it is hierarchical - difference is not neutral; to vary is to be defective, in proportion to the degree of variation alleged to obtain. Second, it links physical characteristics to cognitive, cultural and moral ones, fusing the concrete and the abstract, the animal and the human, the somatic and the semiotic.\textsuperscript{58}

As I have stated, the idea of race actually served more

\textsuperscript{56}Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question...", \textit{Screen}, 24/6 (Nov/Dec 1983), 23.  
\textsuperscript{57}Lindqvist, \textit{Exterminate All the Brutes}, 117.  
tangible economic purposes than what were articulated. In fact, racism as an ideology was closely bound up with factors related to European colonial endeavours in dominating the rest of the world. As economic precedence became the major concern of the competing European powers, racial theory became a convenient colonising discourse. The ideology was devised out of the need to serve a greater objective - colonial capitalism - the immoral human exploitation of which was dangerously obvious and the profit it generated immense.

As I have discussed above, Western scholarship and ideology held a view of the linearity of human civilisation proposed by Western anthropologists. Unilinear evolution establishes the presumption that humans as social beings progressed from a state of simplicity to a state of superiority. Due to its martial prowess in defeating non-European nations, the Westerners mistakenly believed that its military power was also reflective of its "intellectual and even biological superiority."59 This assumption was produced out of the perceived infallibility of Western military and political dominance against degeneration as part of the natural progression of civilisations. This lack of historical perspective prevented Europe from understanding the transitory nature of its privileged position and allowed Europe to regard its destiny as permanent in cutting the path of progress with

59Lindqvist, Exterminate All the Brutes, 47.
other civilisations trailing more or less behind.

Somehow, in its zenith, every ascending civilisation fails to learn from the lessons of history that constantly remind us of the shifting sands of time over which every dominant civilisation is founded. H.G. Wells in his fiction *War of the Worlds* (1898) reminds us of the inevitability of this civilisational downfall when he states that "[i]n the case of every other predominant animal the world has ever seen, I repeat, the hour of its complete ascendancy has been the eve of its complete overthrow."\(^{60}\) Wells was well aware of the euphoria of triumphalism of Britain and other European imperial powers over their superiority and the inferiority of Others when he wrote most of his fiction. Wells, in fact, gives implicit reminders of the fallibility of their pride faced with the forces of nature. It would take the aftermath of the Great European War of 1914–1918 for Europe, and Britain especially, to ponder the possibility of the wheel of time turning against European material superiority and civilisational ascendancy, an inescapable process that Europe had no power to elude.

Writers of the late colonial era such as R.H. Bruce Lockhart and Somerset Maugham were all too aware of the inevitable decline of European imperialism. Throughout human history empires, like P.B. Shelley’s *Ozymandias’,* have had their duration and cycle and been swallowed up by the sands of

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\(^{60}\)Qtd. in ibid. 79.
time only to be replaced by another. The main thematic trajectory, in fact, of Lockhart’s travel writing is the inevitability of the decline of the British Empire. In Return to Malaya (1936) Lockhart muses:

Empires were like flowers, trees, animals, human beings, and everything else that had life. They had their birth, their childhood, their youth, their manhood, their middle-age, their decline and then their death.\(^6\)

In retrospect we cannot deny the achievements of Europe in certain areas and its contribution to the world in terms of its inventions and discoveries, its technical ability, political power and martial prowess but “[i]t is questionable ... whether these achievements have yet brought a greater sum of happiness to mankind as a whole.”\(^6\) The European civilising mission, that Kipling has unforgettably moralised in his poem “The White Man’s Burden” (1899), left a bitter taste in the mouths of its colonial subjects once they experienced what this noble sentiment meant in practice. Conrad’s Heart of Darkness (1899) not only exposes the failures of those civilising missions, but also reveals the cruel physical and economic exploitation of colonised lands and peoples. The reality of colonialism is memorably summed up when Kurtz, who

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\(^6\) Leiris, “Race and Culture”, 85.
epitomises Europe, in his death throes utters the famous phrase, "The horror! The horror!"\(^{63}\)

However, the narcissistic ideology that imagines the superiority of Self over Other is not exclusively symptomatic of Western civilisation. The hubris of a culture in its presumed pre-eminence over another, I believe, has always been part of the history of human civilisation irrespective of the location of the metropole. Philip Holden, for example, refers to "auto-orientalism"\(^{64}\) as the contagious discursive dynamics of Orientalism that can affect other cultures as much as Europe. His analysis of Lim Boon Keng's *Tragedies of Eastern Life* (1927)\(^{65}\) reveals how the writer foresees the inevitability of European decadence being replaced with Confucianism "as a perfect expression of Enlightenment rationality."\(^{66}\) To further his version of the intractability of the passage of time where civilisations are concerned, Lim states, "it was the Confucian junzi, not the English gentleman, who would inherit the mantle of development and progress,"\(^{67}\) indicating his belief in the advent of a Chinese civilisation to eclipse European imperialism in a time to come. But more importantly, the

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\(^{65}\)Lim Boon Keng's *Tragedies of Eastern Life* (1927) is a narrative set in colonial Malaya. The main theme is the rise of an immigrant Chinese civilisation to prominence to replace the decadent European administrators of Malaya. In neo-Orientalist fashion, Lim dismisses the indigenous Malays as unfit to rule the land due to his assumption of their aversion to work, thereby reinventing and appropriating the Western Oriental discourse as part of a Chinese civilisational dualism.

\(^{66}\)Holden, "Reinscribing Orientalism", 212.

\(^{67}\)Ibid.
threats to European mastery of the world were already apparent even before the World War of 1939–45 and it would soon crumble after those tumultuous years.

Holden’s analysis merely shows the failure of human beings in general in coming to terms with their pride. However, what demarcates Western Orientalism as different from others is the sheer quantity and quality of the range of representations of the East that have established Orientalism as an epistemology. No other civilisation has devoted so much labour, intellect and energy in so many academic fields to merely understand other cultures, a process which did not bring the West and East any nearer to each other but rather caused them to drift further apart. After all, “[the] relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony.”\textsuperscript{68} It is a relationship of power that will always be a recurring pattern in human history as long as humans see more differences than similarities between them.

1.2 COLONIALISM AND GENDER

European imperialism was a gendered hegemony. The discourse of East-West relationship as articulated by Western intellectuals and writers subscribed to the notion of gender difference in the metaphorical masculine-feminine dichotomy.

\textsuperscript{68}\textit{Said, Orientalism}, 5.
Orientalism, as a form of knowledge of the Other, assumes that
the West is superior and as such masculine, while its Other is
inferior and thus feminine. As such, gender metaphors were
common in imperial discourse as in the descriptions of
colonial exploration and conquest of the colonised lands. As
Yeğenoğlu states:

> the discourse of Orientalism is mapped powerfully
> onto the language of phallocentrism and thereby
> points to the inextricable link between
> representations of cultural and sexual difference.69

In this sense, European colonialism of the Eastern world can
be understood as being gendered and sexualised. In the uneven
power relationship we can say that European colonials view the
colonised population the way a male views the perceived
inferior female. Laura Donaldson captures this colonial
masculine ideology in her analysis of David Lean’s 1984
cinematic rendering of E.M. Forster’s 1924 novel *A Passage to
India* when she describes the colonialist image of India as “a
cauldron of anarchic eros and the exotic Other for the West’s
voyeuristic eye.”70 By that she implies that the “mysterious
and exotic” Orient attracted Western masculine desire the way
a man was attracted to a dark, alluring and feminine Eastern
subject.

It is in this sexual and gendered sense that European

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69Yeğenoğlu, Colonial Fantasies, 11.
colonialism and patriarchy can be understood to share the same ideological assumptions. In the case of patriarchy in Europe Western feminists have always asserted that the struggle for equality goes hand in hand with the need to counter men's perception of women as emotional, irrational and lacking in the mental capacity to be fully developed civilised beings. These assumptions about women are part of an elementary patriarchal ideology that considers women to represent the lower value of nature as opposed to men who represent the higher value of culture. For example in patriarchal Britain the social position of power of man over woman was also gendered. In the patriarchal society, masculinity as an ideology was built around a collection of values, which Patricia Sexton lists as

- courage, inner direction, certain forms of aggression, autonomy, mastery, technological skill,
- group solidarity, adventure and considerable amounts of toughness in mind and body.

These qualities were seen to be associated with men as opposed to qualities inherent in women such as being weak, emotional, and innately dependent on others especially men.

This patriarchal/masculine ideology was an essential character of European society. Once the ideology traversed the

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continental boundary into the wider empires, white masculinity retained this idea of the power and predominance of white men, now in relation to new subjects — both male and female indigenous Others. Kathleen Wilson, for example, notes how gender became a differentiating signifying order both at home and in colonial relationships.73 Naturally in the colonial domain, masculinity was encoded in British gender constructions as a foundation of empire-building. A sedentary and feminine life at home was contrasted with the adventurous and masculine lifestyle of the rough frontiersman controlling and expanding the boundary of empire.

The notion of masculinity that was transported from the homeland into colonised territories was institutionalised in the British culture via its learning institutions. The idea of British superiority and masculinity, as Patrick Williams states, was received from the public schools that promoted the "notions of good conduct, manly activities (including games), hard work, anti-intellectualism, and the nature and position of women."74 These were the virtues the institutions inculcated in would-be empire builders of the British dominions. It was also firmly believed that the fate of the empire was dependent on those virtues.75 Thus, colonial masculinity became a model for British manhood in all classes, especially from 1880 to

74Qtd. in Zawiah Yahya, Resisting Colonialist Discourse (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1994), 43.
75Ibid.
the beginning of the Great European War in 1914, which was the period of highest "imperial awareness in British history."\textsuperscript{76}

Colonial patriarchy as an ideology was reflected in travel narratives and adventure stories of the era. The underlying precept of this patriarchal ideology was reflective of colonial endeavours such as seeking adventure or fortune in some exotic, lawless and untamed lands or being forced to adapt to and finally overcome an alien and hostile environment. As such, adventure novels of the era eulogised colonial masculinity as opposed to colonised exoticism and femininity. For example, the adventure novels \textit{She} (1887) and \textit{King Solomon's Mines} (1885) by H. Rider Haggard were emblematic of such ideology.\textsuperscript{77} The success of these novels demonstrate the appeal of idealisation of a white hero who fearlessly ventures into a mysterious and exotic African world and eventually re-emerges as a conqueror with the experience that enables the hero to neutralise the aura of mystery and attain power over the alien environment.

Moreover, and particularly for the British, masculinity

\textsuperscript{76}John Tosh, "Imperial Masculinity and the Flight from Domesticity in Britain 1880-1914", in T Foley, L Pilkington, S Ryder and E Tilley (eds.), \textit{Gender and Colonialism} (Galway: Galway University Press, 1995), 73.

\textsuperscript{77}In \textit{She} the antagonist was a white Queen (Ayesha was an Arabic name, indicating the hierarchical civilisational scale of skin pigmentation) and in \textit{King Solomon's Mines} the mountainous landscape was called Sheba's Breasts, thus metaphorically pitting the adventurous British masculine heroes against feminised Africa as a representation of the Other. Some Hollywood adventure movies such as the Indiana Jones Series, \textit{Raiders of the Lost Ark} (1981), \textit{Temple of Doom} (1984) and \textit{Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade} (1989) maintain the familiar themes of a Manichean dualism of good/evil, modernism/traditionalism and rational/irrational reflecting the durability and pervasiveness of neo-colonial ideology in contemporary political and social history.
as an ideology was paradoxically averse to sex. Sex was seen as an indulgence that would lead to moral and civilisational degeneration. This aversion was grounded in part in the assumption that the degeneration of Eastern civilisations was a result of unrestrained and unregulated sexual behaviour. Therefore, British colonial ideals had always been apprehensive about sexual activities, as indulgence in sex meant in theory sapping the imperial sense of morality and consequently endangering the existence of empire itself. Thus it comes as no surprise that there was a marked absence of women (especially white women) in the earlier colonial narratives. The official version of empire in areas not subject to large-scale British migration was a colonised world expanded and administered by white males. The non-settler culture areas of the British empire were viewed not only as an exclusive playground of a white male coloniser but also as "crucial to the construction of British masculine identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century." This deliberate erasing from historical discourse of the roles of white women in the colonies was also due to the need to maintain the prestige of white masculinity in the eyes of colonised indigenous peoples. It was believed that had such a narrative been included the prestige of empire would have been compromised. But, historically, white women did play a crucial

78 Levine, "Sexuality, Gender and Empire", 134-5.
role in the machinery of Empire. Although they were discouraged from taking active parts in empire-building they played prominent roles in the social development of empire as wives of colonial administrators, and as settlers, missionaries and nurses.  

However, in general, the white women’s presence was regarded as a distraction to white men as they fulfilled their colonial responsibilities. Hence, upper echelon British imperial administrators (who were exclusively white males) were particularly wary of women, white and indigenous alike, as they saw their influence as detrimental to the well-being of empire. The message emphasised by the empire-builders was that unrestrained sex was a danger and, therefore, such immoderation needed to be guarded against by constant surveillance. In fact such was the presumption of the negative influence of women that the fall of the British Empire was partly blamed on the domestication of the colonised land by the influx of increasingly large numbers of white females. This influx was presumed to result in the weakening of white male robustness of body and the blunting of his sharpness of mind. But it is in the person of indigenous women that European male colonials found the greatest and most lethal danger to empire as well as to their individual moral

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1.3 COLONIALISM AND THE REPRESENTATION OF THE FEMALE OTHER

In discussing issues surrounding Orientalism and colonialism and the dichotomous representations of Western writers with regard to their Other, we tend to bypass a voice that ought to be heard more, for it is the voice of the most oppressed. We sometimes fail to hear the voices of indigenous women asking for the same recognition in the narrative and dialogics of the oppressed. In the period of Western imperialism, indigenous women had always borne the heavier burden of oppression and marginalisation, being the subordinate of both her own culture and the alien power. While being subordinated within her culture by patriarchy she was also oppressed by colonial patriarchy as the weaker sex of the marginalised Other. Thus, from the perspective of the coloniser she was doubly feminised, by racial and gender codes. Within the colonial worldview she was at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Therefore, in this sense, the indigenous woman was doubly marginalised, both by the familiar and the foreign.

In the colonial masculine ideology indigenous women were further down the ladder of degradation. Concerning the indigenous populations, the colonialists reasoned that "[i]f the men were vile and benighted, then the women were even more
degraded and in need of salvation." And at the same time, in the larger scheme of empire, indigenous women became objects of manipulation by the coloniser in order to demonstrate colonial moral superiority. Unsurprisingly, her body became an object of discursive contestation between male coloniser and male colonised alike. This discursive contestation was within the context of the coloniser’s idea of progress and modernity and against the colonised’s (male) sense of cultural tradition and nationalism.

In this discursive contest over the body of the female Other the coloniser took two views as a vanguard to moral superiority. First, indigenous women as objects of lust should be avoided to preserve the very integrity of empire against biological and moral degeneration. Second, she was to be viewed as a victim of her own patriarchal society. As such it was the coloniser’s moral crusade to save her from sexual and cultural exploitation by the indigenous male. This stance was a means of solidifying the colonisers’ hold on native society as it was viewed that

    Empire could no longer be imagined as an extension of Britain, but a place where disorder, dependency, excess, and savagery required a disciplined, authoritative, but compassionate masculine English

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subject to rule.\textsuperscript{83}

As illustration, Radhika Mohanram discusses this contest over colonised women by the male coloniser and male colonised during the Algerian Independence struggle from French colonial occupation (1954-62) by framing it within the terms of Frantz Fanon’s essay “Algeria Unveiled” (1959).\textsuperscript{84} The central issue was the veil worn by Algerian women that the French (male) authority saw as emblematic of a colonised society “locked in a past that had yet to deal with rationality and science.”\textsuperscript{85} In order that the colonised be brought to Western ideas of modernity the Algerian woman needed to be persuaded to lift her veil. However, Fanon proposed that the argument of modernity and civilisation was simply a discursive façade to hide the coloniser’s inability to survey and thus to panoptically control the colonised territory in its totality, which included the unveiled face of its women. In turn, the veil worn by indigenous women or the inability of the coloniser to see caused apprehension in Western men in a terrain in which he was supposedly dominant. Instead, the all-seeing eye belonged to the colonised woman through her ability to see the coloniser through the veil without herself being seen by him. Yeğenoğlu describes the frustration of Western man at the veiled colonised female. As she explains, the veil

\textsuperscript{83}Wilson, "Empire, Gender, and Modernity in the Eighteenth Century", 22.
\textsuperscript{84}For in-depth analysis of the contest over the veil worn by native women in colonised Algeria see "Chapter 3: Woman-body-nation-space" in Radhika Mohanram, \textit{Black Body: Women, Colonialism and Space} (St Leonards, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 1999).
\textsuperscript{85}Ibid. 63.
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a multilayered signifier which refers at once to an attire which covers the Muslim women’s face, and to that which hides and conceals the Orient and Oriental woman from apprehension; it hides the real Orient and keeps its truth from Western knowledge/apprehension.86

As a political weapon the veil, therefore, became a symbol of indigenous resistance to colonialism. Since the coloniser had little effective way of countering the circumstance he articulated the civilising mission mantra in order to neutralise his apprehension.

For the same reason, the Algerian woman’s body became an ideological battleground between the coloniser and the colonised. Ultimately, Yeğenoğlu’s argument questions the coloniser’s claim of liberating indigenous women from the cultural oppression of her society, or as Gayatri Spivak famously describes the phenomenon as “white men, seeking to save brown women from brown men.”87 Instead, the coloniser’s argument for unveiling served a more selfish reason. By unveiling the indigenous woman the coloniser could now complete his domination of the colonised’s world. In the end, what was less stressed in the whole ideological battle but deafeningly loud in its silence was the voice of the colonised

86Yeğenoğlu, Colonial Fantasies, 47.
87Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, 305.
woman whose body was the central object in the discursive struggle.

As with the French in Algeria the discursive struggle over the body of the colonised woman between the male coloniser and male colonised also raged in British India. I will highlight an occasion in the history of British imperialism in India where the contest over the body of the native woman had never been fiercer, in part because of the divisive nature of the debates even among Indians themselves. The issue was over the legislation abolishing sati in 1829. The debate and subsequent enactment of legislation pitted coloniser against colonised in a fierce ideological battle. But they also divided the indigenes into proponents of modernity against supporters of cultural traditionalism. However, what I wish to highlight, as has been documented by many scholars, is that the legislation was not only motivated by a humanistic mission to protect indigenous Indian women from their own patriarchal culture (although it would have that effect). Rather it presented a façade of benign and moral British colonial power by purporting to protect Indian women from a cruel patriarchal custom.  

As I have stated, the legislation that brought about the abolition of sati was not a spontaneous act of benevolence by the British administrators to prevent a supposed scripturally-

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88Rajeswari S Rajan, Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism (London: Routledge, 1993), 42.
sanctioned cruelty toward Indian women. There were, in fact, initial hesitations on the colonisers’ part as to the judiciousness of legal intervention in the colonised Indian’s religious affairs for fear of provoking nationalistic sentiments among the populace. However, the imperatives of the British civilising mission finally overrode the initial anxieties over Indian retaliation in an attempt to provide the image of imperialism as “the establisher of the good society [...] marked by the espousal of the woman as object of protection from her own kind.” As in the case in Algeria, the Indian woman’s body also became an object of contest between the coloniser and colonised. Thus, while being denied her subjectivity as a person by both the colonising power and patriarchal Indian elites her body, nevertheless, became a battleground for cultural supremacy. Indian women, in this sense, were relegated to being both passive spectators of and voiceless participants in a cultural contest they hardly had any influence over but that greatly affected their subjectivities as human beings. What the two historical episodes highlight is the degree of subalternity in the position of native women in the colonial landscapes. The colonised woman was a mere pawn, control of whose body was highly contested, but whose voice was effectively silenced. As in any patriarchal society, the colonial civilising mission rendered the native women’s voice mute as she became the all-

89Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, 299.
too-familiar object of contest, possession and commodification.

In the broader imperial structure of power indigenous women were always positioned at the lowest rung where white males formed the top rung, followed respectively by white female coloniser, and the native male at the third layer of the colonial power structure. As Barbara Smith strongly points out, “we [women of colour] examined our lives and found that everything out there was kicking our behinds - race, class, sex, and homophobia.”90 While Smith’s statement refers particularly to African American woman’s experience, the feeling of multi-layered forms of oppression is shared by indigenous women as colonised female Others.

Not only male colonisers make fallacious assumptions regarding the female Other. Even sympathetic white feminists could make the same mistakes. For instance Elizabeth Cooper claims in The Harim and the Purdah: Studies of Oriental Women (1915) that Eastern women were “primarily traditional”91 and “a victim to ignorance, superstition, and the many evils that follow in their train.”92 She then wonders if they will ever be free from indigenous patriarchy. As a Western feminist articulating the social conditions of Eastern women Cooper tends to make generalised assumptions about the lives of women

90Donaldson, Decolonising Feminisms, 21.
92Ibid. 12.
from these various cultures as if there were a singular non-European female experience of living in a singular patriarchal society. This belies the fact that a woman in any society (even European) is situated in a specific position of power depending on her class, social and educational background; therefore women have different experiences of patriarchy. But Cooper’s assumption speaks much about the authority of Orientalism and Eurocentrism to operate within broad boundaries of knowledge about the East.

Cooper’s voice was that of a sympathetic Western feminist of the early twentieth century observing what she understands to be the plight of Eastern women. By Eastern she means a collection of cultures ranging from Islamic Egypt to the Indian sub-continent, Burma (or Myanmar), China and Japan. Hers is a feminine but still superior Western gaze looking at inferior cultures and their treatment of their women. Not that Cooper only points to the poor conditions of the women caused by their treatment by men. She is able to appreciate some achievements of Eastern women and their contributions within the social and political dynamics of their cultures even though most of the time she fails to grasp the significance of cultural relativism in her observations. But throughout her text, although she shows her sympathy, the reader is constantly reminded of the assumed superiority of Western women over the social and cultural levels of her Eastern sisters. Sisterly sympathy and cultural superiority were
intertwined in her understanding of Eastern women. I highlight Cooper’s work because this dualistic sense of sympathy and superiority is part of the nuance of colonial themes in many European narratives, notwithstanding the differences between some masculine and feminine accounts.

But in the broader context the ideology of Eurocentrism was not dictated by Western feminism. Still during Cooper’s time the white male was the determiner of the shape and mould of Western knowledge including Orientalism. And Eurocentrism, that drew part of its ideological strength from Orientalism, did not simply demarcate West and East according to unequal Self/Other, culture/nature, or order/chaos dichotomies. Western colonialists provided different representations for the different gender categories in the colonised societies that they encountered. This tendency implies the fact that the colonisers practised both the ideology of racism and racial patriarchy. Thus, while indigenous men were looked upon through a racial prism, indigenous women were viewed through the prism of racial patriarchy. Racial patriarchy signifies Western assumptions that the female Other was inferior both because she was a non-European as well as for the reason that she was a woman.

Racial patriarchy also produced a set of images and representations that put indigenous women in new demeaning and dehumanising positions. In a way her body also symbolised the “terrifying and beautiful, dangerous and nurturing” elements
of the land.\footnote{Heidi Hutner, *Colonial Women: Race and Culture in Stuart Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.} Eastern woman was looked upon as not only passive and irrational from the colonial point of view; she was also exotic and seductive, mysterious and dangerous from a colonial patriarchal perspective. Her seeming appearance of compliance and passivity was viewed by the colonial power as deceptive and illusory as she was believed to possess an innate lethality only a female Other could have. To the coloniser this image of the deviousness of the female Other was comparable to the treacherousness of her male counterpart in dealings with Europeans. But unlike indigenous men, whose subjective categorisation was straightforward and simple, the indigenous woman was a subject of ambivalence in the mind of European men. She was attractive yet repulsive, and weak but dangerous. She was attractive and appeared weak due to her Oriental sensuality and exoticism that conjured an aura of inscrutability and mystery. At the same time she was repulsive and dangerous as she was always assumed to be the catalyst of the moral downfall and degeneration of European men.\footnote{Marilyn Demarest Button, Introduction, in Marilyn Demarest Button and Toni Reed (eds.), *The Foreign Women in British Literature: Exotics, Aliens, and Outsiders* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999), xiv.} Thus, the female Other became imprinted in the Western psyche as the perennial seducer and destroyer of (white) men.

Accordingly, many themes in colonial fiction were underpinned by the notion of sensuous and exotic indigenous women and the danger of being seduced by them. They were
always viewed as the destroyer of Western men whose sexual liaison with indigenous women would bring both moral and personal degradation and destruction. A case in point may be drawn from the history of early English settlement in Virginia. At the initial stage of the English presence in the Americas, the fate of the settlement hinged on the benevolence or hostility of the Chesapeake Indians. As history has it, Pocahontas became the saviour of the colony and she was eventually Christianised and married the Englishman John Rolfe on 5 April, 1614. Pocahontas' royal reception upon her visit to England was, in part, a result of John Smith’s letter to Queen Anne in 1616 warning that without proper treatment upon her visit Pocahontas would bring destruction to the colony as she “may return to what seems to be an innate barbarism and destroy the fledgling colony.” 95 This warning by Smith, once again, reveals the Eurocentric ideology of othering the Indians as inherently uncivilised and unpredictable in their (ir)rational responses to any slights to Pocahontas.

But the images and representations surrounding Pocahontas were central to the argument here as they reflected the Eurocentric ideology that I have discussed above. Heidi Hutner, who studies the issue of colonial women in Stuart drama, suggests that the symbol of the indigenous women was used to “justify and promote the success of the English

95Hutner, Colonial Women, 29.
appropriation, commodification, and exploitation of the New World and its native inhabitants." In the final analysis Pocahontas represents the dualism of attractiveness and repulsion to the white man. To them she was both "virgin and whore, Christianized native and untamable other." 

The female Other/European man relationship presented in Western narrative is also, more often than not, the predator-prey relationship. For instance, Mary Hamer discusses the issue of black women's sexuality and its attractiveness for white men by examining Nathaniel Hawthorne's interpretation of a bust of Cleopatra. The bust was sculpted by William Wetmore Story and exhibited at the London Exhibition in 1862. Wetmore's bust portrays the white marbled Cleopatra sitting on a chair in a thinking disposition "as though some firm willful purpose filled her brain, seeming to set those luxurious features to a smile as if the whole woman would." Hamer explains that Hawthorne promotes the interpretation of the bust as Cleopatra despairing "over the self-restraint of Octavius." This interpretation is given within the context of Western historical and literary portrayal of Cleopatra's predator/prey relationship with Mark Antony who is depicted as enslaved by her beauty and seductiveness. But unlike Mark Antony, Octavius was able to resist seduction by Cleopatra.

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96Ibid. 3.
97Ibid. 24.
99Ibid. 62.
Hawthorne, whose fiction is permeated by liberal themes of female suppression and puritan autocracy, still succumbs to the Eurocentric ideology current during his times. In reference to the bust of Cleopatra, he alludes to black female sexuality as being similar to the hot climate of Africa in its unmitigated animal wildness. In this sense, the image of African women is subsumed into nature (as opposed to culture, which underpins Occidental sexual restraint) as an explanation of her wild lust. Extending the Western portrayal of the Oriental nature of Cleopatra, Hawthorne elaborates her character as “a great smouldering furnace, deep down in the woman’s heart.”\textsuperscript{100} Hawthorne further elaborates that “she might spring upon you like a tigress and stop the very breath that you were now drawing midway to your throat.”\textsuperscript{101} However, the politics behind such a claim is the prevalence in practice of white slave-owners exploiting black female slaves for their own sexual satisfaction and the subsequent rise in the number of mixed-race people among the slave population. Therefore, behind this interpretation of the bust of Cleopatra is the intention of encouraging the view among a white audience that people of mixed race are the result of the lust of black female slaves rather than the white male master’s uncontrollable libidinal impulses.\textsuperscript{102} For that reason, Hawthorne’s interpretation of Cleopatra is an attempt to

\textsuperscript{100} Qtd. in ibid. 61.  
\textsuperscript{101} Qtd. in ibid.  
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
absolve white male slave owners of any moral lapse and, in turn, to point the accusing finger at the amorousness and seductive power of enslaved black women.

Eurocentric ideology vis-à-vis the Arab and Islamic world has a long history. The Islamic world first came into contact with Europe from a position of strength and the fear of Europe being overwhelmed by Islam was always present from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. Thus, a predetermined set of ideas and prejudices about the Eastern world developed earlier in the context of Europeans’ military and political rivalry with Muslims and Islamic societies. When the position of strength was reversed, the negative images of Muslims and Arabs did not alter much and, in fact, intensified as pseudo-scientific empiricism and colonialism began to play their roles in forming images of subject cultures in literature, arts and fields of science such as ethnography, anthropology and biology.

Later adventurers to the Orient such as Richard Burton, Gustave Flaubert and Gerard de Nerval, in line with Eurocentric ideology, produced texts that were unified in their themes of Oriental sexuality. Flaubert’s letter to his mistress (keeping a mistress itself representing an illicit form of male-female relationship in Western culture) wrote of the Oriental woman in his description of the dancer Kuchuk

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103 For a history of Islam in English literature see especially Chapter 1 in Abdul Raheem Kidwai, The Crescent and the Cross: Image of the Orient in English Literature up to 1832 (Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University, 1997).
As for Kuchuk Hanem, ah! Set your mind at rest, and at the same time correct your views about the Orient. Be convinced that she felt nothing at all: emotionally, I guarantee; and even physically, I strongly suspect... The Oriental woman is no more than a machine: she makes no distinction between one man and another man. Smoking, going to baths, painting her eyelids and drinking coffee - such is the circle of occupation to which her existence is confined. As for physical pleasure, it must be very slight, since the seat of same is sliced off at an early age [a reference to female circumcision, practised in Sudan and Egypt, but infrequently in most parts of the Middle East].

Flaubert must have attempted to appease his mistress' apprehension about Oriental women's seductive appeal to her lover, thus advising her to correct her views of Oriental women. This advice from Flaubert must be read in the context of the notion of the Oriental woman as understood in Europe as represented by the views of Flaubert's mistress. As she had no personal experience of the Orient she had to rely on ideas and images from literature, illustrations and pseudo-scientific journals to visualise the Oriental Other. Thus, his mistress' Eurocentric notions of the Oriental woman must have differed

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from Flaubert’s description of her. Understood in this sense, Louise Colet, the mistress must have assumed the Oriental woman to be seductive as opposed to passive, lively as opposed to mechanistic, and sexually fulfilled as opposed to experiencing only slight sexual pleasure.

As a rule, what are emphasised in these representations of the Oriental woman are the image of sexual freedom with which the Muslim woman is associated and the restriction imposed on her social mobility. That these images are contradictory in the first place escaped observation as the Eurocentric ideology overrides all contradictions since they are made to cohere with predetermined assumptions and prejudices. Therefore the images of the harem, as a symbol of Eastern lasciviousness and moral degeneration, are superimposed on those of chador, purdah or veil that are emblematic of Muslim cultures’ oppressive attitude towards their women. \(^{105}\) It is these enduring images that find their way into Western narratives about the ever-mysterious Eastern women.

\(^{105}\) The debate surrounding the issue of colonialism and the veil is also explored in an article by Pat Mule and Diane Barthel. The writers argue that the veil serves a dual function of resisting colonialism’s idea of modern woman and of maintaining Muslim women’s societal esteem in patriarchal societies. Another writer, Sitara Khan explains the functions of the harem and the historical and social developments of purdah within Islamic and non-Islamic cultures. She claims that the harem was misunderstood to represent Oriental lasciviousness and the purdah their limited social mobility. See Pat Mule and Diane Barthel, "The Return to the Veil: Individual Autonomy Vs. Social Esteem", Sociological Forum, 7 (1992), 323-32. For a short history of the purdah see Sitara Khan, A Glimpse through Purdah (Oakhill: Trentham, 1999), 23-38.
1.4 CONCLUSION

Racism, that underpins colonial ideology, did not materialise overnight. It was an ideology that developed through a long historical process. European material ascendancy after the Renaissance and its imperial domination of the East saw racism coalescing with Eurocentrism, producing a colonial ideology that posits a definitive separation between civilised Europeans and savage Others. Later, nineteenth-century social Darwinism provided a pseudo-scientific discourse of racial difference. Also, the masculine/feminine trope became the metaphor of inequality between Europe and its Others. The militaristic Europeans were strong, therefore manly or masculine. On the other hand, the subjected nations under European colonialism were effeminate, therefore feminine. In this colonial hierarchy the female Other was accorded the lowest status because she was the colonised Other as well as the colonised female Other. But European, especially male, visions of her were more ambivalent, especially about her sexuality and femininity. The Eastern woman was represented as a figure of untamed sexual promiscuity as well as a victim of cultural patriarchy. But more prominently in the European psyche, she was the dangerous siren whose exotic and erotic nature constantly beckoned unwary European men to her arms and to their destruction.

As European colonialism spread out towards the rest of the world the Eurocentric themes vis-à-vis the female Other
changed little. Over the next four hundred years Europe went through different historical epochs from the Renaissance and Reformation to Enlightenment and Romanticism and beyond. The status of European women also underwent change as discontent among and agitation by activists and feminists from all walks of life brought about a cultural shift in the position of women. From the focus on political rights such as suffrage and property ownership in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the dismantling of cultural and social discrimination in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Western women have achieved much in terms of freedom and emancipation. Their slow but sure emancipation from patriarchy at home, however, did not necessarily hinder them from being influenced by the same Eurocentric ideology as their male counterparts in formulating an understanding of the subjectivity of the female Other.

Similarly, the fiction and travel narratives of nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers who used Malaya as their setting make implied and explicit suggestions of the paradox of the Malay female Other. Female travel writers such as Isabella Bird and Emily Innes produce practically the same nuanced othering of Eastern women as male writers such as Frank Swettenham, John Thomson, Joseph Conrad, Somerset Maugham and Anthony Burgess. Their writings are replete with textual images and pictures of the seductive, mysterious and vengeful Malay women, along with tacit instructions and
admonitions against the danger of their sexual attractiveness and moral degradation. These narrative subtexts, whether written intentionally or not, serve to warn and caution European man against indigenous woman as she could lead him down to (im)moral abysses and his eventual destruction.
CHAPTER 2  METHODOLOGY

In the preceding chapter I have elaborated the development of Eurocentrism as racist strands of European thought in imagining Others through a lens of cultural superiority which portrayed them through the negative binary oppositions underpinning the production of Europe’s self-image. I have also touched on Edward Said’s seminal text Orientalism that shows how imperial grand narratives worked broadly in the realm of intellectual and cultural discourse as part of the justification of imperialism. This discourse which posits a panoptic tendency of investigation that produced the all-too-familiar Manichean signifying systems eventually produced those negative images of the Orient in the imagination of Westerners. I have also explained that European colonisation of the Eastern world was expressed in gendered and sexualised terms by alluding to the colonial endeavour as a penetration into the feminine East. Finally, in the last part of the previous chapter I have elucidated the representation of indigenous women in the context of colonial patriarchy as the doubly marginalised female Other.

This chapter will elaborate my methodology for analysing and theorising notions of otherness in colonial texts that I have chosen for close study. I find Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism suitable as an approach to the texts to reveal the modalities of repression and textual silence that define the
representations of the Malay female Other. Dialogism, as a theory, serves to dismantle the centripetal or authoritative voice of the author, and in turn, allows for a polyphonicity of voices not subject to the author’s discursive domination. For the purpose of this research I reformulate dialogism as not only applicable to counter-discourses within texts but also possible outside of textual narrative.

2.1 POWER AND DISCOURSE

We are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a worldview.106

Postcolonial criticism remains committed to neutralising, relativising, and finally reversing the discursive flow from the metropole to the periphery. It mandates the deconstruction of colonial/neocolonial ideology and the foregrounding of alternative representations and epistemes. These objectives acknowledge and draw on the perspectives of the marginalised who lie beyond “the white, male European cultural, political, and philosophical tradition.”107 The critical practices expose the fragility and unsustainability of colonial and neocolonial

representations. It is here that Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism in discourse can play a role in developing a methodology for a dialectical struggle against the centre (which stridently maintains a unitary and hegemonic narrative) and in support of the periphery (that strives to break the monological discourse). Bakhtin’s dialogics enable the possibility of hearing contestatory voices in ways never before conceived, especially in the realms of literature and literary criticism.

My formulation of this particular analytical tool will begin by touching on the writings of two postcolonial intellectuals who posit slightly different but related stances on the female subaltern. The first is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who questions the ability of critics to hear the voice of the subaltern in the colonial archive. The other intellectual is Chandra Mohanty who reveals in “Under Western Eyes” (1984) the incompatibility of Western feminist methodological tools and the female subaltern’s effort at reclaiming her subjectivity. Mohanty even goes so far as to indict Western feminism as ideologically echoing Western racism because its general stereotyping assumptions are detrimental to the effort of subaltern discursive resistance. In a second essay related to the same issue Mohanty proposes the framework from which Western and subaltern feminisms could theorise their female Otherness in order to form “a
noncolonizing feminist solidarity across borders.”\textsuperscript{108} These two postcolonial intellectuals’ perspectives on issues concerning indigenous women provide a general discursive foundation for the articulation of female subaltern subjectivity. And I, in turn, propose Bakhtin’s theoretical methodology of dialogism as one of the alternatives to facilitate the recovery of the voice of the subaltern female other.

Spivak’s central question concerns the (in)ability of the subaltern to make herself heard in the discourse dominated by Westerners and the patriarchal society that envelopes and dominates her subjectivity.\textsuperscript{109} Specifically, she asks the question, “Can the subaltern speak? And can the subaltern (as woman) speak”\textsuperscript{110} within the same discourse as an equally valid voice? More importantly, her implied question is, can the voice be heard and be taken note of? In the end she answers her own question by emphasising the inability of the female subaltern to speak on her own behalf within the discourse that is dominated in varying degrees, by both colonial imperialism and cultural patriarchy. By focusing her analysis on the traditional Brahmin practice of \textit{sati}, Spivak highlights the

\textsuperscript{109}Spivak’s claim of the subalternity of Indian women is not dissimilar to W.E.B Du Bois’s notion of the double consciousness that affects African-Americans in their psychical sense of simultaneously being an American and African-American living as a colonised sub-culture among a white-majority United States of America and their fights for political, economic and social equality. Indian women, in this sense, are conscious of their being both an Indian and a woman. This double consciousness also affects most, if not all, subaltern women in nations that came under the domination of European colonial powers.
\textsuperscript{110}Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", 296.
doubly marginalised situation of Indian women, repressed by the hegemonic ideologies of both British imperialism and Indian patriarchy. The antagonistic "[w]hite men saving brown women from brown men" premise of the British imperialists and "[t]he women actually wanted to die" argument of Indian patriarchy only expose the self-serving attitudes taken by both imperialists and patriarchs at the expense of indigenous women. Spivak stresses that

[b]etween patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the "third-world woman" caught between tradition and modernization.\textsuperscript{112}

Caught between the two standpoints the Indian woman, who is her case study, could only make her statement, not textually but through the physically and graphically violent act of suicide by hanging. In her oft-cited text, Spivak explains that Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri chose to commit suicide during one of her menstrual periods in order to deny any potential allegations of illicit pregnancy as the motive for her act. Even so, only a decade later it was revealed that she belonged to an anti-imperialist resistance organisation. The task of political assassination it set for her was too much for her to

\textsuperscript{111}Ibid. 297. \textsuperscript{112}Ibid. 306.
But what captures my imagination here is Bhadhuri’s preference for suicide by hanging when there were other methods to kill herself that she could have contemplated. I propose that by hanging herself Bhaduri could be attempting to construct a voice in a doubly-marginalising (both imperialistic and patriarchal) society that had denied her the privilege of expressing her own voice as a woman. Bhaduri could, in fact, be staging her suicide as a symbolic form of protest. By leaving her body hanging – neither her feet touching the ground nor her head grazing the ceiling – she might have wished to signify the fact that her body/soul/voice was suspended between two realities. Caught between the realities of imperial oppression, on the one hand, and patriarchal subjugation, on the other, she might have chosen death by hanging to highlight the socially and culturally oppressive position of Indian women within the doubly hegemonic discourses of imperialism and patriarchy. As she was denied a voice, the only possible means by which she could make her voice heard was through the violent and graphic staging of her suicide. It is undeniably a strong act to make a statement. Also it is doubtful that such a deed managed to convey her message since the act of interpretation itself is still dominated by hegemonic imperialistic and patriarchal discourses (as shown by a lapse of a decade for the real cause of her suicide to be established). As Kempen muses, the
problem lies not in the failure of the subaltern women to make her voice heard but more in the inability of those in power to listen to the voice of the doubly repressed.\textsuperscript{113} Thus, the act of representing woman still resides in the hands of those who purportedly have her welfare in view while at the same time not comprehending her subjectivity.

In concluding her argument, Spivak implies the ineffectiveness of Bhaduri’s self-destructive act as a method of gaining a voice for herself, specifically, and Indian women in general, by stating that

the subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with ‘woman’ as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish.\textsuperscript{114}

If we take Spivak’s view as reflecting the reality of the position of some Indian (and for that matter, some subaltern) women, this is indeed a pessimistic interpretation of the critic’s capacity to read the subjectivity of the female subaltern in discourse. And from my point of view her assertion is not reflective of reality where women have been able to make narrative intrusion into hegemonic, male-centric mainstream discourse.

\textsuperscript{113}Laura Charlotte Kempen, Mariama Bâ, Rigoberta Menchú, and Postcolonial Feminism (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 25.
\textsuperscript{114}Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, 308.
In "Under Western Eyes", Chandra Mohanty makes equally powerful arguments aimed at conceptualising the voice of subaltern women. Her argument brings the spotlight to bear on the very methods by which women could regain control over their subjectivity and their ability to transcend barriers of class, race and culture. Mohanty explains that Western feminism of the period is inadequate in attempting to articulate the voice of the subaltern by stressing that "[s]isterhood cannot be assumed on the basis of gender; it must be forged in concrete, historical and political practice and analysis." But the central thesis of Mohanty’s text goes deeper than the mere incompatibility of Western feminism and that of Eastern cultures. As Mohanty explains, instead of helping define the struggle of Third World women (borrowing Spivak’s determinant) against patriarchy at home Western feminists practice the same methods of categorisation that resonate with Western Eurocentric ideology. Western feminists, argues Mohanty, create the dichotomous binary oppositions of Western women vis-à-vis non-Western women while attempting to help consolidate the voice of the subaltern female against cultural patriarchy. Despite the fundamental complexities of the experiences of non-European women in terms of religion, race, culture and even caste, Western feminists’ view of the female Other as a monolithic object produces persistently

familiar pessimistic images of the life of Third World woman. The images, as further explained by Mohanty, are underpinned by ideas of

an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being ‘third world’ (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc).\(^{116}\)

Western feminists’ negative views of the female Other are not a new historical phenomenon. In her text Empire, Gender and Modernity in the Eighteenth Century (2004) Kathleen Wilson explains that while Western women of the eighteenth century were able to engage with issues of universal womanhood across the empire their views of African women still resonated with images of colonised women as “victimized, passive, and silent, immoral savages who needed enlightened British women to lift them to freedom.”\(^{117}\) It is in this sense that Western feminism may fail subaltern women. If superimposing Western cultural values on the myriads of non-Western cultures, Western feminism is, in actuality, reinventing Eurocentric ideology and discourse to marginalise female Others. Suffice to say, that while Western feminists’ sympathy is laudable it may unfortunately still carry traces of Western racial ideology. The question that lingers now is how to develop the

\(^{116}\text{Ibid. 337.}\)

\(^{117}\text{Wilson, "Empire, Gender, and Modernity in the Eighteenth Century", 21.}\)
sense of sisterhood across cultures against patriarchy or (neo)colonial patriarchy into a more acceptable form for all.

In her later essay "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited" (2003) Mohanty proposes the kind of alliance that Western and subaltern feminisms could structure in order to further feminist agendas. Mohanty explains that Western and non-Western women face different socio-historical and cultural issues. Even within the non-Western female experience there are a multitude of diverse concerns and value projections specific to local experience. Therefore, Mohanty emphasises the need for an understanding of the local as global interconnectivity in challenging the neocolonial and patriarchal power structures. As she asserts, the feminist struggle must be based on "grounded, particularized analyses linked with larger, even global, economic and political frameworks."\(^{118}\) While Mohanty’s critique is inclined to protest against "global capitalism"\(^ {119}\) and its detrimental effect (often economic) on subaltern female subjectivity, the broader framework of her articulation of resistance is applicable to feminist discourse in general.

Therefore, despite Spivak’s assertion of the powerlessness of the subaltern Other to make her voice heard, postcolonial feminists from different geographical regions have had access to a wide range of narratives depicting the

\(^{118}\)Mohanty, "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited", 501.

\(^{119}\)Ibid. 509.
imperial (and neo-colonial) and patriarchal worlds that
determine their subjectivities. This articulation of their
experience is expressed in various discursive forms and
narrative genres: from scholarly publications to poetry,
fiction and even autobiography. Laura Kempen, for example,
has made an interesting analysis of the experience of some
postcolonial feminists from Mariama Bâ to Rigoberta Menchú. In
the case of Menchú’s narrative I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian
Woman in Guatemala (1984) Kempen highlights Menchú’s
description of the suffering of her people in the face of
(neo)colonial and imperial violence. In her testimonio
Menchu’s resistance narrative is a reconfiguration of personal
experience into a (re)presentation of “collective, communal
identity.” What is more powerful in Menchú’s role as the
narrator of her people’s experience is how she demystifies the
patriarchal assumption of man as the normative leader of a
people. By being the voice of her community Menchú serves as
“a new kind of female leader, who transgresses the traditional
gender roles” normally associated with gender
categorisation. Therefore, by blurring gender space Menchú is
able to subvert both imperial (and neocolonial) and
patriarchal normalising discourses about (subaltern) women in
a single voice. Mohanty’s discursive framework and Menchú’s

120 See Ketu H Katrak, Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women
121 Kempen, Mariama Bâ, Rigoberta Menchú, and Postcolonial Feminism, 104.
122 Ibid. 102.
articulation of the dialectical representation of her people’s experience serve to remind us of the varying discursive strategies to break through the modalities of imperial and patriarchal repression.

The theoretical framework that I propose here is, in essence, a postcolonial discursive strategy. And by responding to the debates discussed above, I propose a strategy to deconstruct the representations of the Malay female Other through the theoretical methodology of dialogism as articulated by Mikhail Bakhtin. Dialogism as a discursive methodology as envisioned by Bakhtin is restricted to literary texts, especially the genre of the novel, and their interpretation. As Ketu Katrak explains, the novel as a genre “is particularly suited to postcolonial writers’ rewriting history from the points of view of indigenous peoples that challenge colonial records from the British standpoint.”\(^{123}\) And, admittedly, Bakhtin does not explain dialogism as a theoretical discourse applicable to fields outside of literature such as politics and history or issues of Western colonialism and its ideological representations of the female Other. But, from my point of view, dialogism as a discursive tool is an embryonic and living methodology that is ever evolving to suit all intents and purposes. We may perhaps elucidate our appropriation of Bakhtin’s dialogism with reference to Roland Barthes’ proclamation of the death of the

\(^{123}\)Katrak, Politics of the Female Body, 30.
Once the author has completed his or her text/method, the author can no longer claim full possession of or control over interpretation of his or her work.

2.2 DIALOGISM AND IDEOLOGY

Before Bakhtin the history of the novel as a genre had been generally understood in terms of the artistic originality and the power of creativity of the author. Critics had always conceptualised the novel as representative of the author’s consciousness. Our conventional wisdom would suppose that authors exclude narratives that do not share their worldview by silencing or erasing them from their narrative. As the master of their own tale they (presumably) dictate the way meanings are to be formed, interpreted and disseminated. In this scheme of things the readers are merely a passive mind whose function is to absorb all those meanings, overt or covert, intended for them by the author. In other words the reader plays no part whatsoever in the interaction with the novel or text. This scenario assumes a one-way communication of meaning with the author as the determiner of meanings and

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124 Barthes proposes the death of the author by suggesting that the author can never lay claim to the originality of his text as "the text is a fabric of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture". The author is simply an imitator; his "sole power is to mingle writings." The same argument is also highlighted by T.S. Eliot where he suggests that a poet's work is never original as "the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously". See T.S Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", Perspecta, 19 (1982), 37. Also see Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in Hazard Adams (ed.), Critical Theory since Plato (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 1130-3. My quotation from Barthes is at 1132.
the reader as their passive receiver. As such the authors’ station as the producers of words also confers to them as the sole arbiters of truth. This was the conception of the novel that held sway before Bakhtin’s idea of dialogism helped reshape our understanding of representational discourse. In its stead, Bakhtin lays out a theory that, inter alia, posits the fragility of the author’s authority as the sole arbiter of meaning.

The basis of Bakhtin’s theory resides in the differences between genres, especially poetry and the novel, in their respective monologic and dialogic tendencies. Poetry, claims Bakhtin, is centripetal in nature because it does not refer to anything beyond itself due to its aesthetic values. It has no other ideology but its author’s with reference to the object of its centralising ideas. The words of poetry as conceived by the poet are not addressed to an addressee, thus do not expect an answer. It is in this sense that poetry is monologic. The novel, on the other hand, is unable to be anything but polyphonic as author, narrators, characters and ideologies within a novel collide and collude with each other in the text. For Bakhtin the novel is the genre that presents the polyphonic nature of discourse by subverting the authorial voice of the narrator and presenting the varied voices inherent in the text. Taking Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment as an example, Bakhtin shows how the author’s voice has become only one of a multiplicity of voices contending for discursive
and ideological space made possible by the genre’s heteroglossic nature. These voices are not illustrative of interaction of ideas but of “the interaction of consciousnesses in the sphere of ideas (but not of ideas only).”  

For Bakhtin, authors simply represent one of the many voices inherent in a discourse; they no longer have the power to unify the supposed centrality of their perspectives. The novel represents “a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized.” When authors conjure a range of different fictional characters in their novels they do not merely summon plausible characters to make the thematic trajectory of their novels more cohesive; rather, this allows for different voices to intrude into the whole discourse, whether acknowledged by the author or not. What Bakhtin envisions in fiction is a discourse not unlike the metaphorical Tower of Babel that allows for differing voices to be equally heard. But instead of the biblical collapse of the tower and the scattering of the peoples with different languages to all corners of the world, Bakhtin posits a more positive collapse of a single authorial voice of discourse and a celebration of a plurality of voices.

Earlier critics posited that the major character or characters presented their author’s philosophical morality in

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126Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 262.
the novel. Bakhtin saw this assumption as the main flaw of these methods of criticism: it came from looking at the novel through the prism of ideology and psychology and how those ideologies and psychical conditions are manifested in the characters. Instead Bakhtin proposes that to understand the full potential of a novel it should be seen, not only from ideological and psychological perspectives, but also in terms of the author’s narrative style and structure. Only then will readers appreciate the polyphonic nature of the novel. By focusing on the style and formal structure of the novel, in contrast to the monologic interpretations of traditional literary and linguistic scholars, Bakhtin posits that Dostoyevsky’s development of the novel gives voice to the varied ideological and social perspectives current at that point in time, providing an intellectual and social cross-section of late-nineteenth-century Russian society. As Bakhtin asserts:

What unfolds in [Dostoevsky’s] works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event.\textsuperscript{127}

This view suggests the independence and will-to-life of

\textsuperscript{127}Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, 6.
characters once they are conjured into the text, beyond the author’s intent and authorial control. Having minds and consciousnesses of their own they have their own ideologically-loaded views which may collude and collide with the author’s own ideology.

In this sense, Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism complements postcolonial discourse as a theoretical tool of resistance narrative. Postcolonial discourse, in general, functions as a method of writing back to the centre and serves, neither to nullify nor to rectify, but in some way to resolve issues between the centre and periphery. Dialogism, as a methodological criticism, could also be useful in other forms of discourse analysis, thereby “not restricting liberatory struggle to purely economic or political battles; instead ... extend[ing] it to the common patrimony of the utterance.”

Nor do these formulations abide by any rules of discursive engagement. Gwendolyn Henderson, for example, contends that the Bakhtinian model is principally adversarial and verbal communication is a form of contestation with other voices. Henderson is, in actuality, reminding us of the varying interpretations and utilizations of dialogism in discourse analysis. As Anne Hermann also asserts, “[dialogism] does not refer to a harmonious dialogue based on amiable disagreement

Indeed, neither Herman nor Henderson is the only voice to suggest the potentially antagonistic nature of dialogism. Similarly, in his interpretation of Bakhtin’s dialogism, Michael Holquist hints at the contestatory model of the theory when he focuses on “struggle” and “battle” as being at the heart of dialogism, thereby indicating the polemical tendency of the theory. Bakhtin’s dialogism only serves to lay the foundation of polyphony, of the possibility of a multi-voiced discourse within a narrative.

This interpretation of dialogism allows for a freer conceptualisation of the critical approach to suit almost any narrative strategy that falls under the broader form of dialogue. It is in this sense that dialogism, as a discursive tool, appeals to resistance discourse as it allows for the engagement with and nullifying of what can be perceived as the more authoritative and hegemonic perspectives presented by authors in their narratives. In the area of post-colonialism, beside Orientalism by Edward Said, which lays bare the Western ideological othering of non-Western worlds, Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism functions as a theory that allows for the struggle against monolithic representation and for the voice of the marginalised Other to be heard within the same discourse. Dialogism empowers subalterns to break the power of

hegemonic discourse over the oppressed and gives them the ability to tease out the suppressed voices of the subaltern in narratives.

One example of the pliancy of dialogism as a discursive theory is proposed by Graham Pechey to further resistance to South Africa’s apartheid system. By contextualising and applying Bakhtin’s dialogism to a different genre (the sociopolitical genre, as he defines it), Pechey suggests that dialogism can be transformed into a critical methodology that suits all narrative terrains and discursive domains. Dialogism, for Pechey, should also be extended to the analysis of “spontaneous and ephemeral everyday utterances.” What Pechey intends is the possibility of a metamorphosed dialogism that can make itself available not only within its original realm of literary discourse but also in other coterminous areas of the life of culture and politics as well - the everyday utterances and concerns of any human being. Accordingly, a dialogical reading can both assert and defy other voices, hegemonic or non-hegemonic, as it interacts with a multitude of different discourses. The re-interpretations of dialogism as an analytical tool by Pechey and Henderson show the potentially exciting possibilities of dialogism being reinvented to suit different discursive terrains and landscapes. It is rather like a theoretical chameleon that blends in with different discursive backgrounds without the

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132Pechey, "On the Borders of Bakhtin", 82.
risk of losing its fundamental structures.

As I have mentioned above the methodology adopted for this research is a reformulation of Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism that transports its literary theoretical principles into the realm of politics and culture. This reformulation draws on the link between literature and ideology and alludes to the idea of literature’s unique ability to show the “double refraction and reflection of reality.” A little elaboration of the definition of ideology, hence, is needed here to differentiate between our common notion of ideology and ideology as espoused by cultural theorists, especially by Louis Althusser. The word ideology was first used by Cabanis, Destutt de Tracy and their colleagues to describe simply the theory of ideas. Karl Marx picked up the term and expanded its definition to mean, as Althusser explains, “the system of ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group.” Marx’s definition of ideology delineates its conceptions to encompass the state of mind of a certain social group to particular issues. This definition then enables us to assume the presence of a collective consciousness in that particular group. The conceptions of ideology become important once we relate it to the collective colonialists’ attitude in their dealings with and

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133 Pam Morris (ed.), *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov* (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), 123.
representations of the images of Malay women.

However, we need to expand this conception of ideology further so as not to obscure the distinction Althusser makes between “particular ideologies, which ... always express class position”\textsuperscript{135} and ideology in general “that has no history.”\textsuperscript{136} As far as consciousness is concerned, it is the second definition of ideology that is related to my methodology. In this sense, Althusser differentiates between ideologies that have histories (such as our understanding of systems of ideas known as feminist, communist, democratic or religious ideology) and ideology which has no history and that we derive from the cultural values of the societies we are born into. It is this ideology that Althusser explains as “represent[ing] the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.”\textsuperscript{137}

This definition of ideology indicates the values that surround us and that help form our conception of our sense of individuality. But it also blinds us to reality as it shapes our very experience unconsciously, or as Catherine Belsey states, “precisely in that it is unquestioned, taken for granted.”\textsuperscript{138} Hence, a writer’s ideology is, generally determined by his or her race, beliefs and social class. But this ideology is also coterminous and overlaps with his

\textsuperscript{135}Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{136}Ibid. 240.  
\textsuperscript{137}Ibid. 241.  
\textsuperscript{138}Catherine Belsey, Critical Practice (New York: Methuen, 1980), 5.
perception of the world fashioned by his education, by the laws that determine the boundary of his social activities, and by the cultural and moral milieu that influences his views. As Rana Kabbani states, a colonialist’s “social position [...] colours his vision, and [...] he usually represents the interests and systems of thought in which he was schooled.”

Based on the explanation above a colonialist’s ideology is shaped and structured by a multitude of factors. But this same ideology will always maintain the assumed superiority of Europeans vis-à-vis non-European worlds. Likewise, my ideology as an indigenous reader is shaped by the same kinds of life experience. And once the two ideologies collide a new form of understanding and an alternative interpretation arise out of the contesting voices. As explained by Pam Morris:

> [m]eaning does not exist or arise in an individual consciousness or soul but in concrete social communication. Only in that dialogic social interaction can the process of generation bring about ideological change.\(^{140}\)

If we could interpret Morris’s explanation of meaning as a social interaction, then ideology is shaped and reshaped within the same dialogic social [and textual] interaction.

The above explanation tailors in with Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism itself because for Bakhtin language is never

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\(^{140}\)Morris (ed.), *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov*, 123.
neutral. Every utterance and every word, spoken or written, carries with it a force and is imbued with power - the force and power of discourse. Therefore, to be involved in a dialogue is to be in a discursive exchange or clash of power dynamics between two or more parties each seeking to centralise his or her version of truth and marginalise the other’s version. Dialogue, in actual fact, is often a battle between ideologies. As Robert Stam emphasises, “[t]o speak of language, without speaking of power, in a Bakhtinian perspective is to speak meaninglessly, in a void.”\(^{141}\)

Language functions in ways that go beyond its presumed role as communication that binds a group of people into an interactive and coherent society. Language, in a sense, reflects the political and social aspects of that society, determining its power hierarchies; it is through language that that hierarchy is maintained.

This idea of ideological interaction also transcends the author/reader relationship. A text produced is loaded with the ideology and biases of the writer. Intentionally or not, the ideas that authors convey carry with them the baggage of their cultural experiences, their aspirations, their fears – all that makes authors a part of their specific cultural and intellectual worlds. Thus when authors write or speakers utter a word they reveal the ideological biases, whether consciously or not, of their own political, cultural and ideological

\(^{141}\) Stam, Subversive Pleasures, 8.
worldview. If we transpose this conceptualisation of dialogue and ideology into the dialectics of colonialists' representations of Malay women we will, therefore, understand that authorial perspectives do not represent the one truth, reality or certainty. Their perspectives are merely an alternative vision produced and signified by their ideology in relation to inherited ideas and prevalent social assumptions current in their eras. As such there are other representative alternatives that can redefine constructs of Malay women, defying the view of them as singular, monolithic subjects of savagery and unmitigated sexuality.

In my discussion above I highlight the fundamental aspect of the multivocality of dialogism, or polyphony, as a theory of discourse because of its potential to serve my methodological need to articulate the hidden voices, as well as to reveal distorted images prevalent in colonial narratives about Malay women. As I have mentioned, the theoretical potential of dialogism can be harnessed to analyse colonial texts to expose their ideological and political inertia and biases and the centripetal tendency of the colonial subject positions as reflected in those texts. Once reformulated, I would realign dialogism to tease out the dialectics of othering of Malay female subjectivity that are inherent in the colonialists' texts independent of the author's intentions. This method would create a discursive polyphonicity where the ideology of the colonial writers would be exposed to provide a
new perspective on the same subject matter in order to create a more balanced discursive dynamics. For that purpose, further clearing of ground is needed to ensure that the research is more focused in its analytical framework and boundary.

As reflected in the title, this research analyses and reveals Eurocentric representations of Malay women in selected colonialists' texts about Malaya ranging from travel narratives to novels and short stories. In the subsequent chapters I show that the writers I consider, whether seemingly sympathetic or outright abusive, hold the common views of the exotic and erotic, licentious and immoral nature of the Malay female Other. My research shows that these assumptions about the Malay female Other are actually a reflection of Eurocentrism. My methodological strategy in analysing the colonialists' texts is an appropriation and reformulation of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism as described above. I posit that Bakhtin's dialogical theory can illuminate the contestatory voices between the ideology inherent in the selected texts and my own ideology (in my positionality as one of their indigenous readers whose cultural environment forms part of their textual settings). In the Bakhtinian sense, this exercise is a form of intersubjective exchange between interlocutors that constitute the texts (as a representative of the ideology of the author) and the reader (the ideology of an indigenous male addressee). This strategy draws its inspiration and generalising principles from the concept of
utterance (as in the novel) as dialogic in nature. This dialogue between indigenous reader and texts (therefore also with the respective authors) also serves as a critical practice of disrupting the colonial signifying chains in the broader struggle over meanings and interpretations.

In order to achieve my stated objectives above I highlight cracks and fissures in colonial narratives by drawing out contradictions and hesitations and also by articulating silences in between voices in those narratives. This is in order to give the silenced material presence as written or spoken objects. The foci/subjects of this dialectical struggle are the Malay women objectified in the colonial writers' conception of reality as well as in their writing. These narratives and fictional writings portray the Malay women from European racial and imperial perspectives. As such we find unflattering representations of the deviousness, licentiousness and degenerative influence of the Malay woman, especially on unsuspecting white men. These are the images and representations that pepper these colonialists' texts despite differences of genre and times of writing. They are also the same images and representations which I deconstruct to lay bare the Eurocentric bricks that form their ideological foundations in looking at the Malay women.

2.3 CONCLUSION

A text is in nature, as Bakhtin posits, a dialogue.
Within the text there is an ideological collision and collusion between the characters. Outside of it, a text could produce a clash of opposing ideologies between author and reader. Therefore, the author/text, in actuality, expects differing voices of resistance. And dialogism, as a theoretical methodology, cannot be separated from the politics of narrative resistance. This is due to its counter-hegemonic reach in nullifying and neutralising the authoritative voice of the author. And resistance, whether ideological or personal, could be part of Bakhtin’s dialectical consciousness. Although not many authors have directly linked Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism to his life under the black cloud of Stalinism (where socialist realism was the only politically sanctioned mode of artistic production allowed) we can only assume his musings on and formulations of dialogism to be an episteme to some degree engaging with the repressive political conditions in which he lived and worked. Bakhtin’s idea of the multiplicity of voices must have come to fruition partly as a response to a harsh political and social environment where truth could only be revealed through analysing multiple layers of meanings and nuances. Thus, dialogism, in a way, is a resistance theory that allows for marginalised voices to seep through cracks and fissures of normalising and rationalising authoritative discourse. It thereby has the capacity to rupture the iron curtain of hegemonic discourse wherever it may be found.
My reformulation of Bakhtin’s dialogism as an analytical method allows for a discursive response to texts written by colonial writers, therefore providing an alternative reading of colonial representations of subaltern Malay women. It is a strategy of reading where we are made aware of the racial and ideological partiality, whether conscious or not, of authors as reflected in their texts. By examining the mechanics of their narratives we can “reduce the gap between what we consciously and rationally know, and what we intuitively discern through pushing the text beyond its limit.”¹⁴² I hope that the merging and fusing of the opposing voices (between text and reader) will bring us to a fuller understanding of how power is inscribed in discourse and of the possibility of a world of discourse that negates authorial hegemony and, instead, celebrates the triumph of polyphonicity.

¹⁴²Hashim Ruzy Suliza, Out of the Shadows: Women in Malay Court Narratives (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2003), 53.
Travel writing was often viewed as operating in a different discursive domain than works of fiction. The assumed difference between the two genres was that travel writing was factual, based on observation and reporting, and fiction was imaginative and creative in its mediation of reality. The travel writer’s assumed presence as an observer of a foreign reality lent an air of authenticity to a travel account that interpreted place and culture for armchair adventurers at home. Thus, the evocation of presence in foreign scenes produces an aura of knowledge and truth.

This chapter explores travel writings that document the Malay world, and eventually Malay women, through colonial and imperial assumptions. The perspectives are those of four colonialists of different backgrounds and genders. Frank Swettenham and John Thomson are male colonialists of different professional background and sympathies. As for female writers, while Isabella Bird’s travel narrative purports to be an objective observation of the Malay world, Emily Innes’s is full of bitter memory of the tropical land. Overall, their writings are records of their experiences and impressions of a world shaped by Eurocentric ideologies albeit with different shades of sympathy, objectivity and disdain. However, a common thread in their narratives is the notion of degenerate and
sexually immoral Malay women that echoes common European ideas of the female Other.

3.1 TRAVEL NARRATIVES AND THE EXOTIC OTHER

Perhaps within the glass cabinet the world, with all its countries, was set on stage. And we remained outside, contemplating it through the glass.\textsuperscript{143}

Western travel writing as a genre has a long history and it was not always conceived as a justifying narrative of colonialism. It began as an effort at understanding other cultures by making sense of their strangeness and peculiarities compared to the normalcy found at home. As Ivo Kamps and Jyotsna Singh note, travel narratives “claim to provide knowledge, frequently premised on pleasure”\textsuperscript{144} in translating the sense of otherness to readers at home. Nor were travel and travel writing the exclusive playground of men although they had been so long their domain that Eric Leed terms them the “spermatic journey.”\textsuperscript{145}

But travel narrative is not as objective and empirical as was commonly assumed. Upon analysis, it displays some

\textsuperscript{145}Qtd. in Roxanne Euben, \textit{Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 134.
similarities to various genres, including fiction. As Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs explain:

one of the most persistent observations regarding travel writing, is its absorption of differing narrative styles and genres, the manner in which it effortlessly shape-shifts and blends any number of imaginative encounters, and its potential for interaction with a broad range of historical periods, disciplines and perspectives.\(^{146}\)

In the same vein, Jan Borm argues that travel writing comprises a range of genres, nonfictional as well as fictional, with travel as the main theme.\(^{147}\)

However much colonial travel writers attempted to objectively and empirically understand local cultures their views were still coloured by the prejudice of Eurocentrism that drew its strength from Orientalism. In effect, narratives of travel to colonised territories share with imperial adventure fictions themes of exploration and subjugation of peoples and cultures.\(^{148}\) And as Inderpal Grewal states, on the part of the European traveller there was “the desire for the exotic, a disdain for natives, a search for the authentic Other, and a need to merge with the native culture and not be

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\(^{146}\)Glen Hooper and Tim Youngs (eds.), *Perspectives on Travel Writing* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004), 3.

\(^{147}\)Jan Borm, "Defining Travel: On the Travel Book, Travel Writing and Terminology", in Hooper and Youngs (eds.), *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, 13.

seen as a visitor."  

Furthermore, while incidental details in travel writings may concur with the reality of the locale, the author’s own creative imagination and subjective exaggeration may also come into play. An example of such exaggeration is Isabella Bird's endorsing trust of Frank Swettenham, whom she met in Selangor. As to the supposition that the Malay was blood-thirsty, he affirms that it is hardly an exaggeration to say that every man above twenty years old had killed at least one man, and that even the women were not unaccustomed to use deadly weapons against each other.  

In the same period, Emily Innes, on the other hand, laments the "monotony of the petty-theft cases" that was occasionally relieved by some murder cases.  

Thus, the reader is presented with two contradictory accounts of the same local culture, and yet both observations highlight a reliance on ideological constructs of Otherness. In essence, travel writers to Malaya, whether male or female, such as Frank Swettenham, John Thomson, George Bilainkin, Isabella Bird, and Emily Innes to a certain degree share the same colonial ideology as writers of fiction like Somerset Maugham, Anthony Burgess or even the paradoxical Joseph Conrad.

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151 Emily Innes, The Chersonese with the Gilding Off, i (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1974), 54.
Travel writers also borrowed heavily from images and assumptions about the foreign from previous travel writers although some of their writings are considered untruths. For example, Percy Adams asserts that Chateaubriand’s and Jonathan Carver’s travel accounts were outright deceptions.\textsuperscript{152} While Adams’ assertion categorically points to travel writers of the eighteenth century these assumptions actually extend to later centuries and even to the present. Sheridan Prasso gives a more lucid description of how travel liars create their own momentum of deceit when other narrators rely on the same accounts to write their own travel narratives. Marco Polo, the thirteenth-century travel writer who purportedly went to China via the perilous Silk Road, came back to Europe in 1295 with wildly imaginative stories of idolatrous and uninhibited sex practised by peoples he met along the route. In one tale, as Prasso explains, Marco Polo reports concerning one household:

\begin{quote}
They give positive orders to their wives, daughters, sisters, and other female relations, to indulge their guests every wish, whilst they themselves leave their homes and retire into the city, and the stranger lives in the house with the females as if they were his own wives.\textsuperscript{153}
\end{quote}

There are other tales of the same nature narrated by Marco

\textsuperscript{152}Percy Adams, Travelers and Travel Liars (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 2.

Polo about the different cultures he met in his Eastern travels.\textsuperscript{154} And these wondrous tales of the promiscuous nature of the Eastern peoples were picked up and recounted by literary notables such as Chaucer and Dante and explorers such as Christopher Columbus. And Prasso states that these accounts of lack of sexual inhibitions were considered true of the Eastern world for the next two centuries of the European Renaissance.\textsuperscript{155} Suffice to say that accounts by travel writers such as Marco Polo, Chateaubriand and Jonathan Carver retold in different narratives became part of a European sense of the Eastern world.

The tales told, be they factual or fictional, endure through time and thus gain currency as knowledge about foreigners in European epistemology. Thus even nineteenth-century Western writers recycled the same ideas when looking at non-European worlds. Unsurprisingly, at this juncture of history new images of the foreign began to emerge. Images of savagism, primitivism, historylessness\textsuperscript{156} and immorality became

\textsuperscript{154}The authenticity of Marco Polo's travel to the East has been disputed by some scholars as well as others who advise against outright rejection of the authenticity of his travels. Frances Wood calls attention to his failure to mention cultural practices of foot-binding and tea-drinking and also his omission of the Great Wall of China in his travel narrative. Peter Jackson has, however, cautioned against dismissing Polo's narratives in totality as based wholly on hearsay or plagiarism from other sources. See Frances Wood, \textit{Did Marco Polo Go to China?} (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996). See also Peter Jackson, "Marco Polo and His 'Travels'", \textit{Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies}, 61/1 (1998), 82-101.

\textsuperscript{155}Prasso, \textit{The Asian Mystique}, 37.

\textsuperscript{156}Some cultures were assumed to be devoid of history since they lacked writing as a tool to record and retain the memory of their history as exemplified by Western perceptions of colonial indigenous Americans and Africans. Thus, Kerwin Klein states that a view was that their histories would "either disappear or assimilate themselves to the rising West". See
some of its defining features.

Primitivism, historylessness and savagism were attributed especially to the less mechanised societies or cultures relying merely on oral traditions. Since they had fewer observable artifacts or less visual richness to account for their cultural traditions they were assumed to be culturally and racially inferior. Undoubtedly there were differences in the material complexity of different cultures then as now. Nineteenth-century Europe was at the pinnacle of its technological achievement—achievement that accounted for its material superiority and military power. But the question of morality, which Alfred Wallace defines as the “right conduct, not only in our immediate social relations, but also in our dealings with our fellow-citizens and the whole human race,” remains hidden in the scramble for lands and national glory.

When European travellers and colonisers began to explore the world they needed a cultural yardstick from which to measure the different cultures they encountered and to make sense of each culture’s achievements and progress. Naturally, European material development was the yardstick (although Europe itself was, as it is now, a collection of diverse cultures with varying success in material achievement). Faced with old and traditionally rich cultures such as Japan, China,

India or the Middle East, European chroniclers focused on the subject of sexual promiscuity, cruelty and the sense of moral degeneration as their main preoccupation. Thus, harems, geisha girls, concubines, and cruel justice and deeds were emblematic of the immorality of these non-European cultures.

Cultures that appeared simple and primitive were represented more mildly. Since architectural constructions and written texts were markers of civilisational advancement, any culture that lacked these markers would be deemed inferior. They were not degenerates (unlike the cultures of China, Japan or the Middle East) because their civilisations had never reached any golden era of material achievement to start with. Instead these primitive cultures were commonly thought to be static in cultural and intellectual capacity throughout their social existence. The primitive was read from makeshift dwellings, involvement in crude agricultural activities or hunting, and patterns of socialisation. These primitive cultures were viewed as being unable to produce something worthy enough to be called civilisation.

Early European travel narratives were littered with descriptions of these foreign savages living like wild beasts that lacked human emotions and rationality. They were viewed as deficient in the conception of law and order, scarce in imagination and wanting in morality. Sometimes these conclusions were made by simple observations and deductions. For example, William Burchell, the well-known nineteenth-
century English traveller who met the Bushmen and Fuegians of South Africa and South America respectively, concluded that they lacked the power of reasoning and intelligence by simply asking them questions that the tribes could not answer to his satisfaction. They were later proven to have well-developed cultures, arts and religious values. Concerning primitive cultures in general, Franz Boas, the pioneer of modern anthropology categorically states:

[O]ur knowledge of primitive tribes the world over justifies the statement that there is no people that lacks definite religious ideas and traditions; that has not made inventions, that does not live under the rule of customary laws regulating the relations between members of the tribe. And there is no people without language.

We now know that while there are differences in civilisational complexity between cultures of the world, none were at the level of nature described in pseudo-scientific reports of European travel narratives.

Every society or culture has its own unique and different developmental and cultural progress. Materially and intellectually some cultures are more advanced while some others are less complex in their economic and intellectual production. But human beings generally are social in nature.

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159. Ibid. 627.
and have an innate desire for organisation and cohesive existence. As Franz Boas explains above, we humans fashion laws and values to dictate how we should conduct our lives. Nineteenth-century England could boast of economic, intellectual and political progress unsurpassed in its complexity. The Malay nation of the same period was a people that had undergone hundreds of years of European intrusion and domination. We cannot predict how the Malay nation would have developed had no European men-o-war traversed its waters and interfered with its affairs, for destiny has a mind of its own and is not subject to our will and whim. But a free spirit is more susceptible to change if it feels the change will bring benefit to itself, while a caged soul will merely parrot what the master trains it to do. And no foreign masters, however honourable their intentions are, would want to see their subjects escape their captivity and deny them the feathers that make their bed soft.

3.2 THE MALAY WORLD IN EUROPEAN TRAVEL NARRATIVES

Throughout Malaya’s colonial history the Malays have been labelled many things by the several European powers that conquered this part of the world. Some of the first Europeans who visited Malacca provided graphic descriptions of the Malay society and their nations. The earliest compilation of Malay customs, laws and commerce by a European was by the Portuguese Tome Pires in 1512-1515 A.D. He mentioned that the Malayas were
a jealous nation where the women moved about publicly in covered sedans and in groups. His account was soon followed in 1518 A.D. by Duarte Barbossa’s. Barbossa noted that the Malay royalty and nobilities were leading a pleasant life with large houses outside of the town complete with orchards, gardens, and water tanks and slaves attending to their needs. He described them as “polished and well bred, fond of music, and given to love.”

Before the coming of Europeans, Malacca, the icon of the Malay sultanate, was an international trading port with merchants from as far as China, Siam, India and the Middle East calling to its port to create an extensive trading network in a multiethnic environment. It was a thriving port where junks, prahus, and ships jostled for space. Merchandise and produce were traded and bargained freely in a peaceful environment provided by the Malaccan authority. In 1511 the Portuguese came, wrestled Malacca from local rulers and changed the political, economic and hence social landscapes of the country. Only after three waves of European colonisation over more than four centuries did Malaya regain its liberty in 1957, with the founding of the modern nation-state of Malaysia.

After the first century of European colonialism the social and economic landscape had changed beyond recognition.

The new powers, by monopolising trade practices, enforced by men-o-war, rendered the native trading class extinct and ruling class impotent. European colonialism supplanted free trade that was the hallmark of Malay (and regional) mercantilism with gun-boat trade monopolism that led to the demise of Malay entrepreneurship and society in general. T. Braddell explains its effect with reference to this brand of trade monopolism:

[Trade monopolism] had in the end a prejudicial effect on the well being of the native states. Each party aimed at the possession of exclusive rights to trade ... Whenever a trade had been collected at any port, by reason of its favourable position for commerce or the advantageous state of government, the Europeans settled themselves. Under the pretence of protecting their lives and property, they erected forts whose guns were turned upon the neighbouring town. They forced from the sovereigns of these ports, engagements, misnamed treaties, in which they assumed exclusive rights of purchasing at fixed prices all available produce and declared themselves free of all duties and taxes.162

This pretext would be repeated and become synonymous with colonial trade practices in various parts of the Eastern

Denied sources of both material wealth and new ideas from the outer world, Malay culture began to slide down the road of degeneration as always happens to a people under constant subjugation. Thus, when a Portuguese official, Emanuel Godhino de Eredia, wrote about Malaya in 1613 he found the Malays intelligent but their nobility oppressive. The common people were accomplished craftsmen and blacksmiths while the nobles spent their time on wasteful activities. Not that the conquest dampened the free spirit of the Malays. As Barbara Andaya notes, even as early as the first arrivals of European powers, such as the Portuguese and the Dutch, the Malay kingdom was seen to maintain the spirit of independence, putting the colonial powers constantly on the defensive. But mere krises and spears were no match for guns and cannons. Consequently, the European intrusion into the Malay world had a heavy bearing on the social and economic conditions of the Malays. As eloquently put by Dianne Lewis:

[the European conquest] had important consequences; the capture and continued occupation of the port-city of Malacca by Europeans throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries had a highly significant effect on the history of the

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Malay people, massively disrupting their economic and political organization and contributing largely to their inability to meet the new challenge of industrialized European nations in the early nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{164}

Numerous other writers since 1613 have felt compelled to put pen to paper in attempts at explaining the Malay world. This is especially true of British travellers after the Malay Peninsula became part of Britain’s sphere of influence after agreements with the Dutch in 1824. The Pangkor treaty in 1874 with Malay rajas and Chinese chiefs further entrenched British influence over the surrounding Malay sultanates until 1919 when the whole of the Malay Peninsula came under British control.

Colonial writers came from diverse backgrounds. There are the East India Company officials such as William Marsden and John Anderson Stamford Raffles and non-government writers such as the journalist John Cameron and surveyor John Turnbull Thomson. But most notable were colonial administrators such as William Maxwell, Frank Swettenham, Hugh Clifford and R.O. Winstedt who had intimate knowledge of local cultures and customs. These officials provided a more in-depth European understanding of the Malay world than other writers who made their Malaya trip a mere sojourn on a tour of Eastern

countries. The fact that Clifford and Swettenham spoke the Malay language and lived among the Malays for an extended period of time greatly enhanced their abilities to understand Malay politics and culture. And at least one writer, R. H. Bruce Lockhart, records his liaison with a Malay woman. In his *Return to Malaya* (1936) he describes, after a twenty-five year absence, a return visit to Malaya and the girl who captured his youthful heart. But men were not the only colonialists who wrote about Malaya and its people. There were also women writers who began to assert themselves in the sphere previously dominated by men. Isabella Bird, the celebrated traveller, traversed the country for five weeks in 1879 and wrote *The Golden Chersonese*. Of note, too, was Emily Innes, the wife of a minor British official, who wrote in response to Isabella Bird’s optimism about the world she thought she knew better in *The Chersonese with the Gilding Off* (1885). These writers comment, moralise and make judgmental opinions about the culture, politics and civilisation of Malaya and the Malays.

As the travellers’ perspectives were recorded at different points in history and were based on different routes through Malaya these writers’ analyses and observations also varied accordingly. Seemingly the views of the indigenes depend in part on the fierceness of local resistance before European imperialism took firm hold of the land and its
people. But, in general, as Syed Hussein Alatas states, the view of the Malay as a people was based on hasty generalisations rather than on a sound methodology and rigid scholarship. It was partly generated by cultural misunderstanding or lack of empathy, but mainly it was ideological, a justification of colonial domination.

The enduring image of the Malays that evolved from the sixteenth to the twentieth century was of a race that was indolent, bigoted, treacherous, and childish. Thus the Malays were indolent for their unwillingness to work in slave-like conditions in tin mines and rubber plantations owned by Europeans, bigots for practising a different religion which refused to conform to European ideas of morality, and treacherous for constantly showing resistance to a demand for total submission to colonial authority. These negative views of the Malays were formulated within the mould of colonial capitalism that excluded from the definition of work any activity that did not generate marketable wealth for the

166 Ibid. 120.
167 Some of the charges of Malay indolence border on absurdity. John Thomson claims, for instance, that some Malays were so lazy that they would sell and resell themselves into slavery (debt-bondage) "for they found themselves too lazy to do this [labour] for themselves without having the spur of a master to urge them to work". See John T Thomson, *Sequel to Some Glimpses into Life in the Far East* (London: Richardson, 1865), 62.
168 The Malays refused to work in exploitative working conditions in plantations and tin mines owned by Europeans and Chinese since they had the land to provide them with the necessities of life. As a solution indentured labourers from China and India were imported to work as "a mule of the nations". See Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, 80.
benefit of the colonisers. Thus, fishing, farming or collecting forest produce for personal consumption was considered a leisure activity even though it might have been a necessity for the daily survival of families and communities. This issue of Malay indolence is contested by W.A. Graham when he maintains that

the Malay is lazy and will not work is a common saying in the mouths of Europeans in Malaya. True, the Malay will often decline to work in the particular manner in which the European desires him to do so, that is as a mining cooly or plantation hand in the service of the said European, but the Malay is by no means an idle person. In Kelantan he grows the seventy thousand odd tons of rice which feed the population, he catches and dries fish enough for home consumption and for considerable export, he makes some forty thousand pikuls of kopra each year, he works boats on the river, and in fact, he makes a very comfortable living, supplies all his wants, and is contented. It is not probable that any European who condemns him would himself continue to work at tin mine or rubber estate after he had made enough to satisfy all his wants and to be able to realise all his ideals in order merely to satisfy
the demand of some stranger for labour.\textsuperscript{169}

Once colonialism managed to extinguish meaningful resistance once and for all the images of Malays changed. Later travel writers to Malaya found three major themes that described the Malay world: the cruelty of the law and the people, the lawlessness of the region, and the immorality of the culture in general. These main images, along with other minor degrading or benign images were assumed to be the innate characteristics of the indigenous society as much as courage, justice and morality were part of the personality of Europeans. But bigger guns and cannons, faster ships and majestic buildings do not reflect moral superiority any more than refined laws indicate civilisational advancement. They only serve to show the advance in material achievement and the need to further control our restless and selfish human nature respectively, as any discerning mind would recognise. A Manichean binary, nevertheless, serves a function in categorising human differences within Eurocentrism. After all, the dichotomous constructs of coloniser/colonised as “the cultural and the natural, the industrious and the indolent, the clean and the dirty, the adult and the child, the male and the female”\textsuperscript{170} were concomitant with the machinery of colonialism itself.

\textsuperscript{169}W.A Graham, \textit{Kelantan: A State of the Malay Peninsula} (Glasgow: James Maclehose, 1908), 19-20.
3.3 THROUGH THE DOUBLE LOOKING GLASS: MALE EUROPEANS ON MALAY WOMEN

It is difficult to find sustained attention to the lives of Malay women in travel narratives. Usually Malay women recede into the background as colonial writers attempt to understand and articulate their experience of the Malay world. There may be two reasons for this significant failure to highlight the Malay woman as a particular subject. First, European colonialism was itself patriarchal in nature. Coloniser/colonised relations were constructed as a male/female or masculine/feminine relationship in the first place. Thus no conscious effort was made to understand gender differences in native culture. Since the coloniser himself regarded the middle-class Christian male as representative of imperial civilisation he assumed that the male indigene too typified the colonised population as a whole. If there is any studied contemplation of Malay women, it merely serves to confirm the already entrenched ideological perceptions of indigenous savagery in general.

Secondly, the lack of interest in reflecting on the position of Malay women could be due to the fact that intrusion into the feminine sphere was deemed insensitive to local culture. Since there was a gendered separation of social spheres in Malay culture, with men maintaining power over the boundary, any foreign intrusion into the indigenous feminine sphere could be deemed offensive by Malay society. Because of
such narrative limitations on travel writers we sometimes need to read between the lines of texts to discern colonial perceptions of Malay women. Interspersed throughout descriptions of the Malay nation there are allusions to and glimpses of the Malay female Other.

FRANK SWETTENHAM

Frank Swettenham first came to Singapore, the capital of the Straits Settlement Colony, in 1871 as a twenty-year-old. He spent most of his professional career and life in Malaya and made a not inconsiderable contribution to shaping the nature and extent of British imperial policy in the region. Over the years, through stature and ability, he rose to the position of Resident of Selangor in 1882, Resident of Perak in 1889, and Resident General of the Federated Malay States in 1897. Swettenham eventually attained the highest rung of the official ladder, as Governor of the Straits Settlements and High Commissioner for the Malay States in 1901.

Frank Swettenham was among the pioneering British officials who lived amongst the Malays, who spoke their language and had close interactions with them. He also had intimate knowledge of Malay rulers and used it for the benefit of British colonial endeavours. Swettenham was a colonial servant par excellence who (unlike Hugh Clifford) set aside sentimentality and romanticism for colonial practicality and efficiency, and he was subsequently recognised as "one of the
greatest heroes of Victorian imperialism.”\(^{171}\) Doubtless Swettenham was a keen observer of the alien world he was in and, through his writings, he also attempted to provide the reader at home and administrative officials with knowledge that could lead to their better understanding of local culture.

On the whole, Swettenham contributed largely to the material progress of the Peninsula but he was less concerned with its social development. With respect to education for Malays (and other Asians), as William R. Roff explains, Swettenham believed that it should be merely for the purpose of lubricating the machinery of colonisation to make it more effective.\(^{172}\) Swettenham also writes extensively of his experience as a colonial official in Malaya in official journals and in prose. Some of his writings include About Perak (1893), Malay Sketches (1895), The Real Malay (1899), British Malaya (1907), Footprints in Malaya (1942) and The Future of Malaya (1946).

Swettenham was not a noted literary writer. However, as was common during that era, he always maintains a sense of imperial high morality and civility in a barbaric Malay world. As such, his texts radiate a personal aura of incorruptibility, courage and justice in his description of

\(^{171}\) Susan Morgan, Place Matters: Gendered Geography in Victorian Women's Travel Books About Southeast Asia (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 141.
\(^{172}\) Qtd. in Introduction to Frank Swettenham, A Nocturne and Other Malayan Stories and Sketches (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1993), xv.
the savage Malay culture. Since he has a better depth of knowledge of Malay people, culture and nation than his European contemporaries Swettenham is able to make stereotypical generalisations about them with ease. This is notwithstanding the fact that these generalisations are part of a broader colonial narrative that establishes a separation of identity and difference between coloniser and colonised. This form of stereotypical surveillance is what Ivo Kamps and Jyotsna Singh refer to as colonizing imagination - tropes, fantasies, rhetorical structures - whereby the writers/travelers frequently fall back on defining the cultural others they encounter in terms of binaries that later consolidate and justify full-blown colonialism: civilisation versus barbarism, and pious Christian versus impious Islam, among numerous others.\footnote{Ivo Kamps and Jyotsna Singh, Travel Knowledge: European "Discoveries" In the Early Modern Period (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 2-3.}

These stereotypes are, however, problematical considering that his sketches and stories of the Malay nation reveal how diverse and varied the Malays are in both physiology and psychology, and even in nuances of culture. Swettenham’s conception of the Malay as a people is too simplified considering the various cultures and ethnicities that make up the Malay nation. Javanese, Achehnese, Bugis, Boyanese,
Minangkabau, Rawa and Malay are some of the major ethnic groups of the Malay nation. And each of these ethnicities has its own particular language and culture. What bind these ethnic communities are only the Malay language as the regional lingua franca and Islam as the unifying faith. The difference in local cultures is even observed by Hugh Clifford in his visits to the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula. As he states:

> [a]lthough the States on the East Coast lie in very close proximity one with another, the people who inhabit them differ widely among themselves, not only in appearance, in costume, and in the dialects which they speak, but also in manners, customs, and character.¹⁷⁴

Despite this observation, Swettenham devotes a whole chapter of *Malay Sketches* to a description of the personal and societal aspects of the Malays, generalising from a male type, and confidently outlining the physiology as well as psychology of a real Malay. As he writes:

> [t]he real Malay is a short, thick-set, well-built man, with straight black hair, a dark brown complexion, thick nose and lips, and bright intelligent eyes. His disposition is generally kindly, his manners are polite and easy. Never cringing, he is reserved with strangers and

And in the following descriptions, by a single stroke of his narrative brush, Swettenham is able to conjure a stereotypical nature for the Malay man: from his sense of fatalism, intolerance of insults, particularity about rank and birth, to his penchant for pursuing any woman he desires, irrespective of her marital status. With regard to the last characteristic of the Malay man Swettenham also problematically reconstructs the Malay’s frame of mind in pursuing his lust. He writes:

I am not going to give away the secrets of the life behind the curtain; if I wished to do so I might trip over difficulties of expression ... in spite of his sensitive honour and his proneness to revenge, and in spite of his desire to keep his own women (when young and attractive) away from the prying eyes of other men, he yet holds this uncommon faith, that if he has set his affections on a woman, and for any reason he is unable at once to make her his own, he cares not to how many others she allies herself provided she becomes his before time has robbed her of her physical attractions.

His reason is this. He says (certainly not to a stranger, rarely even to his Malay friends, but to himself) “if, after all this experience, she likes me best, I have no fear that she will wish to go

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175 Swettenham, A Nocturne and Other Malayan Stories and Sketches, 16-17.
further afield. All Malay girls marry before they are twenty, and the woman who has only known one husband, however attractive he may be, will come sooner or later to the conviction that life with another promises new and delightful experiences not found in the society of the first man to whom destiny and her relatives have chosen to unite her. Thus some fool persuades her that in his worship and passion she will find the World’s desire, and it is only after perhaps a long and varied experience that she realizes that, having started for a voyage on the ocean, she finds herself seated at the bottom of a dry well.” It is possible that thus she becomes acquainted with truth.\textsuperscript{176}

That Swettenham is purportedly able to read the mind of a Malay man attests to a colonial ideology that is able to produce and signify inter-penetrating discourses descriptive of the colonised Other even in the deepest recess of his psyche. This confidence is derived from the strength of Orientalism as an epistemological source in describing, suggesting and even anticipating the nature of non-Europeans in their individual, as well as collective personalities.

But it is questionable that he can understand the motive of such a dangerous liaison if, he himself admits, a Malay man would never divulge the innermost secrets of his hearts even

\textsuperscript{176}Ibid. 21–2.
to his friends, let alone a stranger. As a colonial officer Swettenham was less a friend to Malays than a stranger who ruled over them. Although he had lived among Malays for many years the fact that Swettenham finds the Malay "polite" and "reserved with strangers" should have informed him of the divide that separates the white and the brown. Politeness, in Malay or in most cultures, signifies unfamiliarity and guardedness. Amicability and friendliness, on the other hand, allow for trust and confidence and thus openness.

The second issue raised by the passage is the generalisation of racial type, a narrative process whereby the characteristics of individuals are transposed onto and identified with the collective traits of a group of people "through which simplified images of the Other are created." 177 In his descriptions the Malay, as Swettenham sees him, is contemptuous of his own adat (customs) and religious faith 178 in pursuance of his lust and desire for the flesh. We might not question the veracity of Swettenham's story for one is bound to meet all manner of individual conducts and behaviour in all cultures. But it becomes problematic when a few instances of Malay promiscuity and licentiousness are defined

178 For a discussion of the influence of Islam on Malay Adat and laws regulating his life and conduct see especially "Chapter One: Colonial Perceptions of Malay Adat Laws" (7-20) and "Chapter Three: Islam and Its Relationship with Malay Adat Laws" (51-80) in Rahman, Colonial Image of Malay Adat Laws. See also Roziah Omar, Malay Woman in the Body (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Fajar Bakti, 1994), 16-17.
as a standard of Malay sexual normalcy.

The third issue is related closely to the second in the symbiotic picture of the licentious and promiscuous personality of Malay man and woman. When Swettenham describes the Malay man in his consummate fulfilment of his lust he also reveals his assumptions about the licentious personality of the Malay woman. The passage alludes to the consensual nature of the immorality of Malay man and woman in the sexual misadventure. In attempting to fulfil her heart’s desire the Malay woman is ready to elope with her lover only to find that once the excitement has exhausted itself she is left to ponder her fate and misfortune. This representation of the Malay woman conforms to the general Orientalist fashioning of the female Other as amorous and immoral.

It is interesting that Swettenham uses the metaphor of a “curtain” to describe the cultural boundary that divides coloniser and colonised. As I have outlined in Chapter Two, the veil/curtain plays a prominent role in the interpretation of the relationship between Europe and its Other. Within the context of Swettenham’s narrative, the curtain replaces the veil as the constant sign of the curiosity and frustration of a male European in desiring to uncover the mysteriousness of the Orient. As Yeğenoğlu explains:

[the veil [or curtain] is one of those tropes through which Western fantasies of penetration into
the mysteries of the Orient and access to the interiority of the other are fantasmatically achieved.179

French Algeria studied by Yeğenoğlu and British Malaya are different historical, temporal and geographical sites but notions of hegemony, epistemological superiority and control were part of the grand narrative of colonial discourse anywhere in the colonial world.

Within the context of colonial Malaya, Swettenham’s claim of his ability to intrude behind the veil/curtain and to articulate, although with “difficulties of expression,” the difference of Malay sexual mores from European normalcy speaks much about his desire to explain what is hidden from colonial view. The frustration at understanding the truth and reality behind the veil/curtain forces the male coloniser to adopt the familiar Oriental assumptions about the female Other. As Yeğenoğlu further explains:

[These European men bring their insight and knowledge, their intuition and contemplation to the task of uncovering her hidden truth, yet they are not successful. Their solution is to posit the truth of a particular culture from within certain patriarchal metaphorics: deception and dissimulation are essential characteristics of Oriental

179Yeğenoğlu, Colonial Fantasies, 39.
cultures.¹⁸⁰

Thereby, the passage in which Swettenham explains the Malay by developing a male type also claims mastery over the hidden Malay female Other. Thus, as implied by Yeğenoğlu, what Swettenham depicts as Malay female reality is but his own interpretation that is derived by his Eurocentric ideology coloured by colonial patriarchy. Therefore, his descriptions fit neatly into the preconceived template of the female Other in the grand narrative of Orientalism. It is thus not surprising that the licentiousness and immorality of the Malay woman pervades his retelling of events where Malay female subjectivity is the topic either directly or indirectly.

At this juncture of our analysis it is imperative that we understand Victorian middle-class ideals of female morality and chastity¹⁸¹ as this awareness will throw into sharper relief the colonial idea of the immorality of the female Other. In Good Girls Make Good Wives Judith Rowbotham explores evolving ideas of femininity in Victorian England by studying literature aimed at middle-class girls and women. The literature served a didactic function of imparting moral values and instructing readers about acceptable conduct and aspirations for young women and girls of the era. Rowbotham states that a model Victorian woman was a metaphorical

¹⁸⁰Ibid. 52.
¹⁸¹The middle class played a leading and dominant role in shaping the economic, political and social ideology of Victorian Britain. See Francoise Basch, Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel (New York: Schocken, 1974), 3.
Household Fairy, Angel in the House or Home Goddess. She presided over the domestic affairs of the family in ensuring the physical comfort as well as moral well-being of every family member.

This spiritual elevation of the woman emphasises the importance of the maternal role in the domestic sphere of a typical middle-class Victorian family unit. She was considered as playing a vital role in “making her household a comfortable, tranquil refuge, where the busy man could relax on returning from his toil.”\(^{182}\) This description indicates the gender-based social sphere of the Victorian era where the middle-class husband maintained his position as the head of the household while the wife served as a manager in ensuring the comfort of his nest. Being a wife and mother was a professional career in its own right. As Rowbotham explains:

> [w]hile a man needed a career to justify and bolster his masculinity, being a woman was a career in itself, and in an age of growing emphasis on professionalism in careers, it became increasingly important for women to be professional in the gender sense.\(^{183}\)

More importantly, as a domestic professional a Victorian middle-class woman was also burdened with guaranteeing the moral integrity of the nation. In this sense the middle-class

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\(^{183}\)Ibid. 12.
A Victorian woman became the symbol of the virtue and morality of the nation, and in relation to colonisation, of Empire itself.\textsuperscript{184} Virtue and morality were also synonymous with women's self-sacrifice. William Acton describes the proper self-sacrificing Victorian woman as characterised by "sexual passivity, chastity, purity, innocence and, above all, sexual ignorance."\textsuperscript{185} What is emphasised in these articulations of feminine ideals is the regulation and control of sexuality to fit into patriarchal models of femininity.

In \textit{Relative Creatures} Francoise Basch states that the domestic role assigned to women was due to the assumption of her inferior intellectual and emotional capacity compared to men. Religious, as well as patriarchal, understanding played a leading role in this assumption. From this perspective, she was seen as a "creature of instinct ... characterized by vanity, instability and lack of judgement."\textsuperscript{186} This view of the emotional female that resonated with Christian theological assumptions was, then, picked up and refashioned to suit Victorian patriarchal ideology. When Victorian patriarchal ideology assigned certain behavioural and intellectual characteristics to women their social sphere was also

\textsuperscript{184}In the colonial setting, colonial women played a leading role in the maintenance of white prestige by ensuring the purity of the white race "by producing pure-bred children, recreating metropolitan domestic and social life, and enforcing a social distance between Asian subjects and their colonial rulers". See Janice N Brownfoot, "Memsahibs in Colonial Malaya: A Study of European Wives in a British Colony and Protectorate, 1900-1940", in Hillary Callan and Shirley Ardener (ed.), \textit{The Incorporate Wife} (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 190.

\textsuperscript{185}Qtd. in Lyn Pykett, \textit{The "Improper" Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing} (London: Routledge, 1992), 16.

\textsuperscript{186}Basch, \textit{Relative Creatures}, 3-4.
restricted accordingly. As Basch further elaborates:

[w]hen the woman is denied all capacity for creation, action and authority, her contribution in the masculine world becomes the emotional and moral guidance which are her vocations as wife and mother.\textsuperscript{187}

Under such conditions, home was the only place seen as befitting her intellectual capacity and feminine mentality.

In sum, Victorian patriarchal and theological ideologies combined to define the roles and functions of each gender by and in their respective spheres. Middle-class man, viewed as naturally active, should concern himself with public affairs and providing for the family. Middle-class woman, as the more sensitive in nature, was expected to ensure the mental, moral and physical wellbeing and comfort of the whole family. As a symbol of virtue and femininity a Victorian middle-class woman was viewed as a beacon of morality and chastity. As such, she must follow a code of conduct befitting her status as bearer of the morality and spirituality of the family, nation and Empire, especially with regard to how she managed and maintained her sexuality. Thus, colonial portrayals of and assumptions about Malay women's licentiousness and immorality were conjured in opposition to the ideal, chaste woman found at home.

Swettenham's chapter "The Real Malay" opens up the theme

\textsuperscript{187}Ibid. 5.
of licentious Malay women that would be followed by other narratives of his with Malay women as the principal or minor characters. The theme is reflected, either directly or indirectly, in three sketches with Malay women as the catalysts of events in the narratives. "A Nocturne" and "A Malay Romance" deal directly with the theme of Malay (male and female) amorousness and lustful adventures. "A Nocturne" deals with the story of a local Casanova, Dris, whose right hand is chopped off unintentionally by Samat, the husband of Esah, a woman whose house he is about to enter in the middle of the night. Swettenham is ambiguous about Dris’s action and intention on the night of the incident. When asked about why he was near Samat and Esah’s house that night Dris answers that he has lost his way due to the darkness. Later events that unfold compel Swettenham to suggest that there is a tryst between Dris and Esah. Dris dies due to the injuries and inquiry into the matter is closed after it is categorised as an accidental death. What lingers is the suspicion of Esah’s infidelity.188

In "A Malay Romance" Maimunah, the wife of vain and extravagant Raja Iskander, starts a liaison with an outsider named Raja Slêman. Eventually, Raja Slêman carries Maimunah away to his country but not before stopping midway down the river and daring Raja Iskander to reclaim Maimunah from him. Once the day is over Raja Iskander still fails to show up.

188 Swettenham, A Nocturne and Other Malayan Stories and Sketches, 183.
Raja Slēman continues with his journey leaving Raja Iskander licking his bruised ego and honour by having two attendant girls strangled for the crime of being the go-betweens between the two lovers.

But what is most relevant to us are the comments Swettenham makes with regard to Malay women’s ability to use their eyes to send messages or signals to their intended paramours. He states:

Malay ladies are adepts in speaking the language of the eyes, the chances of verbal speech are but few, and so carefully is this art cultivated, so thoroughly understood, that principals and witnesses never fail to rightly interpret the signs.

Sleman and Maimunah had already mutually declared themselves without the exchange of a syllable.189

This statement suggests that such liaisons are so common that the “language of the eyes” has become an art of non-verbal language among Malay women that is even understood by the intended lovers. After all, to Swettenham, “the masses seldom allow themselves the luxury of burning moral convictions.”190

However, in the same sketch Swettenham recounts the story of a Christian missionary whose proselytising sermon to a Malay man deals with the story of the Immaculate Conception. He writes:

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189 Frank Swettenham, Malay Sketches (Singapore: Graham Brash, 1984), 186.
190 Ibid. 190.
The Malay listened to the end, showing great interest in the miraculous narrative of the Blessed Virgin; then he said, "If that had happened to my wife, I should have killed her." There are conflicting signals conveyed by Swettenham on the issue of Malay infidelity. While in general, he explains that the Malay man would not consider a woman’s infidelity to be so utterly dishonourable as to warrant aggressive punishment he also narrates an instance of a threat of quick and lethal justice to the perpetrator, indicating the seriousness of the deed to the honour of a Malay man.

Another narrative, "The Passing of Pënglima Prang Sëmaun", deals with the story of a Malay Rajah who kills and defends himself against formidable enemies due to a perceived indignity inflicted upon a relative by certain powerful individuals. The main thrust of the story is the cruel but brazen courage and cunning of Pënglima Prang Sëmaun in executing his missions and later in escaping the dragnet formed for his capture. But the catalyst for this chain of events is Megat Raja’s divorce of a relative named Mëriam for infidelity. Although married, Mëriam was said to be notorious (although we are not told in what way). This notoriety

\[191\text{Ibid. 191. The story of the Blessed Virgin is well known to many Malay Muslims because the story is usually narrated to them in their formative years. Only the most ignorant would fail to understand the theological significance of the story and make disparaging remarks concerning the mother of Jesus. Thus, the story only serves to justify the colonial theme of the vicious nature of the Malay in defending his honour.}\]
attracts the attention of men. Soon a young man, Che Nuh, who is from an influential family, becomes her lover. But one night the lovers are caught by Megat Raja. The exposure of the affair would have led to a fatality had not Megat Raja feared retaliation from Che Nuh’s powerful family or relations. Eventually Megat Raja divorces Meriam and also forbids her to take away her belongings as well as his. This incident comes to the attention of Penglima Prang Semaun who feels slighted by Megat Raja’s action. The later chain of events focuses on the Penglima’s exploits and escapade.

Swettenham writes these stories not as fiction but as chronicles of actual events, and so a stereotype of Malay women brings one to question the purpose of repeating it. In Malaya, or in Britain, there are bound to be sections of society not adhering to norms of collective existence, and who are thus represented as behaving immorally. Swettenham himself admits, “[s]ex influence is as strong in Malaya as in other Eastern- and Western-countries, and that led rather often to tragedy.”\(^{192}\) This statement suggests that Malays as a people were no different from any other culture - East or West. Those in possession of power are often the first to indulge in acts deemed immoral by their society’s standards since they have the most means and ways of acquiring what the heart desires. Barbara Leckie notes, reflecting on the universality of

infidelity, “[a]dultery, after all, is the most bourgeois of transgressions ... [and] was never remote from middle-class concerns in Victorian England.” Even in England the pervasiveness of morality was not as strong as colonials abroad professed it to be. That Swettenham looks at the Malay woman as unfaithful and immoral indicates the pervasive power of Eurocentric ideology in representing the female Other.

JOHN T. THOMSON

Thomson was a surveyor in Malaya from 1838-1841 and government surveyor to Singapore from 1841-1853, whose travel narratives Glimpses into Life in Malayan Lands (1864) and Sequel to Some Glimpses into Life in the Far East (1865) were written when he resided in New Zealand. Thomson experienced the Malay world during an era of early British involvement in the Malay Archipelago. During his time in Malaya, British administration was already entrenched in the Straits Settlements while some officials were musing over the need to be further involved in the independent Malay states. Eventually, prodded by British and Chinese capitalists and responding to the encroaching influence of Germany and France in the Far East, the colonial government decided to interfere in the Malay States by signing the Pangkor Treaty in 1874.

Although not as prolific a writer as Swettenham, R.O.

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Winstedt or Hugh Clifford, Thomson provides us with a slightly different perspective as far as colonial travel narratives are concerned. As with Frank Swettenham, George Bilainkin and Hugh Clifford, John Thomson’s perspective on the Malay world is Eurocentric but flavoured with a stronger view of the superior racial and civilisational quality of Europeans over Asians (or what colonialists used to refer to as Asiatics). Suffice to say that Thomson believes that the moral and ethical integrity of Europeans is so opposite to that of non-Europeans that there is no way to reconcile the two. With regard to this incompatibility he refers to Socrates who said, “[a]ll things are produced contraries from contraries.” Kipling’s “East is East and West is West” aphorism definitely finds its most ardent disciple in John Thomson.

The general themes of John Thomson’s two Malay texts are the unenviable task of the British as the guardian and beacon of civilisational progress in the world and the debased nature of the Malays. For example, in “A Black Man Made White” Thomson narrates a story of how the Rajah of Pahang attempts to deceive the British governor of the Straits Settlements into believing that he is a reformed man who no longer owns slaves. For that purpose he sends a white-skinned boy (in actuality a Papuan albino belonging to a Bugis trader). Thomson has no doubt that “his own parents sold him into

194Thomson, Sequel to Some Glimpses into Life in the Far East, xiv.
slavery, as a prodigy of no utility to them." \footnote{John T Thomson, *Glimpses into Life in Malayan Lands* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984), 303.} Since his white parents could not be found it was decided that the boy be trained as an engineer. But as Thomson explains:

I watched his progress for several years; but, even then, his hands could neither hold a file nor a pin; and he could neither be made to comprehend either reading or writing. \footnote{Ibid. 305.}

Such a story reveals how Thomson’s Eurocentric ideas about Others operate. That the boy was sold by his parents is a given as no evidence is being cited to support such a claim. Thomson reaches this conclusion simply on the basis of his assumption of the depraved nature of the Oriental who, in the circumstances, would put self-interest above parental love. Thomson also casts suspicion on the boy’s intellectual ability, undoubtedly due to his racial stock. Even after years of exposure to European education the boy cannot seem to be able to achieve even the rudimentary aspects of European intellectual capacity.

On the other hand, John Thomson extols the high morality of the (at least middle-class) English in Malaya by locating both Malay and English cultures in an obviously simplified black/white moral dichotomy. After observing the Malays as a people he summarily explains, “[w]hat is called morality in
England has no meaning here — hence the difference."\(^{197}\) By way of example, Thomson purports that Malay princes attempted to entertain their European friends by supplying girls from their villages, causing panic in mothers and making apprehensive fathers to hold tightly on to the hilt of their krises. But, to Thomson, the European is beyond corruption due to “the nature of the educated European; with his moral training, his intellectual cultivation, and his power of self control.”\(^{198}\) As if by a narrative slip he laments the behaviour of common European sailors in their drunkenness and vices in native ports due to what he views as their potential to degrade the prestige of Europeans in the eyes of the ruled indigenes. In another narrative he deplores the cases of the abandonment of children of Europeans and native mothers as abominable.\(^{199}\) However, the contradictory nature of the behaviours of Europeans displayed in his texts that he so emphatically proclaims as very moral never occurs to him.

With regard to the cruelty of the Malay aristocracy, Thomson even goes as far as to suggest that the oppressive nature of the ruling class is reflective of the viciousness of the people when he says that

\[\text{[i]f the stalk be virtuous and vigorous, so will the princely flowers be. If the stalk be demoralized and}\]

\(^{197}\) Thomson, *Sequel to Some Glimpses into Life in the Far East*, 64.

\(^{198}\) Thomson, *Glimpses into Life in Malayan Lands*, 55.

\(^{199}\) Ibid. 180-1.
vicious, the princely flowers are of the same nature.\textsuperscript{200}

Thomson purports that the whole of the Malay nation is made of the same stock of cruelty and viciousness replicating those of their nobility. And on another occasion he explains that “[t]he Malay, beyond all other nations, has a character for treachery and bloodthirstiness.”\textsuperscript{201}

We have to admit that not all descriptions of indigenes are malicious as some of these representations may have a degree of truth. Accounts of the aristocracy’s and nobility’s injustices may have some authenticity, albeit with exaggerations,\textsuperscript{202} and depending on which Malay states are observed. But this view of the Malay as vicious and savage nonetheless carries the implied idea of the benevolence and kindness of British colonial justice as a whole. But even in Europe the laws had always been on the side of the rich and strong. The English social class structure was designed to demarcate the racial/biological line of the upper/middle class as separate from the benighted working class. This was especially more apparent during the Victorian era when the Industrial Revolution and laissez faire capitalism enabled the middle class to become more affluent by exploiting the working class.

\textsuperscript{201}Thomson, \textit{Glimpses into Life in Malayan Lands}, 296.
Thomson’s assumption of Malay immorality and cruelty extends to the images of the Malay woman since, in his view, she comes from the same racially degenerate stock. Thomson believes that as a person she is immoral and prone to sexual promiscuity, and as a sexual partner of a European man she is the cause of his degeneration. An example of this assumption is Thomson’s relating of the vices of European men who associate with indigenous women. Since he deems vices committed by Europeans to be uncommon, Thomson attributes them to the effects of the indigenous female partner and the hot climate.

While in Province Wellesley he witnesses the misdeeds and hears the unsavoury tales of despotism of an East Indian official who is married to a nona, a native wife. He muses that this official’s years in this part of the Oriental world must have turned him into an oppressive European rajah. Thomson writes, “[h]e no doubt had the feelings of a white man forty years previously; but he was weak-minded, and had, for thirty years, been held under native influences.”²⁰³ He also states, “[f]lattery and climate destroy the original independence of the European”²⁰⁴ and blames the influence of the indigenous wife and the hot climate for the man’s moral degeneration. But George Bilainkin in his Hail Penang tells of Europeans “who go out, thoughtlessly speak of the freedom they

²⁰³Thomson, Glimpses into Life in Malayan Lands, 115.
²⁰⁴Ibid. 126.
will know in distant colonies." This admission renders suspect Thomson’s claim that degeneration is a product of the climate and indigenous culture since, as Bilainkin admits, some Europeans bound for imperial dominions already had a preconceived idea of freedom from the embarrassment of gossip and the inconveniences of laws in Britain (or Europe). Similarly, Klaus W. Jonas asserts that to Somerset Maugham the East is “more and more a liberation, just as in his youth the loss of his religious belief and the awareness of the meaninglessness of life had given him freedom.”

Before Malaya was a British colonial Protectorate proper there were very few European women who stayed there as life was thought to be difficult and unsuitable for a European lady. Most of the early British officials, such as Frank Swettenham and Hugh Clifford, were colonial pioneers living as single men in the Malay communities. Eventually the number of colonial officials grew. These officials served in various capacities in the colonial administration once the residency system was enforced. Some of these officials took mistresses, whom Thomson refers to as nona, from amongst the indigenous population. Thomson describes a typical nona:

207 The system was known as Keeps. Margaret Shennan explains that up to 1914 it was common practice for colonial officials to keep indigenous mistresses until a directive by the Secretary of State for the Colonies forbade such practices. A survey of the planting community found that around 90 per cent of British planters kept mistresses. See Margaret Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun: The British in Malaya 1880-1960* (London: John Murray, 2000), 68.
[she] is clothed in rich silk sarongs, and flowing white cabayoos. She waddles in wooden clogs, held to her feet by a wooden peg, which sticks up between her great and second toes. Her rich black hair is thrown back, and knotted behind, where it is secured by round-headed gold pins. She has no other head-dress than that which nature has given her. This would be envied by a western belle, and her dark sparkling eye illuminates a countenance that tells of passion more than of intelligence. Her gait I have termed a waddle; this is partly owing to oriental ideas of gracefulness, but more owing to the weakness of muscle and flexibility of joints. Her arms swing as she proceeds, owing to the same causes. Thus her carriage is not prepossessing. Her features are small; nor do they bear the impress of thought or mind so striking to the oriental when he first views the western lady. When seated on mats, or supported by the luxurious cushion - that is the time at which the nona appears to most advantage; for the softness of manner, so congenial to those who suffer from the languor caused by the climate, proves too frequently seductive.\textsuperscript{208}

This description of the nona, who may come from different ethnic backgrounds, places her in a singular, homogenous

\textsuperscript{208}Thomson, \textit{Glimpses into Life in Malayan Lands}, 195-6.
category - the Oriental female Other. The focus of description is her sexuality and the manner in which she exploits her sensuality to attract the attention of European men.

The nona's physical characteristics, sexual allure, lush setting, and character traits of passion and indolence evoke the stock eroticism and exoticism of the harem. She, as portrayed by Thomson, fits the typical colonial stereotype of Oriental "aberrant sensuality" epitomised in the harem with "its sexual suggestiveness and dubious morality."\(^\text{209}\) Similarly, Thomson's description of the nona's "weakness of muscle and flexibility of joints" as well as her alluringly soft manner recycles the Orientalist "myth of sexuality and indolence."\(^\text{210}\) This stereotype of the harem\(^\text{211}\) suggests a sexual permissiveness not condoned by Victorian morality. The stereotype conjures ideas of luscious and sensual women lounging in a hedonistically-themed setting, waiting for calls to provide sexual pleasures. The women of the harem were not prostitutes in the usual sense for prostitution exists in all cultures and the motivation is mostly material for the woman and quick sexual pleasure for her male client. The harem, in the European categorisation, was uniquely Oriental because it

\(^{209}\)Ibid. 86.


\(^{211}\)Nothing captures the Western imagination of the sexual promiscuity of the East more than the concept of the harem. The harem was, in fact, a living quarter meant for women to be by themselves without the prying eyes of the opposite sex. Only close blood relations, such as father, brothers or sons were allowed to enter. See Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 97.
was “a system that permits males sexual access to more than one female.”\textsuperscript{212} As such, it has become a powerfully evocative symbol of Oriental sexual laxity and immorality.

The harem also denotes the male-dominated power structure of the Eastern world in its supposed oppression and degradation of women. Reina Lewis explains that

\begin{quote}
[for men, the harem woman trapped in a cruel polygamous sexual prison was a titillating but pitiful emblem of the aberrant sexuality and despotic power that characterized all that was wrong with the non-Christian Orient.\textsuperscript{213}
\end{quote}

The harem presented a colonial phantasm of Eastern women (mostly Muslim) whose social space was regulated and body exploited by cultural/theological patriarchy. More importantly, the harem as a social space was not accessible to colonial power, thereby becoming an object of both longing and repulsion.

In Thomson’s depiction of the nona of Malaya there are insinuations that these women are being trained for the specific purpose of providing sexual pleasure. These insinuations emanate from the descriptions of her elaborate clothes and her sexually self-conscious physicality, especially her rich, black hair and sparkling eyes that, to Thomson, suggest “passion more than ... intelligence.” She is

\textsuperscript{212}Leila Ahmed, "Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem", Feminist Studies, 8 (1982), 524.
\textsuperscript{213}Lewis, Rethinking Orientalism, 13.
emblematic of the immorality of the female Other with Thomson explaining that “[a] life of chastity and continence was a phenomenon so rare as to be beyond native belief.” But more importantly Thomson’s discourse of the nona and his allusion to the harem can be interpreted as concealing the real cause of the European practice of keeping indigenous mistresses. Instead of laying the blame, too, on Europeans who had female indigences as companions, the burden of immorality is turned on the female Other who has the tendency to entrap young and lonely European men into immoral arrangements.

Thomson relates the story of a young European friend who attracted the attention of a local nona. In order to gain his companionship she consulted the more experienced “queen of the nonas” to devise a plan for the realisation of her plan. Thomson describes the plan, although in this instance the prey managed to elude entrapment. Eventually, as is normally the case in Thomson’s colonial narrative, the young man prevails in keeping his morality intact. In concluding the anecdote Thomson states:

Such are the episodes in human life. Amidst sunshine there are many cutting cruel blasts. The children of passion know not, nor understand not, the energy that binds the son of the cold north to his destiny. Each weighs the other by their own standards, so their actions are inexplicable. By our standard

\[214\text{Thomson, Glimpses into Life in Malayan Lands, 197.}\]
their actions are lewd, immoral, and wicked. By their standard our actions are cold, prudish, and unfeeling. But how true to reality are Thomson’s descriptions of colonial morality? Were the values and practices of colonisers and colonised so clearly demarcated along these black and white moral lines?

Testimonies by other writers are not so kind to Thomson’s assumptions of the lofty moral pedestal of European men in Malay land. In admitting to the practice of keeping mistresses, and indicating the effort on the part of European men to find substitutes for wives in the colonial setting, Winstedt asks, “was it any wonder that the white exile took to himself one of the complaisant, amusing, good-tempered and good-mannered daughters of the East?” And one alternative to not keeping an indigenous mistress was more morally unacceptable to a Victorian sense of decency. As Margaret Shennan explains, without a woman some colonial planters in Malaya resorted to young male coolies as homosexual partners. After all, as Hugh Clifford states, “it was difficult to reconcile public standards of morality based on Victorian values with human instincts and emotions.”

Immorality, in the Victorian sense, was not the monopoly of

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215 Ibid. 200.
218 Qtd. in ibid.
any one ethnic group in multicultural and multiracial Malaya.

Thomson was more an observer of than a participant in Malay culture. Although he stayed in Malaya for a few years he failed to use the opportunity to appreciate cultural relativity but instead attempted to sensationalise images of the Malay, and Malay women particularly, into the era’s normative discourse of Oriental exoticism and eroticism.

3.4 NEITHER SYMPATHETIC NOR SISTERLY: WESTERN WOMEN REPRESENTING MALAY WOMEN

Travelling to faraway lands had always been a social domain dominated by men. Hardship and security were the two most obvious issues invoked by men to deter women from venturing far away from the confines of their community. Moreover, in the Victorian period of imperial expansion women travellers were viewed suspiciously as they were sometimes regarded as too independent to fit into an idealised representation of the virtuous lady. Therefore, these women needed to overcome patriarchal prejudice that viewed their activity as “unnatural and inappropriate behavior.”

But as British military and political domination began to spread into the four corners of the world the sense of the world as being part of the British realm gave a new sense of confidence to even British women to venture out more freely

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either for reasons of recuperation from illnesses,\textsuperscript{220} pleasure or adventure. Thus, although travelling became a favoured social pastime for men from the middle of the eighteenth century, expeditions as part of female social activity began to develop only in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{221} And by the end of that century British women had visited almost all parts of the globe.\textsuperscript{222}

Numerous writers have pointed out how gender plays a role in influencing imperial perspectives, especially with regard to the female Other. As travel writers women are often deemed to project different perspectives from those of male writers. In one sense the women travellers were allowed to cross gendered boundaries of the non-European world in ways that their male counterparts were not. As Sarah Searight states, “physically, they could see both sides of the harem, mentally a wider perspective.”\textsuperscript{223} This advantage provided them with a wider discursive framework for textual representation. Their ability to enter indigenous feminine spheres usually closed to men also served as a validation of the truthfulness of their representation of foreign women in the eyes of home readers.

\textsuperscript{220}Victorian female travellers, especially the religious ones, usually stated their reason for travelling as recuperating from illnesses as the idea of travelling for pleasure was still viewed negatively. See Isabella Bird, \textit{Letters to Henrietta}, ed. Kay Chubbuck (London: John Murray, 2002), 4.

\textsuperscript{221}Y. Ruth Jenkins, "The Gaze of the Victorian Woman Traveler", in Kristi Siegel (ed.), \textit{Gender, Genre, & Identity in Women's Travel Writing}, 15.


Lady Mary Montagu’s account of Ottoman harem life in *Embassy Letters* (1763), for example, gained credibility due to her access to the feminine space, also underlining the colonial premise of the importance of sight to inform sense.\(^{224}\)

One line of argument posits that women travel writers were more hesitant than male writers in endorsing the justification of empire. Margaret Strobel, for instance, explains that “[i]n comparison with accounts by Victorian men, women’s travel narratives incline less toward domination and more toward discovery.”\(^{225}\) Since these women travellers were themselves struggling against Victorian social conventions and ethics\(^{226}\), there was, supposedly, a sense of belonging to and sympathy with their sisters of different cultures. Undeniably, there is ambivalence in their outlooks on the female Other because as European women they straddled the cultural cross-currents of being “colonised by gender but colonisers by


\(^{226}\)John Gullick tells of Isabella Bird’s difficulty in riding a horse sidesaddle, following Victorian etiquette for women, in dangerous and rough terrains when it was safer to ride astride. And once she learnt to ride astride a horse in a pair of trousers, certain newspaper reviewers regarded her as having masculine tendencies. Doris Jedamski also writes about another female Victorian traveller, Ida Pfeiffer, who went so far as designing her own travel garments that broke Victorian social conventions in order to have a more comfortable travelling experience. See J M Gullick (ed.), *Adventurous Women in South-East Asia: Six Lives* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995), 204–5. See also Doris Jedamski, *Images, Self-Images and the Perception of the Other: Women Travellers in the Malay Archipelago* (University of Hull: Centre for South-East Asian Studies, 1995), 7.
Thus, female travel narrators, purportedly, provide the reader with a unique feminine perspective on the female Other within the imperial discourse as compared to the patriarchal narratives of male writers.

Women's reputed intuition and sympathy, however, do not always work to provide counter-hegemonic insights about colonialism. As Kristie Siegel acknowledges, "it would be pleasant to think that western women, often dominated themselves, would bond in sisterhood with women of other cultures, but that was not always the case." As my analysis of Isabella Bird's and Emily Innes's narratives testifies, their perspectives are eventually consonant with the wider discourses of Orientalism and Eurocentrism.

Isabella Bird's *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither* (1883) and Emily Innes's *The Chersonese with the Gilding Off* (1885) are the better-known travel narratives about Malaya by women. Their accounts of the flora and fauna of Malaya interweave with their political, cultural and societal views of Malays as a people. Most are descriptive, but some are judgmental. Their narrative voices are what Susan Morgan terms...

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228 Siegel, "Intersections: Women's Travel and Theory", 3.
229 Bird's and Innes's writings received a contrasting reception by general Victorian readers when they were published. While Bird's book was enthusiastically received, Innes's received, as Susan Morgan explains "a combination of contempt, disgust, and anger" (165) due to her criticisms of the British colonial system in Malaya. See "Writing Against Sympathy" in Morgan, *Place Matters*, 164-75.
"feminine imperial discourse"\textsuperscript{230} as it is structured by Victorian domestic discursive strategies. Thus, themes such as the fatherly, the motherly, sympathy, cleanliness, chastity and morality that were ideally bound to a typical middle-class Victorian home find their way into their narrative representations of the female Other.

ISABELLA BIRD

Isabella Bird ranks as one of the most prolific women travel writers of the Victorian era measured by areas travelled as well as by books produced narrating her adventures in those regions she visited. Before setting foot in Malaya she had already traversed the Rocky Mountains in the United States, Korea, Nova Scotia and Morocco. And after the death of her husband in 1886 she continued with her passion for travel, visiting, among other places, India, the Middle East and Turkey. She was in Japan when opportunity provided her with a five-week sojourn to the Malay region. En route, she managed to visit Hong Kong, Canton and Saigon. When Bird was in Malaya the wider area of the Peninsula beyond the British-administered Straits Settlements was largely terra incognita to Europeans. Even the protected indigenous states of Kedah, Selangor, Perak and Sungei Ujong remained to be fully explored.

Travelling in an era of high imperialism, Bird was aware

\textsuperscript{230}Ibid. 155.
of contemporary politics, especially of the British efforts to
expand empire and secure hegemony around the world against
other competitive European powers.\textsuperscript{231} In the Preface to her
text \textit{The Golden Chersonese} she takes it for granted that
Malaya would be "destined to afford increasing employment to
British capital and enterprise."\textsuperscript{232} It is a tone merely echoing
mainstream British sentiment of the era as far as overseas
dominions were concerned. Also her Christian faith plays a
strong part in the articulation of her ideology\textsuperscript{233} and
worldview especially when she visits and describes peoples of
the Islamic faith, aware of the long history of antagonism
between Christianity and Islam. It is thus that her writing
about the region and people is flavoured with Eurocentrism
that was the ideological currency common among British and
European explorers and administrators of the era. On the other
hand, Bird also interprets Malaya through a middle-class
domestic feminine perspective especially in her account of
colonial stability and her use of father-figure metaphors to
describe colonialism.

Bird considers that British influence in Malaya produces
a positive effect due to the British sense of justice and
impartiality in government. It is the fairness which she

\textsuperscript{231} See Bird, \textit{Letters to Henrietta}, 21-3.
\textsuperscript{232} Bird, \textit{The Golden Chersonese}, 15.
\textsuperscript{233} John Gullick explains that the church, especially "the evangelical,
missionary, and philanthropic section of the Anglican Church", was the
strongest influence on Bird. See Gullick (ed.), \textit{Adventurous Women in South-
East Asia}, 199.
refers to as "justice's justice" to differentiate it from a local notion of justice, or lack of it. For example, she frequently evokes the impartiality of colonial administrators and the enduring peace under British jurisdiction. A particular British official, Captain Shaw, who was then the Lieutenant-Governor of Malacca, symbolises for her a benevolent and just British colonialism. Bird describes him:

He can be firm and prompt when occasion requires firmness, but his ordinary rule is of the gentlest and most paternal description, so that from the Chinese he has won the name Father, and among the Malays, the native population, English rule, as administered by him, has come to be known as the rule of the just.

The model that is extrapolated from Victorian domestic ideas of a stable family projects a benign but disciplinarian father-figure that is central to her vision of empire. The British administration was a just father whose presence in Malaya was to provide order and stability to otherwise unruly and undisciplined indigenes/children. This narrative of a just and firm coloniser/father accords with British

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235 Ibid. 130-1.
236 This theme would echo in later British colonial literature of Malaya. For example, George Moon, a character in Somerset Maugham's "The Back of Beyond" thought that, as a retiring Resident, he would probably be remembered by the Malays and Chinese as "stern, but ... just". See Somerset Maugham, The World Over: The Collected Stories, Volume Two (Bungay, Suffolk: Reprint Society, 1954), 1086.
justification of intervention in the Malay States; thus she aligns herself with the prevalent patriarchal colonial forces.

To further extend the argument of the just and firm fatherly role played by the British she manages to make sound respectable the colonial schemes of replacing rightful indigenous rulers\(^{237}\) with others who would willingly comply with furthering colonial interests, mostly at the cost of indigenous independence and interests. In describing the locally unpopular Datu Klana of Sungei Ujong, the pretender to the Negeri Sembilan sovereign who “has been faithful to British interests,”\(^{238}\) she represents the indigenous loyalist as “[s]traightforward, honest, and truly charitable”\(^{239}\) while at best evading the description of the personality of his rivals.\(^{240}\) The regent to the Selangor sultanate, Raja Moussa, whose fiercely independent spirit and reforming character were a threat to British rule, is portrayed as being “bigoted” and having “almost sinister expression.” Bird further explains that if Raja Moussa were to come to the throne he would create trouble for British intervention,\(^{241}\) indicating her partiality to the advancement of British imperialism in the Malay States.


\(^{239}\)Ibid. 157.

\(^{240}\)The Datu Klana eventually fell out of favour with the British and in 1887 was replaced by the new Datu Bandar who was more pliant to the sway of British interests in Sungei Ujong. See Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y Andaya, *A History of Malaysia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1982), 167.

Since she values stability, the British actions of replacing recalcitrant and potentially rebellious local leaders are deemed necessary to ensure that the cohesion of the British Empire is not compromised. From the same ideological perspective, acts of punishment also serve as an imperial rod of stability for the domesticated colonies. Thus, she assumes to be just the British method of revenge for krissing an official, no matter how deservedly: sending a gunboat upriver “to punish, [...] kill, burn, and destroy; there would be a little war and a heavy war indemnity, and the true bearings of the case would be lost for ever.” In her formulation, “fatherly” British justice sometimes needs to go beyond sympathy to use disproportionate violence to ensure that the house rules are obeyed.

Bird’s feminine imperial ideology is also apparent as she casts her moral net far and wide by othering European powers that are competing with Britain for colonies. To Bird

the Portuguese were little better than buccaneers, the Dutch who drove them out were little better than hucksters – mean, mercenary traders, without redeeming qualities, content to suck the blood of their provinces and giving nothing in return.

Since these powers were also imperial they were a threat to the stable existence of the British Empire. This act of

242 Ibid. 236.
243 Ibid. 153.
othering fellow Europeans serves to produce an almost propagandistic narrative of the civilising mission of the British being superior to the exploitative tendency of the Dutch or Portuguese. They are moralised as rogues out to destabilise the peace established by British imperialism in the Malay world. Based on letters written to her sister Henrietta, The Golden Chersonese implies reassuringly that the British or English for that matter, stand as beacons of progress and modernity, and civilisation and morality, and more importantly, that the empire was peaceful due to the benign enforcement of British morality and discipline.

This perception of imperial order, though, does not put her sense of insecurity to rest. Strangely, amidst her compliments for the impartial and fatherly British administration and emphasis on “there ... really [being] nothing to fear from these ‘treacherous Malays’”\(^{244}\) she is aware of local resentments and the role of the British as occupiers. Hence, there is a constant concern over native uprisings and treachery. While in Singapore she feels relieved to hear “the roll of the British drum [as a] reassuring sound in the midst of the unquiet Chinese population.”\(^{245}\) And while staying for the night at the Stadhaus in Malacca she has the same feeling of insecurity lest “creeping Malays or pilfering

\(^{244}\)Ibid. 184.
\(^{245}\)Ibid. 115.
Chinamen" come in uninvited.²⁴⁶ In Klang, she constantly fears that the Resident of Selangor, Mr. Bloomfield Douglas would be killed by Malays, as he might be the target of ... many a vendetta.

²⁴⁷ Bird also writes of her "dream that the Sikhs had mutinied and were about to massacre the Europeans, myself included!"²⁴⁸

These fears may be explained as an unexpressed acknowledgement that the British intervention in the Malay States is, for the most part, for the economic and strategic interests of the colonials and secondarily, if at all, for the benefit of local populations. As such there is always a fear of resentments and uprisings on the part of the non-Europeans. Thus, while presenting British colonisation of Malaya as fatherly, Bird also realises implicitly that its acceptance by the locals is mostly predicated upon British military power and not deference to reputed moral strengths.

In the "Introductory Chapter" of The Golden Chersonese, Bird furnishes the reader with the feminised exoticism of Malayan landscape and the people who inhabit it. The Malayan natural world is described through exotic assumptions of an uncharted territory. Bird charts it by providing detailed descriptions of the flora and fauna. In accord with a common Eurocentric notion of far-flung countries, Bird refers to

²⁴⁶ Ibid. 131.
²⁴⁷ Ibid. 219.
²⁴⁸ Ibid. 281.
Malaya as the “Golden Chersonese of Milton,” implying a paradise lost and found by Europeans. As she explains, “[n]ature is so imposing, so magnificent, and so prolific on the Malay Peninsula”\(^{249}\) that she feels its awe-inspiring presence first before anything else. The reader can sense her idea of humanity (in this part of the world) being very close to nature.

Bird dismisses the historicity of the Malay Peninsula by writing that it has “no legitimate claim to an ancient history”\(^{250}\) and that “[e]xistence stagnates,”\(^{251}\) thus locking the Malay nation in the typical Eurocentric assumption of temporal stagnation. The Malay Peninsula was only “rediscovered”\(^{252}\) by the Portuguese in 1513; before then, in Eurocentric terms, it was out of contact with civilisation and, therefore, enlightenment. And as if in tandem with the rhetoric of imperial capitalism her introductory description of the landscape resonates as an inventory of domesticated resources. The words and phrases commonly used in trade constantly crop up. “Highly-prized,” “valuable,” “extensive economical uses,” and “commerce”\(^{253}\) are some of the words and phrases used to describe produce available in the Malay forest.

\(^{249}\)Ibid. 31.
\(^{250}\)Ibid. 21.
\(^{251}\)Ibid. 133.
\(^{252}\)The discovery motif was important in European colonial discourse as it assumed the discovered lands as being without owners or as “an empty space, a tabula rasa on which they could inscribe their linguistic, cultural and later, territorial claims”. See Kamps and Singh, Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues, 1.
in anticipation of future exploitation. Her meticulous descriptions of Malay landscape and people, while attempting to make known the unknown, also serve then as an exploration of uncharted territory (or discovery) that normally precedes colonisation.

As for the indigenes, Bird concludes that the Malays are physically unattractive: "[t]he men are not handsome, and the women decidedly ugly."\textsuperscript{254} Their poetry, for the most part, is full of sexual connotations\textsuperscript{255} and there is no indigenous literature or trustworthy histories.\textsuperscript{256} The Malays are also regarded as "very jealous", keeping "their women ... veiled [and] secluded"\textsuperscript{257}, with Islam\textsuperscript{258} serving as a "freezing and retarding influence, producing the fatal isolation which to weak peoples is slow decay."\textsuperscript{259} Bird also finds the Malays bigoted and fanatical, ideas that she stresses countless times in her narrative.

Bird’s assumptions about Malay women are more difficult

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{254}Ibid. 36.
\textsuperscript{255}Ibid. 38.
\textsuperscript{256}Ibid. 37.
\textsuperscript{257}Ibid. 41.
\textsuperscript{258}Isabella Bird is always uncomfortable with Islam that she feels is "antagonistic to national progress" (\textit{The Golden Chersonese}, 326). Religious Malay men, evident in the title of \textit{Hajis}, were accused by the colonials of living idly and instigating local populations to revolt. This notion of idleness may be attributable to their idea of the history of Catholicism where the church thrived by selling indulgences and positions. In Malaya, local \textit{imams} usually had their own occupations to support themselves and their families and provided Islamic teachings to the local populace as a matter of personal responsibility. In Malaya, these \textit{Hajis} formed part of the Malay intelligentsia that informed the Malay Muslims, not only on religious teachings and practices, but also political developments in other Muslim countries. From early 1906 they were also some of the early modern agitators for independence, with Syed Syelikh al-Hadi and Syelkh Muhammad Tahir Jalaluddin being some of the prime movers through their reformist writings and teachings.
\textsuperscript{259}Bird, \textit{The Golden Chersonese}, 43.
\end{footnotesize}
to isolate as she calibrates her writings more on Malay life lived by men. One can only glimpse fleeting images of Malay women in her narrative. But when opportunity provides for a view of the world of the Malay woman she never fails to grab it. For example, on the trip to see the Sultan of Selangor with the Resident she asks to be allowed to visit the Sultana. But as her narrative testifies, their meetings fail to make any good impressions on her.

Bird makes some personal comments on individual Malay women whom she meets, but on the whole the Malay women did not fulfil her Victorian expectations of productivity and intellectuality. And it is through attending to narrative cracks and crevices in Bird’s narrative that one is able to develop a better understanding of her ideological gaze at the Malay female Other. For example, in one instance she explains the Malay women’s aversion to work. She writes:

\[\text{the women were lounging about the houses, some cleaning fish, others pounding rice; but they do not care for work, and the little money which they need for buying clothes they can make by selling mats or jungle fruits. Their lower garment, or sarong, reaching from the waist to the ankles, is usually of red cotton of a small check, with stripes in the}\]

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260 This notion of work and European colonials’ views of the indolent natives have been discussed extensively by Alatas in *The Myth of the Lazy Native*. To repeat the argument of his study would be an analytical redundancy on my part. Thus, my discussion of Bird’s notion of work is more specifically focused on the Malay woman within the power dynamics of a Malay family unit.
front, above which is worn a loose sleeved garment, called a kabaya, reaching to the knees, and clasped in front with silver or gold, and frequently with diamond ornaments. They also wear gold or silver pins in their hair, and the sarong is girt or held up by a clasp of enormous size, and often of exquisite workmanship, in the poorer class of silver, and in the richer of gold jeweled diamonds and rubies.261

Ideas of indolence and industry have always underpinned descriptions of indigenous societies in European travel narratives. Since it is part of a middle-class Victorian woman’s duty to ensure the orderliness of her home, the Malay women’s perceived indolence only confirms Bird’s ideology on the subject of the Malay women. Bird herself admits, “indolence and apathy [have always been] associate[d] with Oriental life.”262

Bird’s assertion that Malay women “do not care for work” is also drawn from the wider ideological prism of Western laissez-faire capitalism. Colonial capitalism was an economic infrastructure designed to exploit the natural resources and labour that would mostly enrich the British colonials. Bird’s Victorian feminine ideology asserts that the Malay woman’s indolence reflects her failure in her domestic responsibility

262Ibid. 122.
of keeping a materially conducive environment for the comfort of her family. This view accords with the repertoire of colonial assumptions of lazy natives. Thus, despite her mere five-week sojourn in the Malay states, and despite the limited areas travelled she could make, nevertheless, a generalised assumption about the indolent Malay woman. The strength of her assumption did not come only through her observation; it derives a truth-value from previous colonial discourse about indolent Malays.

This discourse of the indolent natives is also related closely to the notion of Darwinian social evolution, as industry was viewed as one of the engines that drove human progress to greater heights. As Benjamin Kidd puts it:

\[ \text{[t]he evolution in character which the race has undergone has been northwards from the tropics. The first step to the solution of the problem before us is simply to acquire the principle that in dealing with the natural inhabitants of the tropics we are dealing with peoples who represent the same stage in the history of the development of the race that the child does in the history of development of the individual. The tropics will not, therefore, be developed by the natives themselves.}^{263} \]

Statements such as this by Kidd serve as an argument for

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forced use of indigenous natural resources by Europeans if it is deemed necessary. While the rights of possession by indigenes are recognised (in words, at least), Europeans could decide that they should not become a hindrance to social progress and impose more efficient economic activity. In other words, Kidd tacitly argues that colonisation is for the betterment of humanity as a whole. This colonial idea of work is contextualised within capitalistic economic activity that puts wealth acquisition as its fundamental objective. As Alatas explains, "[t]he ideology of colonial capitalism evaluated people according to their utility in their production system and the profit level."264 Since Europeans are at the apex of the economic triangle they would certainly benefit the most from the system itself.

But the lives of Malay women were not as idle as their colonial observers paint them to be. Even within the so-called indigenous subsistence economy a female member of the Malay family unit played a large contributory role in ensuring the survival of the family. For example, Stivens et. al. note that during the pre-colonial period women played gender-specific but significant parts in economic activities.265 They were involved in agricultural, fishing, mining and even small trade activities besides performing the more traditional roles of child-rearing and doing household chores. Malay women were

also dominant in activities such as gardening, weaving and handicraft making and, in the state of Kelantan, in small-scale trade. The significance of the role of women in Malay economic activity was acknowledged by the Malay culture as reflected in the two adat laws that allowed women the rights to own and develop lands. The two Malay adat laws, adat temenggung and adat perpatih, also gave to a Malay woman rights to property and land. Adat temenggung allows for equal share of the parents’ property between daughters and sons, whereas adat perpatih rules that the property should go to the female heirs in its entirety.

Bird’s elaboration of the dress worn by Malay women serves to extend my argument. In the excerpt on this topic quoted above Bird provides a description of the intricacies of the clothes and ornaments worn by the Malay woman. In Malaya, especially in the East Coast states, cloth weaving was an industry dominated by female labour and considerable effort had to be exerted to produce such cloths and accessories. For example, in Kelantan and Terengganu, the states renowned for the quality of their cloths, the women spent long hours weaving textiles by hand as a way of supplementing the income of the family.

It was British colonialism that contributed largely to the demise of Malay women’s economic activity by introducing land reforms in favour of the husband as head of the family. The reforms broke the Malay women’s pre-colonial share in land
ownership, and thereby their material independence.\textsuperscript{266} Also, in handicraft making and textile weaving, the industries where Malay women were predominant, their work and income were undermined by cheaper competition from manufactured imports.\textsuperscript{267} In colonial Malaya it was normally a section of the ruling class, British and indigenous, that showed the symptomatic leisure and indolent inclinations. Bird herself admits that it was the wives of British officials who “lead half-expiring lives” and who were able to indulge in parties, sightseeing and letter reading and writing.\textsuperscript{268} To indulge in such activities would only imperil the survival of ordinary Malay families.

With the exception of the idea of Malay women’s indolence described above, it is quite difficult to analyse Bird’s ideology with regard to Malay women. This is because there are few Malay women whom Bird meets and describes in her travel across Malaya and she never makes explicitly judgmental observations about the few that she meets. So how might we make sense of her understanding of Malay women by analysing her representations of the few that she meets? I posit that we could further our investigation by turning to the structure of The Golden Chersonese. Her text is, essentially, a collection of letters turned into a travel narrative. As Bird explains in

\textsuperscript{266}Ironically, Virginia Woolf writes in 1929 that the marginalisation of British women was partly due to their lack of material independence. See Virginia Woolf, \textit{A Room of One’s Own} (London: Flamingo, 1994), 24–9.

\textsuperscript{267}Stivens, et. al., \textit{Malay Peasant Women and the Land}, 14.

\textsuperscript{268}Bird, \textit{The Golden Chersonese}, 122–3.
her Introduction, the text is a set of letters sent over a period of time to her sister Henrietta, "unaltered except by various omissions and some corrections as to matters of fact."\textsuperscript{269} The letter format suggests that Bird might only have had a single reader in mind when she first put pen to paper and that her observations were not initially meant for the reading pleasure of the general public. As the letters were not meant to be published, the narrative, she writes, lacks "artistic arrangement and literary merit."\textsuperscript{270} But despite these disadvantages she explains that the form still allows the reader to "travel with the traveler."\textsuperscript{271}

The origin of the text in letters also accounts for a high level of private musings revealed to a public readership. Unlike a text meant for public consumption, a letter to a close relative (she was very close to her sister) allows for more open elaboration of thoughts and assumptions. Although she admits to self-censorship in the editing of the letters with regard to views involving British residents (probably the "various omissions"\textsuperscript{272} that she mentions), there was seemingly no hindrance to airing her analysis of Malay culture and society.

Travelling with the traveller is the main organising principle of the book. As Bird explains in the Preface, "[i]n

\begin{footnotes}
\item[269]Ibid. 16.
\item[270]Ibid.
\item[271]Ibid. 17.
\item[272]Ibid. 16.
\end{footnotes}
writing to my sister my first aim was accuracy, and my next to make her see what I saw." Bird informs her readers that the text that she writes allows them to see what she sees; that her vision is also the reader’s vision. Complemented with sixteen illustrations of the Malay world, ranging from sketches of scenes to peoples, The Golden Chersonese can be situated within the narrative framework of colonial exploration and discovery of the exotic. These sketches serve to enhance the purported truth-value of her travel narrative since the visual representations provide the reader with evidence of the authenticity of her descriptive representations.

In Bird’s travel across Malaya she met very few Malay women. The first was the Sultana (Queen) to Sultan Abdulsamat of Selangor, a leading nobleman in a potentially naturally-rich state in Malaya. Bird describes the Sultana:

She looks nearly middle-aged. She is short and fat, with a flat nose, open wide nostrils, thick lips, and filed teeth, much blackened by betel-nut chewing. Her expression is pleasant, and her manner is prepossessing ... Our conversation was not brilliant, and the Sultana looked to me as if she had attained nirvana and had neither ideas nor the consciousness of the absence of ideas.274

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273 Ibid.
274 Ibid. 229-30.
Another occasion when she has the opportunity to observe Malay women is upon her return from a hospital in Klang. She meets four Malay women whom she finds individually attractive but lacking good manners according to her model. She states, “[e]ach one would make a picturesque picture” but, she writes, they have disagreeable behaviours as they “seized on my hands ... all exclaiming, “chanti! chanti!” - pretty! pretty!”\textsuperscript{275} The image of the group of Malay women that she creates is of curious children being attracted to something that arouse their interest. The only other Malay woman she met was the Raja Dris’s wife, a Malay noblewoman whom she cursorily dismisses as a “dull, heavy looking woman.”\textsuperscript{276} In all three descriptions of the Malay women Bird focuses her attention on their visual appeal. Given the epistolary genre of the text, these descriptions of the Malay women of different classes function like postcards. But, instead of the sensual images favoured by male Orientalists, Bird’s images centre on the perceived lack of maturity and intellectual depth of the Malay women.

In order for us to fully understand Bird’s assumption about the Malay women we have to relate it to the illustrations provided in her text that reveal the main theme of her Malaya experience. In Bird’s Malayan travel she relies more on providing picturesque images of non-European worlds.

\textsuperscript{275}Ibid. 235.  
\textsuperscript{276}Ibid. 314.
that she encounters. The strength of her writing lies partly in her evocative and detailed descriptions of peoples, as well as flora and fauna, and events that she encounters. The illustrations add to the veracity of the textual descriptions. For example, her description of the Kling woman is indicative of her overall writing skill at producing strong visual images in the mind of the reader.\footnote{Ibid. 121-2.} The graphic sketch of a Kling man also complements the textual description of the Kling woman, thereby producing an ostensibly complete sample of the Kling as a people.

As I have mentioned above, the illustrations that accompany The Golden Chersonese underscore the ethnological and exploratory nature of Bird’s text. The sixteen sketches fall into four identifiable categories: scenery, flora, people and architecture. Interestingly, four sketches represent each category. But what unites these sketches is the ideology that posits a difference between the notion of a civilised Europe and the exotic peoples of Malaya. For example, three of the four sketches of the scenery illustrate the dense tropical jungle of Malaya. These jungle sketches emphasise the difference between Bird’s notion of British landscape and the Malayan scenery. In the architecture category Bird illustrates a police station, a Malay House, a Chinese house and Malay bathing-shed, and a row of shops along a street in Kuala
Kangsa. These buildings show the typical and simple, primarily wooden structures that contrast with the mostly stone and brick structures found in Britain. Understandably, the illustrations are attempts by Bird to depict glimpses of the Malaya that she visits as they are a means of "mediating English views of the world." But they also project the value-laden progress/stagnation and culture/nature binaries that run along cultural and racial lines that produce the civilisational hierarchy that defines both cultures stereotypically.

Seen in this perspective, the letter form (that includes graphical illustrations) is comparable to the colonial postcard genre that calls our attention to the imperialist visual practices of understanding and representing foreign cultures. As Eleanor M. Hight states, the colonial visual genre is dependent on "[t]he colonial constructions of racial, cultural, and geographic difference." The postcard/illustration genre serves to describe the colonised other by providing vivid pictures (or picturesque images) for the intended reader to denote its truth-value. As Mark Wollaeger states, "colonial postcards satisfied the desire for the authentic." But at the ideological level they also function to demarcate the coloniser/colonised and

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279 Qtd. in Margaret Toth, "Framing the Body: Imperialism and Visual Discourse in Maria Cristina Mena's Short Fiction", Legacy, 26 (2009), 93.
280 Wollaeger, "Woolf, Postcards, and the Elision of Race", 44.
normal/exotic binarisms. Bird’s textual and visual representations shy away from the highly sexual patriarchal perspectives given by male colonialists as described in Malek Alloula’s *The Colonial Harem* and Sarah Graham-Brown’s *Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East, 1860-1950*. But other assumptions linger in her text/letters that underscore the influence of Eurocentrism as the epistemological repository from which she writes about the female Other.

Thus, the illustrations in *The Golden Chersonese* serve two purposes. Firstly, as I have already indicated, they attempt to convince the reader of the authenticity of her experience. As Aldous Huxley explains, “[t]o know the images of things is the next best thing to knowing the things themselves.” Secondly, they also point to her colonial visual practice of selecting and appropriating images that only fit her thematic colonial narrative. Since the non-European are lagging behind in human linear progress, their mental capacity is assumed to be retrogressively closer to nature than culture. She reveals her Eurocentric ideology by putting to centre stage primitive images of the Malay world.

By conjuring Malay women through textual images and

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281 These two texts investigate and expose the male colonisers and orientalists’ “sexual fantasies in socially acceptable (because remote and hence unthreatening) ways; and to justify colonialism by conjuring backwardness and depravity, the timelessness and availability, of the Middle Easterners”. See Irvin Cemil Schick, "Representing Middle Eastern Women: Feminism and Colonial Discourse", *Feminist Studies*, 16 (1990), 347.

282 Qtd. in Toth, “Framing the Body”, 99.
associating them with her visual illustrations, Bird is alluding to the Malay women as intellectually immature, an idea consonant with culture/nature binarisms. In this sense, Bird conforms to the colonial ideology of producing exotic landscapes and people that are the dichotomous Other to the civilised European subject. Eventually, Bird’s images of the indolent and dull Malay women correlate with her view of the lethargic Portuguese half-breeds “lowered by native marriages”\(^{283}\) as they relate to her ideas of the difference of cultures contextualised within the concept of the linearity of history. And it is through this dominating pseudo-scientific elaboration of Darwinism, prevalent during the Victorian era, that we can make sense of the patterns of her ideology with regard to the dull and immature Malay women.

Admittedly Bird, like Swettenham, is not an overt racialist. Rather, unlike Thompson and Emily Innes, whose work I will analyse later in this chapter, she attempts to provide her sister (and eventually the reading public) with authentic accounts of far-flung cultures and societies. However, she cannot escape the habit of forming narrative/illustrative descriptions of Malay women as inferior in cultural and intellectual disposition. This is due to her ideology being partly shaped by nineteenth-century European-constructed Orientalism as an epistemological repository for understanding non-European worlds.

EMILY INNES

Emily Innes was a contemporary of Isabella Bird but they never actually met during Bird’s sojourn in Malaya although Bird met Emily’s husband James Innes, a Collector of Revenue and Magistrate in Kuala Langat, Selangor. Emily Innes’s book *The Chersonese with the Gilding Off* (1885) was written two years after *The Golden Chersonese* (1883). It serves as a more gloomy response to Isabella Bird’s optimism about the Malay world in her travel narrative. Innes believed she had reason to be pessimistic. Confronting her husband’s declining fortune in his job - Innes was friendless when their relationship with their nearest European neighbours, the Resident and his family turned sour. These problems were compounded by her inability to immerse herself in the Malay society and culture that surrounded her. It is the sense of misery at their unlucky prospects and her solitary life in an alien culture that predominates in her text.

By comparison with Isabella Bird with her five-week sojourn, Innes spent seven years in South-East Asia, more than one year in Sarawak and almost six in the Protected Malay States. She went to Sarawak in 1875 with her newly-wed husband, who was then in the service of Charles Brooke, the second white Rajah of Sarawak. Due to some problems with the management of Sarawak finances James was dismissed by Charles Brooke so the Inneses went to Singapore where James was employed by Sir William Jervois, the then Governor of the
Straits Settlements. At the end of his colonial career, James was in charge of revenue as well as serving as magistrate in Bandar Langat. In 1882 he resigned due to deteriorating relationships with his superiors.

Their experiences prompted Innes to write in response to Isabella Bird’s book, not that Innes wished to refute Bird’s accounts of Malayan life and nature. In fact, Innes acknowledges the truthfulness of Bird’s descriptions although hers are as sombre as Bird’s are colourful. As Innes admits:

[i]t may seem curious that, notwithstanding the brilliancy and attractiveness of her descriptions, and the dullness and gloom of mine, I can honestly say that her account is perfectly and literally true. So is mine. The explanation is that she and I saw the Malayan country under totally different circumstances.284

The different circumstances that Innes mentions were the fact that Bird was on an almost semi-official visit to Malaya, where British officials, all male and with the trappings of colonial office, were anxious to accommodate her itinerary. Since Bird by this time was already a respected, and thus feared, female travel writer these officials were aware of the fact that her writings might affect their careers. She was, thus, on a grand tour of a British colonial territory with the backing of British power and protection. Emily Innes, on the

284Innes, The Chersonese with the Gilding Off, i, 242.
other hand, was the invisible wife of a minor official who had
to struggle to build a semblance of Victorian comfort in a
world she found discomfortingly alien and culture she found
unfailingly inferior. Isabella Bird, notes Susan Morgan, was
“an enchanted participant”\footnote{Morgan, \textit{Place Matters}, 161.} whereas the Malay life to Innes
was “dull and gloomy to a degree which can hardly be conceived
even from this sketch of it.”\footnote{Innes, \textit{The Chersonese with the Gilding Off}, ii, 243.} The result is that, although
both exhibit feminine and imperialist rhetorical strategies,
the colonial ideology of Isabella Bird is more connotative
than denotative whereas Emily Innes’s is present for all to see.

But despite the dullness and gloom of the Malay world
Innes realises the advantages of the British presence in
Malaya and supports its continuation. Like Bird, Innes
recognises the enormous economic potential of Malaya for the
British Treasury. She has a sharp-enough mind (and probably a
stronger will than her husband) to see the potential of
British economic interests, since her husband was a revenue
collector, and a magistrate. The second, more personal reason
is that living in colonised lands provided class prestige and
a sense of grandeur, especially to minor officials and their
wives. As Somerset Maugham notes, rather spitefully, back in
Britain “instead of having a house with plenty of servants ...
[these wives] would ... be serving behind a counter."\(^{287}\) In colonial Malaya the class structure of colonial officialdom conferred on white men the status of rajah and on white women the status of memsahib.

Emily Innes loves the life of a memsahib and its attendant privileges. For example, she particularly enjoys her trip to visit the Resident of Perak Hugh Low, as the comfortable and luxurious passage must have played to her sense of being a real memsahib.\(^ {288}\) Another indicator is her constant preoccupation with class status. She makes regular comments regarding the status of individuals whom she meets. This constant sense of self-importance fits her well in Malaya where all her needs are attended to by locals. As a certain Mrs. V. Kitserow maintains, Malaya for a memsahib, is "a paradise on earth."\(^ {289}\)

However, staying in Langat deprives Innes of most of the luxury befitting a memsahib. She rather enviously comments on the luxurious lifestyle of Hugh Low:

> Living thus comfortably, and monarch of all he surveyed, he was better off and in a higher position than he could hope to enjoy in England, where, as everyone knows, even colonial governors are nobodies, unless they happen to have titles to fame

\(^{287}\)Brownfoot, "Memsahibs in Colonial Malaya", 193.  
\(^{288}\)Innes, *The Chersonese with the Gilding Off*, ii, 124-34.  
\(^{289}\)Qtd. in Brownfoot, "Memsahibs in Colonial Malaya", 192.
other than their official rank.\textsuperscript{290}

Of course, it never occurs to her that in the eyes of the indigenes she is probably herself a monarch surveying their lowly existence. Hugh Low's is a lifestyle for which she craves but could not possibly maintain given the meagre salary of her husband. Thus, when James Innes makes the, to her, erroneous decision to resign from the service she tries to "dissuade him from resigning,"\textsuperscript{291} indicating her love for the life but not the land and its people.

Towards the end of \textit{Gilding Off} Emily Innes suggests a solution to the perceived problem of the isolation and loneliness of the wife of colonial officials. She suggests the annexation\textsuperscript{292} of the Protected Malay States as "[annexation] would really mean Protection, of which in my opinion [the wife of colonial officials] stand, far more than the native, in need."\textsuperscript{293} Since annexation means opening the floodgate for officials and settlers from Britain the officers (and their wives) would not be as isolated and lonely as she feels herself to be. With regard to the Malays if her suggestion were carried through she admits that "it would probably drive most of them into the neighboring countries of Pahang and

\textsuperscript{290}Innes, \textit{The Chersonese with the Gilding Off}, ii, 134.
\textsuperscript{291}Ibid. ii, 223.
\textsuperscript{292}The merits of annexation were indeed pondered by the British especially with regard to expense. The debate on the issue was initiated by C.P. Lucas of the Colonial Office as a result of his memorandum for a federation of Malay States in 1893. Eventually the Residency system was maintained as the more viable option. See Simon Smith, \textit{British Relations with the Malay Rulers from Decentralisation to Malayan Independence 1930-1957}, 5.
\textsuperscript{293}Innes, \textit{The Chersonese with the Gilding Off}, ii, 248.
Kedah. To justify this policy she, like other colonialists replaying the tune of Benjamin Kidd, states that the Malay is not capable of developing the land since

he belongs, with his patriarchal feudal system, his love of the dolce far niente, and his determination to allow the brains of half his race (the feminine half) to lie for ever fallow, to the past; he cannot move with the times; and unless he moves out of the way (to Kedah or Pahang), he will certainly be crushed beneath the wheels of the car of progress.

This is where Bird and Innes diverge in their imperial attitudes. Unlike Bird who extols the role played by the British as fatherly and just but firm, Innes merely wishes to create a domesticated tropics without the hassle of dealing with Malays she considers semi-civilised.

At the same time Innes purports to sympathise with the locals and “regret[s] the disappearance of the amiable, gentle-mannered Malay.” This condescending attitude peppers her text with conflicted feelings of sympathy for the natives and repulsion at them. For example, in one episode she supervises a group of about forty Malays who had to carry her brass-laden piano up the slippery slope to her bungalow in rushes of two and three steps. Since the piano is very heavy the effort has to be prodded with collective cries. After

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295 Ibid. ii, 249-50.
296 Ibid. ii, 249.
hearing the first few cries she runs “out of the bungalow ... in alarm at these cries, fearing the piano had fallen on some of them, and at least broken some dozens of their legs.” By reflecting on her contemptuous tone about life in Malaya an indigenous reader could easily tell where her real concern lies. On another occasion, after having dismissed Taip, her Malay cook, she employs a Malay policeman as extra hand in her household by paying him an extra dollar with the purported justification that he would come to mischief with so much time available to himself. She never mentions the money saved by not hiring a full-time servant. On these two occasions Innes attempts to highlight her sympathetic tendency towards the Malays and gloss over her more complex feelings and motives. The examples above are some of the cracks in her narrative that show how Eurocentrism could operate to weave through morally difficult issues to, in the end, justify European superiority and morality and indigenous inferiority and immorality.

_Gilding Off_ also reveals Emily Innes’ condescending assumptions as well as her ignorance about the very people she loves to despise. There are, in fact, many instances of her ignorance (or outright attempt at deceit) about the Malays as a cultured people. Interspersed in her text she tells of

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297 Ibid. 1, 235.
298 Ibid. 1, 7-8.
'Malays [who] always laugh when they tell you bad news,' of the "prophet's verdict that women have no souls," of "women [who are] not allowed to enter the mosque," that "stealing comes as naturally to Malays as breathing," of "the unpunctuality of Malays, [that was] partly the fault of their religion, which forbids them to count their age." She also writes of the Sultan of Selangor who purportedly tells her that "it was a grave breach of decorum for any man to enter another man's house during his absence, or to speak to his wife" (which is culturally true), but adding that even if the Sultan meets his daughter on the road, he "must not speak to her. It would be an insult to her, and would injure her position, that any man, even her own father, should be seen speaking to her," (which shows either her ignorance of the fallacy of the statement or she has the intent of deceiving her reader). Similarly, a reader should be more cautious of her story about the Datu Dagang who marries his three nieces as a debt settlement from his brother, bearing in mind that

299 Ibid. i, 62.
300 Ibid. i, 82.
301 Ibid. i, 86.
302 Ibid. i, 157.
303 Ibid. i, 194.
304 Ibid. i, 212-3.
305 This theme of deception in travel narratives has been discussed by Percy Adams in his Travelers and Travel Liars. But our main concern here is to identify the writer's intent in her descriptions of events and cultural practices. The description could either show her ignorance or an attempt at deception. For example, when she elaborates that the Sultan, as a father, cannot talk to his daughter without her husband present, it can be viewed as an attempt at deceiving her reader. This is by assuming that the Sultan should know the differences between mahram (unmarriageable kin such as father, brothers, and uncles) and nonmahram (men a Muslim woman can marry).
306 Innes, The Chersonese with the Gilding Off, i, 80.
in Islam an uncle cannot marry a niece, let alone three of them all at once. Since Islam formed a major influence on Malay cultural practices Innes’s descriptions cast doubt on the authenticity of this story.

Another indicator of her othering narrative is when Innes describes the oppressive relationship between the Malay aristocracy and their subjects and tries to make sense of it. Two incidents are related to her by her husband who describes the oppression perpetrated by the Malay nobility. In one instance Tunku Panglima Raja, a Malay Rajah, is walking with James Innes when he sees some ripe corn belonging to a Malay peasant. Upon the Rajah’s order, his followers simply break the fence, confiscate the corn and bring it to their master without any compensation for the peasant. When the owner comes out to investigate the commotion and realises that the Rajah has taken possession of his corn he “humbly bowed and smiled when he saw that a raja had condescended to appropriate his corn.” In another incident the followers of another Rajah simply deprive a fisherman of all but some shabby fish he has just caught. Emily Innes rationalises over these incidents by assuming that “[t]he ryots [peasants] never dream of resisting this oppression; in fact, they really seem to like it.”[^307]

[^307]: Ibid. i, 182.
to claim future favour from the Rajahs.

The difference between the oppression as understood by a European and Malay reveals to us how Eurocentrism operates to fashion the Self, even a female narrator, as different from Others. What Innes misunderstands is the concept of power as manifested in its different contexts. A Malay subject living under the shadow of an oppressive Rajah could not offer any effective resistance when all the power to rule, judge and punish was in the hands of the nobility. Under the circumstances the unfortunate farmer and fisherman could only acquiesce to the loss of labour because to resist would potentially lose him even his life. It is the survival instinct of any human being, European or otherwise, when faced with the choice of two evils to choose the less harmful alternative.

Power, and how it shapes the behaviours of people, can come in many guises and forms. We can understand the attraction of power when discussing how Innes was anxious to please the Governor, Sir William Jervois, on his visit to their residence. She describes the comical circumstance of Malay inefficiency and unpunctuality that leads to the Governor leaving without dinner. But what is evident is her anxiety to gravitate to the Governor’s favour. As she explains:

[w]e were delighted, and also at his having come without the Resident, who, when present, always took
the lion’s share of a Governor’s attention, hardly allowing anyone else to get in a word.  

This incident reveals the general nature of power and how it shapes the behaviour and action of people under its influence. A Governor, like a Resident in one of Maugham’s short stories, possesses the power of a “word of praise [that] could delight and a frown [that could] humiliate all sorts of and conditions of men.”  

Although a Governor missing a dinner and a Rajah being denied his desire bring about different effects due to the different historical and cultural contexts, the fact remains that power can affect behavioural changes in those subject to it. Innes’s anxiety to please the Governor is due to his power to determine the professional future of his subordinates, whereas the Malay subjects realise only too well what the power of a displeased Rajah could do to their immediate well-being. 

As I have already indicated another stock colonial theme is the perceived industry (or lack of it) of the colonised. But by far, Innes is the most unwittingly able to show how her assumption of Malay laziness conflicts with her narrative of their industry. In exaggeration, she suggests the Malays are “by nature the laziest being on the face of the earth. He would like to lie under a banana-tree, and let the fruit drop

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308 Ibid. i, 190.
309 Maugham, The World Over, 1087.
into his mouth."\textsuperscript{310} But later on, she professes to prefer Malay servants "as they are much better able to turn their hands to anything than the Klings or Chinese."\textsuperscript{311} She also provides descriptions of Malay policemen and boat-boys "cheerfully [doing] many little jobs of carpentering, painting, etc., at the public buildings in their leisure time, thus saving the Government a good deal of money."\textsuperscript{312}

The role of labour in colonial territories has been touched in the section on Isabella Bird and I would not wish to protract the discussion unduly. But I would like to point out how the same issue of Malay laziness, in Emily Innes's case, is given a different lyric but replayed to the same tune of the indolent Other. Thus, while lamenting the lack of industry of the Malays, she herself uses them indiscriminately for her own purposes. The Malay labourers who transfer the Innenses' furniture from the old house to a bungalow at a hill in Jugra benefit the colonials. So does the labour of Malays who serve as policemen to protect her and the Malay oarsmen who are in charge of the boat. She also mentions the fisherman and the corn planter whose produce might benefit colonial coffers in terms of tax levied on them. This notion of Malay laziness and European industriousness needs to be contextualised within a colonial capitalist ideology where the colonised is indolent if his or her labour does not contribute

\textsuperscript{310}Innes, The Chersonese with the Gilding Off, i, 187.
\textsuperscript{311}Ibid. ii, 14.
\textsuperscript{312}Ibid. ii, 73.
to the colonial market economy. Innes presents contradictory pictures in her text. While describing the laziness of the Malays, at the same time she inadvertently describes their usefulness when it suits her.

But the issue directly of concern to me is the constructs Innes evokes to produce the images of the Malay female Other. And will those images of the Malay woman merely serve to reinforce her Eurocentric ideological assumptions about the general condition of the Malay Other or would a feminist ideology intervene to show a more sympathetic attitude towards the doubly Othered Malay woman? My subsequent analysis will show that Innes’s feminist leanings do serve to reshape her impressions of the Malay woman but in a way that reinforces the justification of colonial intervention in the Malay States.

One major difference between Bird’s and Innes’s narrations is their degree of attention to depicting, specifically, the lives of Malay women. Bird, due to the brevity of her stay and also to the largely male circles in which she moved, writes little of her impression of Malay women. Innes leaves more detailed accounts of Malay women and their conditions. This ability to provide a greater representation is due partly to her experience as the wife of a British official (thus able to meet Malay women of all classes) and partly because of the length of her stay. The opportunity allows her to write more elaborately about the
manner, dress and peculiarities of Malay women. But Innes could not escape the normative Eurocentric discourse of the Oriental female Other. This is due to her reduction of the experience of the Malay women to the stock notion of their being oppressed by Oriental patriarchy and the familiar tropes of illiteracy, submissiveness, savagery and irrationality.

Innes’s role in the colonial context as the wife of a junior British officer posted away from the comfort of civilisation and company of fellow Europeans also reinforces her feminine imperial ideology. She understands her subservient relationship with her husband and knows full well the patriarchal aspects of Victorianism and even Victorian notions of empire. As such she writes not as a builder of empire but as an unwilling female participant whose contribution is as a typical Victorian house goddess who serves as a moral guide as well as the domestic helper to her husband. Thus, her narrative is more domestic than public in the sense that it revolves more around her immediate needs for physical and social comfort than the Malay world about her. As Khoo Kay Kim writes in the Introduction to the 1974 edition of her book, “Mrs. Innes wrote primarily about personal relationships and as a participant, albeit an aloof and a reluctant one, in the life of the kampong.”

Innes’s main interest is to make life as comfortable as possible due to the perceived length of her and her husband’s

313Ibid. xii.
stay in Malaya. In this she aspires to create a little England in the wilderness of the Malay world. In one incident she is rather aggrieved when the grocer mistakenly jumbles her order of condensed milk and biscuits and sends her milk biscuits instead. As a result, she says, "I was deprived of my solitary comfort and pick-me-up — namely, my afternoon cup of tea."\textsuperscript{314} This Oriental inefficiency denies her even the simple English cultural nicety that she strives to maintain. Incidents such as this inform us that she is not much interested in the Malay world beyond its contribution to her comfort and happiness. And since she believes that it could not fulfil her wishes and expectations, and rattled by the dwindling professional fortunes of her husband, her narrative brush becomes more judgmental than descriptive and more personal than probing.

Innes's description of the old Malay attendant foreshadows her general assumptions of the degenerate Malay woman:

[\textit{b}arring the honour, I would gladly have dispensed with this old creature's presence: she was frowzy in her garments and very dirty in her habits; she chewed betel constantly, and her talk required Bowdlerizing so much that I soon pretended to know no Malay, and thus tried to silence her.\textsuperscript{315}]

\textsuperscript{314}Ibid. i, 32.
\textsuperscript{315}Ibid. i, 11.
Interestingly, although showing evidence of her awareness of the issue of women’s emancipation and oppression in her writing, Innes is less sympathetic to Malay women than Malay men. She writes:

Malays are never vulgar. Vulgarity and snobbishness seem to be growths peculiar to civilisations, and savages are free from them. Indeed, the manners of all classes of Malays are extremely good, except those of the women.316

Innes further narrates how the women “of three nations”317 come into her bedroom to stare and gaze at her uninvited. Once she manages to get rid of one group another would be waiting to, again, stare at her. Suddenly Innes finds the reversal of their positions - she is the observed and exoticised in her relationship with the female Other - and disconcerted. Also her attempt at communication with the Malay women is disastrous as she finds that they “had no notion of confining themselves to stated hours,”318 the subjects that they talked about are “altogether too improper, or too insignificant”319 and she eventually finds even the rajahs’ wives “were just as intrusive and tiresome, and though very rich ... they begged in perfectly shameless manner.”320

As Innes is laden with this cultural bias, it is,
therefore, not surprising that her anecdotes about the Malay women are full of abuse and prejudices. But it is the reasons she gives for their conditions that reveal the ambivalence of her colonial gaze as she seeks to reconcile their positions with her feminist leanings. Innes explains:

[t]hey are not taught to read nor write; they never travel out of their own country — nay, many a Malay woman never travels farther than the house to the well and back; and they cannot pick up knowledge even orally, for their mankind, on principle, avoid talking to them on any subjects but household matters, and what they are pleased to call love. These subjects, it must be admitted, are not elevating; and if the Malay men lived the same narrow, base lives as the women, doubtless they would soon become as unintelligent.321

This description of the reason for the condition of the Malay woman reveals Innes’s feminist sympathy but it is also bound to the discourses of Orientalism and of English cultural superiority, producing the all too familiar tropes of the ignorant and degenerate Malay female Other.

At the centre of Innes’s narrative of the degenerate and cruel Malay women is Tunku Chi, the daughter of the Sultan of Selangor. As admitted by Innes, whose notion of Malay femaleness is emblematised by Tunku Chi, she is "too

321Ibid. i, 82-3.
picturesque and too oriental to be omitted.” 322 Tunku Chi comes to Innes’s attention with a story of her unmitigated cruelty to a slave-girl. She relates a rumour of Tunku Chi’s beating of a slave-girl who, while serving her husband and another Rajah, receives a favorable remark from him. A week later the girl is found dead and Tunku Chi is believed to have ordered that her body be thrown into the river. Innes admits that she would “not vouch for” the “accuracy” of the story, 323 but states that she “certainly would not vouch for its falsehood” 324 either. Although she inserts these two pronouncements to remind the reader of the doubtful trustworthiness of the story the weight of credibility, to a Eurocentric reader, is on the truthfulness of the event since Eurocentrism viewed the notion of Oriental cruelty as a given.

But what captures Innes’s admiration and respect for Tunku Chi is her sense of her rebellion against Malay patriarchal hegemony. Although Innes highlights her supposed volatile temper Tunku Chi is also pictured as having an independence of mind by living separately from her husband. It is this independence and freedom that Innes realises she, as a superior Victorian woman, lacks. As Innes describes her:

She having lived shut up and veiled in a Malay house all her life, was thoroughly Malay in her ways and customs; her ideas, which were the narrowest of the

322 Ibid. i, 92.
323 Ibid.
324 Ibid. i, 95.
narrow, revolted against [her husband]. While still portraying her ideas as backward Innes, inadvertently, admires Tunku Chi for her progressive action of defying her husband and eventually choosing to divorce him. Tunku Chi, in this context, is Innes’s idea of a liberated female Other.

Innes’s paradoxical sense of repulsion at and attraction to the female Other resembles colonial Europe’s own sense of attraction to and repulsion at the feminised Other. But given that this narrative is bound by the gender discourse that transcends the racial boundary it is not the feminisation of Tunku Chi that is the focus. Rather it is the Oriental aspects of her character that become the centre of Innes’s interest. In this sense, the images of the exotic female Other are produced from the ideology of a Victorian feminine discourse. But it differs little from the broader Eurocentric discourse that marginalises Eastern women. They both conjure the same Manichean binary oppositions familiar to postcolonial critics. The difference is that while Victorian patriarchal ideology regards women as emotional and irrational this feminist orientalist perspective defines the female Self as rational and virtuous in opposition to the irrational and cruel female Other. Innes’s images of Tunku Chi are grounded not on fact, for what she knows about Tunku Chi is based on hearsay, but on the strength of her Eurocentric assumptions about the

325Ibid. i, 88.
irrational, mysterious and cruel female Other. In this sense, Innes’s feminist leanings merely borrow the colonial and imperial rhetoric to produce her own sense of moral superiority over the Malay woman in the images of Tunku Chi.

We cannot deny that patriarchal ideology played a strong role in shaping the cultural identity of the Malay polity (although I have touched, in some aspects, on how the Malay adats were more liberal in providing for the rights of Malay women). This is also undeniably true in the cultural formation of Victorianism and the construction of Empire. Since Innes elaborates very descriptive images of oppressed and immoral Malay women, the narrative, by itself, turns into a self-propelled rationalising discourse of the emancipation of Victorian women. And by producing the images of the tyrannised Malay women the reflected images of the English Self were of freedom and liberty from patriarchal subjugation.

However, Innes’s description of Tunku Chi reveals how class and gender criss-crossed each other in the determination and positioning of the power of individuals in the Malay culture. That Tunku Chi, being the daughter of a Sultan, could defy her husband at will and has her orders obeyed by lower ranked Malay men supplants the notion of patriarchy as the sole determining factor in the formation of Malay social and cultural ideology. Innes herself admits that she respects and

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admires Tunku Chi’s “hatred of the English, and her unbending attitude of defiance and conservative views” and was told that she is “one of the few respectable women in Langat.”\textsuperscript{327} Within the Malay culture her subjectivity is determined, not only by her gender, but also by her class position within the overall structure of power. The case of Tunku Chi also reflects the bigger role Malay women played, even if largely symbolical, in the social and political activities of Malays in colonial Malaya.

By comparison Victorian women were not as free of male domination as Innes assumes. It is true that middle-class Victorian women of this era were more literate due to the widespread availability of reading materials and better educational infrastructure (some of which were funded from the exploitation of riches from British colonies). There were also women travellers to other countries and regions but during this era they were a select few who had the means to travel widely. But, as Sara Mills states, many Victorian women, especially from the middle class

were confined to the home and the private sphere, chaperoned when outside, swaddled in clothes which restricted their movements and had little or no economic or political choice about their lives.\textsuperscript{328}

These were the same conditions that Innes is describing in her

\textsuperscript{327}Innes, The Chersonese with the Gilding Off, i, 96.
\textsuperscript{328}Mills, Discourses of Difference, 27.
account of Malay women while trying to maintain an air of the superiority of Victorian values, especially with regard to the treatment of women.

In Malaya she was constantly reminded of the position of European women within the broader colonial structure in her interaction with both Malay and European men. As the wife of a British official she had no formal authority. And as she admits, her “very existence was not acknowledged by the Government.” Her sense of vulnerability is most pronounced in her dealing with Malay men. She feels that the Malay men’s patriarchal ideology is much stronger than their presumed sense of cultural inferiority and that they projected their sense of superiority in the way they treated her. On a native boat trip to Langat she explains that the trip took twenty-four hours instead of the normal eight due to the fact that “Malays never hurry themselves when there is no white man present.” She also makes remarks on Taip’s devotion to her husband James that she feels is not extended to her because of her gender. These interpretations reveal her anxiety as a woman over loss of control over the very people that were supposedly lower in the racial scale.

Even within the European cultural sphere patriarchy still determines the formation of the social, political and even economic power structure. In a conversation with Hugh Low,

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329 Innes, The Chersonese with the Gilding Off, i, 218.
330 Ibid. i, 12.
331 Ibid. i, 222.
concerning slavery\textsuperscript{332} in Malaya that Innes accuses the British colonial administration of ignoring, he reminded her that, "[y]ou are a slave yourself, you know – all married women are slaves." And as if to confirm the prevalence of patriarchy that underlines Victorian social ideology she answers, "[t]hat is precisely why I can sympathize with other slaves."\textsuperscript{333} On another occasion when the Sultan of Selangor wants to present James Innes with a gift made of gold he refuses it. And when the Sultan suggests that his wife, the Sultana, would give it to Mrs. Innes he categorically tells the Sultan that "anything given to his wife was given to him, and belonged to him."\textsuperscript{334}

James Innes’s answer is an indicator of the subordinate social position of a Victorian wife in her relationship with her husband. Victorian women, eventually, had to yield to the era’s notion of social ethics and morality that was pervasively patriarchal in nature. Of course, there were some women who attempted and succeeded in breaking down the social and cultural barriers that limited their freedom of action and thought, and like the Malay Tunku Chi, led a more autonomous

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\footnote{Joyce Zonana has made an interesting investigation on the slavery trope within the feminist discourse in the West by analysing Charlotte Brontë’s novel \textit{Jane Eyre}. By strategically inserting the subject of slavery as inherently and naturally Oriental, Zonana explains that Western women tried to influence the case for female emancipation by positing that the change should be constituted "not as a radical attempt to restructure the West but as a conservative effort to make the West more like itself" as opposed to the Orient. Seen in this light, Innes’s argument for the abolition of slavery in the Malay states may be construed as partly to add weight to the struggle for the emancipation of Victorian women at home and not merely to show her sympathy for the plight of slaves in Malaya. Joyce Zonana, "The Sultan and the Slave: Feminist Orientalism and the Structure of \textit{Jane Eyre}", \textit{Signs}, 18 (1993), 592-617. The quotation is at 594.}

\footnote{Innes, \textit{The Chersonese with the Gilding Off}, i, 139.}

\footnote{Ibid. i, 47.}
\end{footnotes}
3.5 CONCLUSION

Travel narratives by European travellers to the East are one of the earliest sources of information with regard to Eastern cultures. Because they are mostly in documentary form, these narratives were often regarded as true representations of the mysterious worlds beyond European borders. Since European readers could only rely on these accounts to satisfy their curiosity they tended to be accepted into European epistememes and regarded as factual. When European imperialism spread throughout the known world the same accumulated assumptions were recycled to produce a new discourse about the exotic and erotic East. Therefore the same images of Eastern immorality, savagery and cruelty are reemployed as the tropes to represent them. At the same time Eastern women were also represented as promiscuous and irrational, seductive and lethal to the moral integrity of a European male. Above all she was viewed as tyrannised over and dominated by cultural patriarchy. As such the veil and the harem became two of the most enduring symbols of the lustful and patriarchal East.

The colonialists who visited Malaya also brought with them the same assumptions about the Malay female Other. Licentiousness and patriarchal violence are two of the most durable images that describe the Malay nation and Malay women. But interestingly in the Malay context, the male colonialists
differ in their thematic emphasis in describing the Malay female Other. Swettenham and Thomson direct their documentary efforts at illustrating the unmitigated sexual nature of Malay women. Bird and Innes, on the other hand, are less curious about the sexual divergence and more fascinated with the intellectual personae of the Malay women that they encountered. Therefore their descriptions of the intellectual inferiority and cruel nature of Malay women do not necessarily converge with the licentious nature as portrayed by the male writers.

These representational differences could be due to the fact that European men felt more threatened by the perceived sexuality of Malay women. These fears of the unfathomable female savage, who is seductive as well as degenerative, are more evident in fictional representations than in more ostensibly documentary genres. As I discuss below, both Conrad’s and Maugham’s fictions brought to bear this fear in Europeans, men especially, of the incomprehensible darkness that is the Malay woman.
CHAPTER 4 FEMALE SAVAGES: MALAY WOMEN IN CONRAD’S EARLY FICTIONS

This chapter discusses two of Conrad’s Malay novels and his representations of Malay women that are consonant with Eurocentric images of the female Other. Firstly, I discuss Conrad’s liberal humanist ideology and his general views of and assumptions about the imperial/colonised dichotomy. While we have to admit that Conrad is revisionist in the temporality of his perspectives, a rereading of his novels (especially by a native reader) will find the limitation of Conrad’s liberal humanism being restricted by the grand narratives of Orientalism and Eurocentrism. Later, I address a range of questions in my analysis of Almayer’s Folly and An Outcast of the Islands. What is the position of Malay woman in Conrad’s hierarchical structure of Malay culture? What sort of woman will emerge from a society that Conrad implies is barbarous and savage? These are the major issues that are the focus of the following analysis. I discuss Conrad’s fictionalisation of Malay piracy and its attendant notion of Malay masculinity being tied to the idea of a savage Malay mentality. I extend the argument to expose Conrad’s essentialising discourse of the equally savage female Malay mentality. In the second part of this chapter I analyse Almayer’s Folly and the representations of Mrs. Almayer as a savage Malay female Other. Finally, I discuss An Outcast of the Islands and its
representations of Aïssa as the degenerate and degenerative Malay woman whose relationship with any European man will cause his moral demise.

4.1 SAVAGE FEMALE OTHERS, NARRATIVES AND EUROCENTRISM

Early and late, Conrad’s fiction shows the native girl, whatever her personal character, as the embodiment of a spirit of place essentially hostile to the wandering European attracted by her fateful glamor.335

In Guy Boothby’s The Beautiful White Devil (1896) the heroine of the adventure novel is a white woman who thrives as a white female rajah in an exotic corner of the Malay world of Borneo. The narrative echoes the exploits of James Brooke, the white Rajah of Sarawak whose successful establishment of a private dominion in the former province of the kingdom of Brunei elevated him to celebrity status in London. Boothby’s story also captured the imagination of readers in Victorian England, whose sense of adventure was shaped, to a certain extent, by heroic tales such as H. Rider Haggard’s King Solomon’s Mines (1885) and, further back, Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe (1719).

Of particular interest is Boothby’s description of Alie

Dunbar, the heroine whose beauty, physical prowess and intellectual powers shine so brightly in the middle of the dark and mysterious Eastern world, like a stunning goddess of Greek mythology who stood amidst the Eastern mortals whose fates were hers to toy with. This is how Boothby describes her:

Quite a young woman — eight-and-twenty at most. Tall and mellow. Beautiful features, clear cut as cameo — exquisite complexion and rippling golden hair — a voice like a flute, figure like Venus, and eyes that look into the uttermost depths of your soul.336

Boothby's fictional imagination constructs Alie Dunbar as possessing exceptional physical beauty and intellectual "cosmopolitanism and sophistication"337 amidst the dangerous and fast-paced life on the high seas, being always on the run from both British imperial authority and enemies who constantly lurk around the corner to destroy her. The image given is of an intelligent, tough and well-groomed heroine in a dangerous and exotic world, not dissimilar to the way a well-groomed and physically strong Tarzan, aristocratic Anglo-Saxon hero in the African jungle, would later be portrayed in cartoon strips and on film.

In contrast, the Malay women in Conrad's Malay fictions,

Mrs. Almayer and Aïssa, are consistently portrayed as savages, semi-savages, violent, diabolical, irrational and sensual. Conrad’s descriptions of Malay female characters typically render Malay culture as beneath Europe’s high civilisation in the production of cultural discourse and its Malay women doubly othered as a subordinate section of that culture. The descriptions by Boothby and Conrad are consonant with wider Western representational practices that fill in the yet unexplored Malay world and serve as markers of the position of European culture vis-à-vis the Other. What the practices - apparent in fiction, travel narratives, visual arts and political and cultural tracts - share are similar racial, philosophical and political ideological underpinnings.

"Blank space"\textsuperscript{338} in Heart of Darkness is the phrase Marlow the narrator uses to explain the still uncharted lands of the world before the coming of European explorers and colonisers. The Malay world was not as precious as India, the jewel in the crown of British imperialism. It did not draw as much frenzied interest from European powers as Africa did during the scramble for that continent following the Berlin Conference of 1885. But the Malay world was yet another blank to fill, another mysterious East to uncover and to insert into the Western epistemology of the Orient. There was topography to measure and chart, peoples to describe and cultures to explain. It was a theatre for the enactment of the colonial

\textsuperscript{338}Conrad, Heart of Darkness, 21.
mission, a mission taken up, with varying degrees of willingness and enthusiasm, by early administrators, travel writers, missionaries, philanthropists and eventually novelists. The savage Malay world, like any other non-European world, needed to be civilised to the mould of European ideas of progress.

But Joseph Conrad is not your everyday colonialist. For a writer living in an era of colonial expansion he shows a remarkable insight into the operation of colonialism and feels a sense of repulsion towards its true motives and stated justifications. While most colonialist writers would, in one way or another, buttress or support the purportedly benevolent aims of colonialism, Conrad is radical in his exposé of the contradictions between European words and deeds. When Chinua Achebe first labelled Conrad, in the strongest terms, a “a bloody racist”339 for denying Africans that individuality he gives to Europeans340 in Heart of Darkness, his accusation caused considerable debate among academics as to its validity. Terry Collits considers Achebe’s argument for Conrad being racist as his error of “misread[ing] Heart of Darkness as a stable embodiment of Conrad’s political beliefs and attitude towards blacks,”341 in that Achebe views Marlow’s ideological stance as a narrator as representing that of Conrad the

340 Ibid. 119-29.
author. Collits explains:

Conrad’s text contains, but is not contained by, Marlow’s limited and prejudice-ridden liberalism. Marlow embodies the liberal-humanist ideology that underpinned European imperialism at the end of the nineteenth century: the civilizing mission, the work ethic, and the superiority of civilized man.342

Collits further highlights the contestatory nature of the debate343 when he states that the book which R.B. Cunninghame Graham considered as “anti-imperialist” in that it “challenge[s] the old colonial novel’s implicit claim to omniscience is read by Achebe as a reductive account by a European of the African world of his own grandparents.”344

So how might we begin to make sense of Conrad’s colonial ideology in relation to such contradictory but justifiable perspectives? For this we might turn to Mohanty’s accusation that Western feminists have often had a Eurocentric perspective in viewing third-world women whom they attempt to save from local patriarchies. Conrad’s criticism of the white man’s burden in Africa in Heart of Darkness and in “An Outpost of Progress”, the central theme of Almayer’s superior attitude and his tragic ending in Sambir in Almayer’s Folly, and Willems’ false conviction of his intellectual prowess and

342Ibid. 99.
343For a discussion of racism in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness see the chapter “Conrad in the Postcolonial World” in ibid.
344Ibid. 99.
eventual degeneration in An Outcast of the Islands are, in reality, manifestations of Conrad’s diminishing faith in the idea of benign colonialism and his hesitations as to the solidity of the moral faith of Europeans. We understand that through these texts he condemns the very idea of Europeans’ sense of superiority and their conduct vis-à-vis the colonised. But on the same pages Conrad also, unintentionally, provides us with traces and clues that lead to the exposure of his ideology with regard to non-European worlds. Referring to Althusser’s definition of ideology as the experience that helps shape our worldview, I suggest that it is very hard for Conrad, even as a liberal humanist, to escape being influenced ideologically, by the common European construction of the non-European world and racial ideologies that have become part of the European Orientalist episteme.

An example of how Conrad’s ideology is shaped by the common Orientalist idea of the non-European world is his negative portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in his early Malay novels. The Malay novels expose Conrad’s shallow understanding of Islamic faith and how it shapes the conduct of Muslims, both Arabs and non-Arabs. To Conrad the Muslims, and Arabs especially, are still as licentious and treacherous as ever. His Arab345 character Reshid in Almayer’s Folly is still the

345Islam and the Arabs were opponents Europeans faced since medieval European times. The experience of the Crusades and the rivalry between Christian Europe and Muslim Arabs in cultural, religious, political and military spheres embedded in the psyche of Europe the idea of Arabs as eternal enemies. Kabbani claims that Europe’s confrontation with Islam
epitome of Eastern amorousness as the “possessor of several Malay women” and now eyeing Nina as a further addition to his harem, while Abdulla in *An Outcast of the Islands* is treacherous in his abandoning of Willems, who had helped him gain the upper hand in trade against Lingard, once his objectives are achieved. As John Lester states, Conrad’s Arabs still conform to the stereotypical Victorian perception of “bigoted, frequently violent, invariably unscrupulous and always complacently exclusive” Muslims.

We can surmise that power relations are also important in understanding European stereotypical representations of non-Europeans. For example, James Brooke’s close affiliation to the Dyaks and Malays in Sarawak was because they never could counter the power of his authority militarily or his trade monopoly. On the other hand, his dislike for the Chinese was due to the threat they posed to his authority, not militarily, but by their sheer diligence and perseverance in conducting commercial business perceived by Brooke as detrimental to his

would eventually shape the fundamental formation of perceptions in the nature of Europe’s discourse with the East. See Kabbani, *Europe’s Myths of Orient*, 5.

348 Ibid. 41.
349 The stereotyping of Indians in America depended on the intensity of their resistance to the colonists’ encroachment into their lands. Indians in Virginia were “ignorant heathens” while Indians in New England who showed fiercer resistance were “a demonic race, their dark complexions signifying an indelible and inherent evil”. See Ronald Takaki, "The Tempest in the Wilderness: The Racialisation of Savagery", *Journal of American History*, e 79 (1992), 912.
authority.\footnote{The Chinese Uprising in 1857 was the result of James Brooke’s attempt to impose tax on Chinese gold and business activities in Bau, Sarawak and to prohibit them from trading with other states. When on 17 February 1857 three Chinese were flogged the Chinese attacked Kuching. Brooke nearly lost his rule in Sarawak and when he retaliated there were some appalling consequences for the Chinese. See Gullick (ed.), \textit{Adventurous Women in South-East Asia}, 61-5.} Another example is the early Chinese early experience in South Australia and the Northern Territory during the nineteenth-century Australian gold rushes. The fear of their competition caused whites to accuse them of various vices and stereotyping that eventually led to legal and actual abuses against them.\footnote{For further reading on the history of the early Chinese in Australian mining industries see the chapter “Civilisers, Celestials and Savages” in Alan Powell, \textit{Far Country :A Short History of the Northern Territory} (Carlton South, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2000).}

The Chinese in their trading practices, like the Arabs in their fierce resistance, presented continuous threats to the colonialists’ trade and power monopoly, thus creating the need to put them under control.\footnote{When the Chinese community rebelled against Brooke’s rule in 1857, and were subsequently brutally repressed, their grievances were never really explained beyond the statement by the Chinese captain that they “had been badly treated, paid too many taxes, and were not regarded with the dignity they deserved”. See Robert Payne, \textit{The White Rajahs of Sarawak} (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990), 91.} When Isabella Bird first visits the Malay Archipelago her apprehension of the Muslim Malay was allayed once she realises that the Malay indigenes are contrary to her expectation of fierce and fanatical Muslims. I could only conjecture that Conrad’s (and other colonialists’) negative view of Arabs but relatively positive portrayals of Malays of the nineteenth century was because the Malays were more agreeable and less antagonistic to European imperialism than Arabs of the Middle East were. All these examples give us...
a sense that a people who could not pose a serious threat to European hegemony were more agreeable than a people who showed more antagonism and provided fiercer competition to European domination.

Conrad admits to his lack of intimate knowledge of Malaya. As Hugh Clifford mentions, Conrad is in "complete ignorance of Malays and their habits and customs." In fact, one of the sources of his Malay fictions was A.R. Wallace's *The Malay Archipelago*, a work Wallace dedicated to Charles Darwin, who developed the theory of evolution. Conrad's scant knowledge, however, did not prevent him from writing about Malays as he deemed writings by other Europeans sufficient to understand indigenes' psychology and society. He relied on the truth-value of the assumptions made by Wallace and based his writing on the validity of such judgments.

Conrad is a product of his era, the way Harriet Beecher Stowe is emblematic of nineteenth-century liberal humanism in the United States. Darryl Wellington discusses Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which was generally considered as "a tract attacking the great American injustice: slavery" in relation to James Baldwin's criticism of the author for the "limitations of her views on race, the human condition and the meaning of freedom." Baldwin's sense of Stowe's allegorical

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355 Ibid.
characterisation of blacks as lesser equals to whites echoes somewhat Achebe's view of Conrad's "sidestep[ping] the ultimate question of equality between white people and black people." There is, then, a strong parallel between the criticism that Achebe directs against Conrad's sense of humanity and Baldwin's hostility to Stowe's inadequacy in understanding the meaning of human subjectivity.

What these debates raise in actuality is the question of temporality of perspectives. In their days, Conrad's and Stowe's voices were revisionist in nature; they went against the mainstream ideas of race in their eras. Theirs were voices of humanity in a world where racism was normative and an ideology taken for granted in the materially unequal world of Europe and its Others (or whites vis-à-vis blacks in North America). Achebe's and Baldwin's reinterpretations of the texts produced by earlier writers merely represent, inter alia, a reevaluation of texts using late twentieth-century theory on race and racism. Therefore, as Agnes Yeow states, "Conrad's portrayal of Malays and Chinese differs little from the Orientalist stereotype propagated by European observers" but the subjectivity he gives his Eastern characters speaks much about his sympathy towards the oppressed and abhorrence of their oppressors. Thus, I do not agree with Achebe's

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scathing accusation that Conrad is a racist. But at the same
time Conrad is a product of his era, albeit with a higher
sense of sympathy for the oppressed. Thus, this chapter
reveals how contemporary Orientalist and Eurocentric ideology
helped shape Conrad’s worldview and his early texts about the
Malay world that reflect these conceptions of the superiority
of Europe over the colonised East.

An imperialist, a liberal humanist and a native reader
will understand Conrad’s texts and his ideology differently.
What I am alluding to here is the fact that we can only
analyse and criticise a literary text, or any other text for
that matter, from our own ideological and cultural standpoint
as we tease out certain textual themes and representations.
From my position as a Malay reader Conrad is a liberal
humanist and I have to concur with the fact that he went to
great lengths to point to Europeans’ false sense of
civilisation. His fictions, in many ways, tread new ground by
replacing the benevolent heroic image of the white man in
travel writings and adventure fictions with the narrative of
the demise and degeneration of white characters outside
civilised society. But at the same time Conrad’s liberal
humanism only answers to his European temporal and spatial

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358 Marialuisa Bignami explains that Conrad found the Eastern world to be the
only place “the desperate and faithless men [of Europe] of his imaginative
world live and thrive.” The reason for this, she further explains, is not
because they were outside of civilised Europe but more because of their
conviction that faith and ideals no longer exist. See Marialuisa Bignami,
"Joseph Conrad, the Malay Archipelago, and the Decadent Hero", Review of
English Studies, NS, 38 (1987), 201.
needs and concerns. That is to say, Conrad criticises European civilisation's faith in the rationality of empiricism and science as the new foundation of human progress.

Cedric Watts in his insightful text *A Preface on Conrad* provides us with a possible explanation of these puzzling contradictions in Conrad's worldview. He states that Conrad relishes paradox, and though at times he suggests that civilisation is just a hypocritical sophistication of savagery, at other times he will suggest that it is a precious achievement to be guarded ... If civilisation is represented by a humane fellow like Marlow, then Conrad can see it as indeed a worthy achievement. If it is represented by jingoistic statesmen and the commercial exploitation of Africa, Conrad can see it as hypocritical fraud.\(^{359}\)

Watts' statement of Conrad's ideological leanings reveals to us the ambivalence of his position on the idea of civilisation. If he had not known of the Belgian atrocities in the Congo region would he have accepted the idea of European civilisation (and Eurocentrism) as a "worthy achievement"? His text *Heart of Darkness* partially answers this question in its criticism of Europe's purported civilising mission in Africa.

From my point of view, his characteristic construction of the Malay world, its people and especially its women is

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erroneous if well intentioned. It is understood that an author’s formation of characters suits the trajectory of his or her themes. The acts and thoughts of major European characters such as Lingard, Willems, and Almayer in Conrad’s fiction set in Malay territory shape the major themes of the novels elaborated by Conrad. These characters are developed as part of a critique of certain dominating ideas in the grand narrative of European imperialism. But fictitious indigenous characters, to a reader not from the Malay Archipelago, may represent the reality of the Malay’s cultural patterns, social life and moral mores. The imprint on the mind of a reader unfamiliar with indigenous history and culture could become deeper as the pattern of indigenous stereotypical characteristics is repeated in new ways in other texts by other European writers. In a world of discourse where facts and fictions are intertwined, an exotic fictitious character can easily be mistaken as a representation of indigenous reality.

My analysis of the Malay women in Conrad’s early Malay novels shows that Conrad at least is trying to give an equally valid voice to indigenous characters so that they are not simply conjured up as part of the general setting of his texts where European characters determine the majority of viewpoints. Unlike other mainstream colonialist writers Conrad attempts to present indigenous perspectives on central concerns of the novels. For example, indigenous characters
such as Babalatchi and Mrs. Almayer provide the reader with indigenous viewpoints on European colonialism and its detrimental effects on local political cohesion and culture. What is even more radical is Conrad’s modernist anti-heroic narrative technique in both novels. In an era of imperialist triumphalism the demise of European protagonists when pitted against characters represented as primitive savages seems to invalidate commonly held ideas of the superiority of Europeans.

But despite his attempt to review colonial subject positions by providing subjectivity and voice to indigenes, Conrad still adheres to the Eurocentric civilised/savage dichotomy between Europe and its Others in his general bias against Islam or even in his pseudo-scientific notion of intellectual superiority based on race. There are traces of Eurocentrism, and even of overt Darwinism, in his texts with regard to the Malay indigenes and Malay women especially. Their savagery is consistently portrayed alongside the sense of their humanity that Conrad wishes to project. Mrs. Almayer, Nina, and Aïssa, upon analysis, are still representations of the Other against the image of Europe. In the case of Mrs. Almayer and Nina, even their Western education does not help in raising them to the level of Europeans for, in part, the savage attraction of the Eastern world and culture is too strong for them to resist. And Aïssa, sensuously destructive in her influence over Willems, is Conrad’s model of the
Eastern girl that was partly constructed from the epistemological bricks of Orientalism. To state it differently, Conrad’s Malay novels were constructed by the ideologies of Eurocentrism on the one hand and the liberal humanism of late-nineteenth-century Europe on the other.

4.2 PIRACY AND MALAY FEMININITY

Piracy features prominently in Conrad’s Malay novels. Almost all major Malay male characters are involved in or are material beneficiaries of the activity. Malay piracy is used to delineate Malay manliness, in fact becoming a mirror in which to steal a glance at the psychology of female Malay characters. Piracy, then, is central to defining Malay culture and, more importantly for my research, profoundly influences the colonial conceptualisation of the Malay female Other.

Firstly, we need to ask ourselves how piracy became a fibre of Malay culture as seen through European eyes. No doubt piracy existed in the era of colonial expansion. It is now a modern maritime scourge, especially in the Straits of Malacca, although the practice is currently regarded as mostly acts of criminality by certain sections of society due to economic hardships. But piracy is not restricted to the Malay Archipelago, having always featured in human maritime

And acts of piracy have always been motivated by material gain and by political consolidation. Even European history evinces acts of piracy by warring states for various, but mostly political, reasons especially from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century. The English writer G.A. Henty writes, with reference to English piracy against Spanish galleons, "in the days of Elizabeth, Drake and Hawkins were regarded by the Spaniards as pirates of the worst class, and I fear that there was a good deal of justice in the accusation." But from the point of view of the English, Sir John Hawkins and Sir Francis Drake were patriots acting against a hegemonic maritime power of the era. The knighthoods that they received speak much about royal appreciation of the merit of their activities. But what does it mean to generalise from examples of Malay piracy that the whole people of the Archipelago are innately piratical? How did piracy as a conceptualisation of the Malay world become part of Western historical knowledge as reflected in its literature?

When Conrad presents the Malay race as piratical in nature, he is actually borrowing the representation from other Europeans who were there before him who found piracy rampant but did not present explanations as to the cause. Since the activity remained unexplained it was assumed to be part of the normalised and common activities of the peoples of the

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Archipelago since time immemorial. Conrad’s descriptions of the Malays as revelling in “savage glories ... barbarous fights and savage feasting”\textsuperscript{363} imply to the reader the innate piratical nature of the Malays even before the coming of European powers. The same ideas of Malay savagery also litter \textit{An Outcast of the Islands}, as when Conrad writes that Bahassoen excitedly talks about “the honourable topics of throat-cutting, fire-raising, and with the far-famed valour of his ancestors.”\textsuperscript{364} These descriptions indicate the barbaric nature of the Malay in the Malay Archipelago where violence has become accepted, even encouraged, as part of Malay culture.

Conrad’s sense of Malay history seems to begin with British imperialism when it ventured into the savage and chaotic world that, since then, took a different historical direction under colonial rule. His texts allude to piracy, constant warfare, and want of proper authority to enforce a rule of law as norms in Malay waters before the coming of Europeans. Conrad assumes that it was Europeans who managed to enforce the rule of law in the region when he mentions that piracy there “received its first serious check at the hands of white men.”\textsuperscript{365}

It is highly probable that the issue of piracy was a key concern among imperialist and colonial circles, especially

\textsuperscript{363}Conrad, \textit{Almayer’s Folly}, 37.
\textsuperscript{365}Ibid. 51.
those closely involved in or reliant on shipping activities. How piracy became central to reputed Malay traits would only be left to historians to address academically. But with regard to piracy O.W. Wolters states:

Piracy began to be a prominent historical feature in Southeast Asian history only when Raffles and his contemporaries were writing about the region, and the reason is that the withering of local economic power compelled seafaring peoples to eke out a living by violent means at the expense of the Europeans who had forced the local rulers to conclude restrictive trading treaties. In earlier times, piracy was chronic only in intervals between the fall of one important trading center and the rise of another in the same neighbourhood.\footnote{Qtd. in Gene M Chenoweth, "Melaka, 'Piracy' and the Modern World System", Journal of Law and Religion, 13/1 (1996-1999), 120.}

Another indictment comes from James Brooke who established Sarawak as a private dominion, at the expense of the Brunei kingdom, in 1841, a political status which lasted until 1946. He writes in his journal concerning the state of affairs in the Malay world:

In the Archipelago the first voyagers from the West found natives rich and powerful ... with strong established governments, and a thriving trade with all parts of the world. The rapacious European has
reduced them to their present condition. Their governments have been broken up; the old states decomposed by treachery, by bribery, and intrigue; their possessions wrested from [them] under flimsy pretences; their trade restricted, their vices encouraged, their virtues repressed, and their energies paralysed or rendered desperate, till there is every reason to fear the extinction of the Malay races.\textsuperscript{367}

Interestingly, Brooke, who was "mythicised as [one of the] imperial heroes"\textsuperscript{368} himself, would expand the early settlement annexed from the Sultan of Brunei through forceful means by constantly asserting the despotism and misrule of the native rulers as the bulwark of his moral justifications. He also refers to subsequent consolidations of his power against local rebels as "war against the pirates."\textsuperscript{369} In fact, Brooke’s war against Sherif Osman, who was described as "a well known daring Arab pirate"\textsuperscript{370} (consonant with Conrad’s portraiture of Omar el Badavi in \textit{An Outcast of the Islands}), and other wars with recalcitrant Ibans and Malays were reported positively in the British press as part of an effort to eradicate piracy to enable uninterrupted commerce. Piracy had now become the catchword in justifications of British expansionist and

\textsuperscript{367}Qtd. in Jerry Allen, \textit{The Sea Years of Joseph Conrad} (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 199.
\textsuperscript{368}Hampson, \textit{Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad’s Malay Fiction}, 1.
\textsuperscript{369}Ibid. 64.
\textsuperscript{370}Ibid. 3.
commercial policy.  

Conrad’s historical sense of the region, as reflected in his Malay novels, is informed by a slice of contemporary history formulated when the terms pirate and piracy were applied to Malay brigandage activities against European intruders in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. What eluded Conrad was the important fact that these piratical activities were partly a resistance to European incursions and the result of trade monopoly practised by successive European imperial powers.  

Denied their previous trade vocation among themselves and the wider non-European world such as India, the Middle East and China, some Malay fighters made it their practice to raid vessels that conducted business with the alien powers.  

As for the Illanun people, who are portrayed in Conrad’s Malay texts as pirates, they are described by William Dampier in 1689 as a very peaceable people. But a century later, their savage treatment at the hands of the colonial Spanish power turned them into pirates in attacking European ships as well as those of other traders.  

The brutal Dutch policy of monopoly and slavery in Java also contributed

371 For example, Nicholas Tarling notes the Dutch manipulation of the term piracy in the context of Acehnese resistance against Dutch colonial control of its territory. See Nicholas Tarling, British Policy in the Malay Peninsula, 1824-1871 (Kuala Lumpur and Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1969), 133.


373 For the historical and dialectical term piracy within the political dynamics of the Malay Archipelago, see the essay by Chenoweth, "Melaka, 'Piracy' and the Modern World System", 107-25.

to an explosion of acts of piracy in the Malay Archipelago. Conrad’s ignorance of this historical fact renders the Malay world in a way that suits Orientalist ideas of the savagery and barbarity of the Malay world. As he is a novelist and not a historian, Conrad must have felt that he had enough local history to mould into a fiction. Thus, it suits his purpose to satiate his Victorian readers by providing them with glimpses of indigenous characters as the background to the elaboration of European moral and ethical concerns.

At this juncture I wish to touch on the European sense of the masculine Self and Other’s forms of manhood as understood in colonial ideology. This is because in my discussion below I will connect Conrad’s representation of local piracy to a notion of Malay masculinity. In Chapter One I have discussed the racial feminisation of Others vis-à-vis the masculine Self in the general Eurocentric discourse. But British representation of the feminine Others can be discriminatory depending on the context of the colonised settings. Among non-European peoples under British imperialism some were considered manlier than others in the sense that they were more warlike and militaristic. Peoples of northern India were considered warrior races. For example, Heather Streets analyses the British discourse that elevates Sikhs, Gurkhas and other native soldiers as martial races for their courage in

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in battles under the imperial banner, especially in the Indian Rebellion of 1857. As Streets explains, “British and loyal native soldiers were represented as ultra-masculine saviours of British women in India”376 while at the same time Indian rebels were deemed less manly. Other Asian peoples, by contrast, were generally “feminized in the eyes of the white men of the colonial era.”377

In relation to Andrea White’s observation of Conrad’s sympathetic narrative representation of Malay characters, Andrew Roberts states that in Conrad’s novels Malay manliness is defined as “violent heroism which seems no longer available to [European males].”378 Roberts points to Conrad’s concept of heroic violence that defines Malay manliness and its implied absence in the formation of European masculinity. But, as he further indicates this projection of the violent but heroic Other might well be what a male European desires. Roberts then asks, “Might not a male European longing for heroic aggression express itself through the representation of the supposedly untrammeled masculinity of the male Other?”379

From my perspective, this interpretation of European and Malay masculinity belies the fact of colonial relationship by

378 Andrew Michael Roberts, Conrad and Masculinity (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 16.
379 Ibid.
alluding to the more compassionate aspect of European masculinity and suggesting the inherently aggressive nature of Malay manliness. In fact, since colonialism was spearheaded and expanded through violence as the main driving force, and justified as a civilising mission, then “violent heroism” is more indicative of the whole enterprise of romanticised imperialism itself. That notwithstanding, the British notion of masculinity as work and imperial endeavours was contrasted with the perception of Others’ masculinity as related more to violence and savagery. In the end, a colonial interpretation of masculinity of both Self and Other still preserved the essentially Eurocentric ideology of the benign Self and savage Other. It is this concept of Malay masculinity as irrational savagery and European manliness as tempered by morality and restrained violence that are reflected in Conrad’s Malay texts.

In Conrad’s Malay novels piracy as a stereotype of Malayness also implies piratical violence as integral to Malay masculinity as much as the dualistic notion of work and imperialism defined a Victorian British sense of masculinity. In *Almayer’s Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands* piracy has been encoded not just as a practice conducted for mere monetary gain but as symbolising a Malay form of masculinity. To be involved in piratical activities denotes a man’s masculine prowess and is a symbol of power.

380 Ibid. 13.
Omar el-Badavi, Lakamba, Babalatchi, Bahassoen and Sahamin are Malay men whose main occupation is piracy, with trade being a supplementary concern. Theirs is a life that valorises bravery and violence. Omar el-Badavi, who is Conrad’s type of Malay piracy, vacillates between virtue and blood-thirstiness, "[f]or many years ... [leading] the men that drank blood on the sea: first in prayer and first in fight!" More tellingly, Babalachi as the main Malay protagonist in both novels is described as a typical Malay man of the sea:

He was brave and bloodthirsty without any affection, and he hated the white men who interfered with the manly pursuits of throat-cutting, kidnapping, slave-dealing, and fire-raising, that were the only possible occupation for a true man of the sea.\(^3\)

The imagery of violence is consistently present in Conrad’s description of the Malay man. Blood, bloodthirstiness, throat-cutting and fire are constantly conjured to portray a Malay man in his everyday activities. To Conrad piracy is the only route to power that a Malay man could have. And piratical violence is Conrad’s notion of Malay cultural initiation into manhood. A “true man of the sea” is not a sailor or a trader, but a pirate. This connotes the idea that the cultural propensity of the Malay to piracy is

\(^3\)Conrad, An Outcast of the Islands, 46.
\(^4\)Ibid. 50.
something to be desired and that it is expected that a properly raised Malay man aspire to piracy as his sole vocation the way a middle-class Victorian British man would aspire, for instance, to become a successful merchant or a higher official of the British government.

Christopher Nicole’s novel Singapura (1988) conjures a similar idea of the Malay in his narrative construction of Perak Shah and his piratical nature. Piracy becomes a natural choice of occupation as, to Nicole, “the Malays knew nothing of trade.”\(^{383}\) He, however, fails to address the fact that if foreign merchants were conducting trade in the Malay Archipelago it would be logical that these merchants would be in contact with local merchants, thereby indicating the existence of a Malay trading class.\(^{384}\) I raise the issue of this later novel to show how Eurocentric stereotypes of Malay society and its piratical tendency could reach far and wide, even into the ideology of Western writers of the late twentieth century.

The juxtaposition of a Malay sense of manliness and a British sense of masculinity is apparent in Conrad’s descriptions of Babalatchi and Lingard. James H. Warren explains that British imperial definitions of masculinity

\(^{383}\)Christopher Nicole, Singapura (London: Sheridan, 1988), 12. 
\(^{384}\)The success and failure of kingdoms in the Malay Archipelago from the Srivijaya kingdom down to the Melaka Sultanate had always been reliant on the control and support of international trading practices. This was due to the geographical position of the Melaka Straits as an international trading route that became the natural meeting point between East and West and surrounding regions. See Andaya, A History of Malaysia, 42-4.
promoted by figures such as De Quincey and Carlyle in the 1840s emphasise "a timeless, natural, uncontested, and necessary quality of authority." The "necessary quality of authority" becomes the salient masculine feature of Britishness in the colonised world. The term "necessary" itself camouflages violence as a tool of authority and dominance. It invokes the idea of reason and the controlled temperament of British masculinity.

This definition of British masculinity fits well with Lingard’s position in Conrad’s Malay world as the uncontested Rajah Laut. Comparatively, both Lingard and Babalatchi practically live lives of violence. But there is a marked difference in how Conrad depicts the characters. Babalatchi, and for that matter most of the leading male Malay characters, possess the innate violence that could only be released through the practice of piracy. Babalatchi is a man of violence living in “this barbarous corner of the world” among savages who “strove, struggled, fought, worked if only to prolong a miserable existence.” The Malay world is in a constant struggle for existence, which of course, alludes to the notions that rules of law are scantily in existence if at all and that Darwinian natural law of the survival of the fittest applies to Malay societies. Lingard, on the other

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386 Conrad, An Outcast of the Islands, 60.
hand, is a European who

\[ \text{never hesitated in his life ... He had been a most successful trader, and a man lucky in his fights, skilful in navigation, undeniably first in seamanship in those seas.}^{387} \]

Lingard is also sparing in his use of violence although “a good many did not think it worth their while to run the risk of Lingard’s enmity for the double advantage of trade.”\(^{388}\) Here, the reader is presented with contrasting pictures: Babalatchi is a pirate while Lingard is a trader, and Babalatchi is innately aggressive while Lingard is judicious in his acts of violence. Babalatchi is the epitome of the Victorian indigenous savage, while Lingard, in a sense, is Conrad’s idealisation of British masculinity.

This discussion of piracy and Malay masculinity gains significance if we consider assumptions about the psyches of Malay women embedded in the notion of Malay piracy. My argument is that Malay male savagery (as reflected in the act of piracy) is symbiotic with the representation of Malay femininity in Conrad’s novels. Accordingly, Conrad’s Malay women, who are conditioned by their culture, find a brutal masculinity most attractive and irresistible. The women find this idea of courage and violence fits into their understanding of real manhood and hence their attraction to

\(^{387}\)Ibid. 165.  
\(^{388}\)Ibid. 54.
embodiments of it. As an example Mrs. Almayer in Almayer’s Folly, when taken in by Lingard after the decimation of her people, finds it natural that she should be his as he has shown his manliness by overpowering her people. She does not harbour any grudge or nurture desires for revenge for the death of so many of her family members at the hands of Lingard. To her it is the law of nature that the victor should reap the benefit of the spoils left by the vanquished. She is resigned to that fact and this resignation allows her to accept any fate that awaits her at the hands of her victorious enemy. Conrad writes that she thinks becoming a possession is “quite natural; for was she not a daughter of warriors, conquered in battle, and did she not belong rightfully to the victorious Rajah?” The word “rightfully” highlights Conrad’s notion of the savage Malay culture that equates might with what is right. She is taken in a fair battle where her enemies have shown their better prowess and hence whatever they dictate is just and fair.

Mrs. Almayer is also under the impression that Lingard’s kindly treatment of her is not due to his benevolence, since she cannot comprehend the concept under such circumstances and conditioning, but due to his admiration for her beauty. Thus, Mrs. Almayer envisions the life of a normal Malay girl, even in captivity, as

the usual succession of heavy work and fierce love,

Conrad, Almayer’s Folly, 21.
of intrigues, gold ornaments, of domestic drudgery, and of that great occult influence which is one of the few rights of half-savage womankind.\textsuperscript{390}

Since piracy and savagery are perceived as symbiotically enmeshed as part of Malay nature, Mrs. Almayer is also viewed through the same stereotype. Being a half-savage she hates the "high walls, the quiet gardens, and the silent nuns of the Semarang convents,\textsuperscript{391}" the high walls and quiet gardens symbolising the disciplined and cultured European society.

The high walls also demarcate the physical as well as cultural separation of the two societies. They are the boundary that delineates the physical and cultural space of the Europeans as distinctively different from the semi-civilised cultural space of the indigenes beyond the threshold. The walls as a physical and moral barrier need to be high enough so that the two cultures could be separated indefinitely so as to ensure the purity of what is inside from the perceived potential cultural contamination outside. In the end, and not surprisingly given stereotyping, Mrs. Almayer fails to appreciate the alien culture, resisting its restraint of her untamed sense of morality and natural freedom as a semi-savage because, as Eurocentrism assumes, a savage could never be taught the way of the civilised without eventually surrendering to her savage nature. It is a cultural condition

\textsuperscript{390}Ibid. 22.
\textsuperscript{391}Ibid.
which Trinh T. Minh-ha describes as “[p]rimitive means elementary, therefore infantile.” Being infantile or being a mere child, the primitive or semi-savage is still at the budding of civilisation, and therefore ignorant of the higher concepts of discipline, self-restraint and morality. Consequently, Mrs. Almayer feels “dread and hate” of the “restraint” represented by life at the convent.

This idea of the female savage is put to the test when Mrs. Almayer is married to Almayer, and her hope of being a life partner of her captor, Lingard is dashed. It nauseates her to find Almayer the opposite of what Lingard is and Mrs. Almayer constantly chides and mocks Almayer for his lack of masculinity. She accuses Almayer of having “no courage and no wisdom” as opposed to Lingard who is “a chief and a warrior.” As violence is her culturally ingrained idea of masculinity, Mrs. Almayer “lament[s] the lost possibilities of murder and mischief that could have fallen to her lot” had she had a manlier partner. To Nina, her daughter, Mrs. Almayer would recite her people’s appreciation of masculinity in “the story of deeds valorous, albeit somewhat bloodthirsty.”

The revelation of this concept of Malay masculinity in its relation to violence and savagery infects other female Malay characters as well. Mrs. Almayer’s glorification of

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392 Trinh T Minh-ha, Woman, Native, Other (Bloomingdale: Indiana University Press, 1989), 124.
393 Conrad, Almayer’s Folly, 22.
394 Ibid. 121.
395 Ibid.
396 Ibid. 37.
Malay masculinity is not lost on Nina.\textsuperscript{397} Nina, in turn, is attracted to Dain Maroola due to his male aura of power and strength. He is “reckless, ferocious, ready with flashing kriss for his enemies ... the ideal Malay chief of her mother’s tradition.”\textsuperscript{398} Equally, Aïssa’s attraction to Willems in \textit{An Outcast of the Islands} is not so much due to his personal attributes as to the fact that “[h]e was of the victorious race,”\textsuperscript{399} implying her attraction to the ability of a European man, as a representative of his people, to dispense greater violence than his enemies, thus giving them the right to conquer and subjugate lesser peoples.

These narratives of the adulation of power, strength and violence by both Malay male and female characters manifest Western perceptions of Malay masculinity and femininity as based on the ability to commit the most savagery by inflicting the most violence on other people. Masculinity connotes creating terror and the greater terror a man could inflict the more masculine he is. And the essence of savagery that defines Malay people could not be viewed without applying the law of nature to it. Violence determines Malay social hierarchy the way the predator/prey hierarchy of animals in a jungle is

\textsuperscript{397}The question of Nina’s cultural identification will surely be raised in view of her racial hybridity. But the narrative uncertainty is extinguished by Conrad’s final judgment that Nina, like Aissa in \textit{An Outcast of the Islands}, belongs to the Malay culture. Nearing the end of \textit{Almayer’s Folly} Nina is made to proclaim to her father, “[b]etween your people and me there is also a barrier that nothing can remove” (\textit{Almayer’s Folly}, 144) and it is confirmed when she categorically defines herself, “I am a Malay!” (\textit{Almayer’s Folly}, 145).

\textsuperscript{398}Ibid. 55.

\textsuperscript{399}Conrad, \textit{An Outcast of the Islands}, 68.
usually determined by strength. This implies that the Malay world, as a society, operates on the notion of masculine power as a stabilising factor in its cultural dynamics as opposed to the rule of law in Western society. This codification of piracy and violence as a Malay form of masculinity serves to buttress Western articulations of superior morality. More importantly, the Malay female is assumed to be equally vicious and violent as Malay men due to her perceived attraction to the character of Malay masculinity.

4.3 MALAY FEMALE SAVAGERY IN ALMAYER’S FOLLY

‘Kaspar! Makan!’ was the phrase in Almayer’s Folly that launched Conrad into the literary world and into the limelight as one of the foremost literary figures of his day. The two words, simple as they appear, also brought onto the centre stage of Conrad’s Eastern fictions his persistent themes of the interlocking of horns between two disparate worlds: the worlds of the coloniser and colonised, the superior and inferior, and the civilised as opposed to the savage. When Mrs. Almayer shouts the two words to Almayer, the language used is indigenous and the tone imperative. That a female indigene would utter such words in commanding fashion against a European man who received it meekly runs counter to Victorian ideals of Europeans (men especially) as representative of a race at the pinnacle of human achievement reflected in its travel writings and adventure fictions. In
those adventure narratives the central protagonist is always viewed, as Andrea White notes, “as heroic and his endeavor as authorized, even divinely ordained.” And that Europeans would be defeated by the schemes of Eastern peoples is another uncharted theme in Conrad’s adventure fictions.

The idea of Europe as a representation of culture and the Malay world as nature is partially in evidence even in Conrad’s early Malay fictions. The tragedy of Almayer who fails to realise his Malay Eldorado in Almayer’s Folly is superimposed on a Malay world where European notions of Enlightenment scarcely spark and where indigenous social cohesion is determined by brute strength. By this rationale the intrusion of European powers into this area is justified as bringing also the gift of the rule of law and normal existence. Lingard’s war against the Sulu pirates symbolises the dichotomy of the orderliness of European civilisation and the chaotic reality of an Eastern world. Lingard, who represents European seafarers and adventurers in search of wealth, is himself not averse to “a brush with ... pirates” and is portrayed as one of those “gentlemen for whom that kind of life had a charm.” That sometimes the rule of law had to be imposed upon the natives by massacres here and there was taken as a necessary to create a conducive business environment out of an immature and stubborn culture. Lingard,

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400 White, Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition, 44.
401 Conrad, Almayer’s Folly, 10.
who is Conrad’s version of the conscientious coloniser, has wiped out Mrs. Almayer’s clans and now adopted her as his daughter. He also manages to provide a semblance of peace in the region for trade to thrive. Lingard’s imposition of peace by force is shown to be devoid of any emotion. In order for the rule of law to reign force is necessary and its enforcement to a greater or lesser degree resembles a just father’s harsh admonition of a wayward child. Lingard’s imposition of peace is assumed to be for the benefit of both coloniser and colonised, given the barbarous nature of the indigenes.

At this juncture we should understand the term savage as understood by the English before we continue with the analysis, as colonialist fictions and travel writings about Malays are laden with it. This is also true of Conrad’s Malay fictions. The earliest idea of the savage developed in the consciousness of the English upon their contact with the Irish people whom they dominated for many centuries after the invasion of 1171, exploiting and quelling their resistance. In the eyes of the English, the Irish were savages as they did not conform to English ideas of civilisation that, as the English defined it, comprised “Christianity, cities, letters, clothing, and swords.” Furthermore, as Ronald Takaki describes, the English portrayed the Irish as lazy, naturally given to idleness, and unwilling to

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work for their own bread. Dominated by innate sloth, loose, barbarous and most wicked, and living like beasts, they were also thought to be criminals, an underclass inclined to steal from the English. The colonists complained that the Irish savages were not satisfied with the fruit of the natural unlaboured earth and therefore continually invaded the fertile possession of the English Pale [an area loyal to the English at Dublin]. 403

The Irish were also subjected to English discriminatory laws and brutal cruelty as the English believed that "[n]othing but fear and force can teach duty and obedience to this rebellious people." 404 As the Irish people were also Christians, the English viewed their form of Christianity as "merely the exterior of strongly rooted paganism" 405 thereby denying them the potential brotherly love of people of the same faith. 406 (Mrs. Almayer also shows this hollow comprehension of Christianity by only understanding the superstitious parts of it). The Irish, thus, became the first Other for the English in defining their sense of civilisation and the Other's form of savagery.

403 Ibid. 893.
404 Ibid. 894.
405 Ibid. 893.
406 Nicholas Canny explains that the Irish were regarded as pagan because although Christianised they were uncivilised. As he puts it the English believe that "a people could be civilised without being made Christian but not Christianized without first being made civil". See Nicholas P Canny, "The Ideology of English Colonisation: From Ireland to America", William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd S, 30 (1973), 585-6.
This notion of civilisation versus savagery was brought to the New World when the English encountered the indigenous Indians. The English found the Indians savages as they, too, did not conform to English ideas of civilisation. Some of the Indians who were kidnapped from New England were brought back to England as exhibits representative of savagery and violence. As William Bradford explains, the Indians were thought to be "most furious in their rage and merciless ... not being content only to kill and take away life, but delight[ing] to torment men in the most bloody manner." 407 As these people were culturally outside of the English notion of civilisation it was only proper that they were "subdued by extralegal methods." 408 It is unfortunate for the history of humanity that such words as "subdued" in actual practice extended to exterminations and genocides 409 as, especially, the Irish people, the Indians in the American continent, Africans in Africa and Aboriginal people in Australia found out. This notion of savagery or semi-savagery embedded in European epistemology as a given fact was applied to other cultures. Cannibals, barbarians, savages or semi-savages were degrees of humanity accorded the various cultures which later English

407 Qtd. in Takaki, "The Tempest in the Wilderness", 898.
408 Nicholas P Canny, "The Ideology of English Colonisation", 595.
409 The practice of colonial violence in war took different shapes and doctrines of decency for different peoples. Against fellow Europeans agreed-upon conventions of law would be followed but against savages or semi-savages such conventions did not apply. The method, as explained by a certain British Colonel Fuller, should be "more brutal." See Elbridge Colby, "How to Fight Savage Tribes", American Journal of International Law, 21 (1927), 283.
colonial power encountered. Thus when Conrad represents the Malay culture as savage or semi-savage this notion of civilisation is used as his yardstick.

In *Almayer’s Folly*, Mrs. Almayer is consistently portrayed as savage by Conrad. In fact Mrs. Almayer and savagery are almost synonymous in this novel. Periodically Conrad reminds the reader of Mrs. Almayer’s nature. She is the embodiment of savagery, semi-savagery and witchery all at once. She is a “half-savage”\textsuperscript{410} or a “savage mother”\textsuperscript{411} who has a “savage manner”\textsuperscript{412} and “savage nature”\textsuperscript{413} and such nature cannot stand being in a convent and under civilised “restraint.”\textsuperscript{414} She treats Almayer, her husband, with “savage contempt.”\textsuperscript{415} Almayer, in turn, dreams of taking Nina, his daughter, away from the “savage life” and the “savages”\textsuperscript{416} around them to civilised Europe. But Nina seems to adapt herself to a “half-savage and miserable life”\textsuperscript{417} through the “savage intrusion”\textsuperscript{418} of her mother. Such concentration of adjectival negativity that exudes from the words *savage* and *savagery*, as understood by a European reader, could not but be understood as the innate nature of Mrs. Almayer and the nation and race which she hails from.

\textsuperscript{410}Conrad, *Almayer’s Folly*, 22.
\textsuperscript{411}Ibid. 37.
\textsuperscript{412}Ibid. 21.
\textsuperscript{413}Ibid. 25.
\textsuperscript{414}Ibid. 22.
\textsuperscript{415}Ibid. 24.
\textsuperscript{416}Ibid. 27.
\textsuperscript{417}Ibid. 29.
\textsuperscript{418}Ibid. 30.
Nor are savage and savagery the only labels that describe the Malay female Other. Another assumption about the Malay women’s personality in Almayer’s Folly is of the irrational savagery which they are capable of. One instance of the irrational savagery of the Malay women is a description of an orgy of violence that marks the delineation of rational Europe and irrational Other, even if it only serves as a mere diversion from the major themes. I am attracted to the scene as it calls into being the binary conception of us/them, civilised/savage and the demarcation between reason and madness that separates the two worlds. The said event concerns Bulangi’s numerous wives who would attack his Siamese slave, Taminah, in a collective brutality to appease their anger arising out of disputes with their husband unrelated to the unfortunate slave. And, naturally, Taminah would receive the assaults with the “resigned apathy of half-savage womankind.”419 Conrad narrates that Taminah is a slave owned by Bulangi, whose numerous wives were said to be of a violent temper. Well-founded rumour said also that the domestic squabbles of that industrious cultivator ended generally in a combined assault of all his wives upon the Siamese slave.420

There are two issues that I wish to raise here. Firstly, how the source of the rumour is received and how rumour

419 Ibid. 33.
420 Ibid.
circulates as truth. Since the instance of female violence and irrationality occurs within the confines of an indigenous household, no European gaze could penetrate it and describe the event at first-hand. As such, markers are used to assert the validity of the rumour so that the rumour is seen to be closer to fact than mere hearsay. In this case, Conrad applies the marker "well-founded"\textsuperscript{421} to explain the rumour so that a European reader would readily accept it as truth and not as rumour.

The use of markers to add factual value to something that is beyond a white man’s first-hand knowledge is not restricted to Conrad. George Bilainkin, the author of the travel narrative \textit{Hail Penang} (1932) applies numerous methods to encourage the reader to accept second-hand narratives as closer to truth than mere hearsay. In explaining prostitution in Penang that went underground as laws were enforced to prohibit it, some of the girls reportedly being as young as ten and eleven, he explains that "[a] Penang doctor, who was at Oxford, told me that the danger to the population was now greater"\textsuperscript{422} than before laws were implemented to close the brothels down. In another instance the author is informed about the poor treatment of a white girl who married a non-European by "[a] modern Chinese girl, a Christian whose education was more thorough than that of most products of

\footnotesize 421\textsuperscript{Ibid.}

\footnotesize 422\textsuperscript{Bilainkin, Hail Penang, 97.}
The linking of the rumours or news with Oxford, modern and Christian (or well-founded) adds to the truth-value of the news presented. This discursive act privileges and emphasises qualities associated with the European in determining trustworthiness.

Secondly, irrationality combined with a penchant for violence is attached to the personality of all of the wives of Bulangi. In Conrad’s Malay novels violence is the norm and is readily used for many purposes and for various reasons. If piracy is violence for monetary enrichment or to gain prestige among peers, Bulangi’s wives’ acts of violence could be construed as a racialised show of power in the hierarchical unit of a family inclusive of the servants/slaves. But what it implies also is the incomprehensibility of some of the actions of foreign women. Why would the wives displace the source of their anger onto a helpless slave who would receive the assault meekly “through the strange, resigned apathy of half-savage womankind.” Strangeness here takes two forms: the inexplicable violence towards the innocent slave, and the ability of the victim to accept her fate as part of a violent cycle of her culture. Conrad writes of Malay people that they seek the gratification of their desires with the savage cunning and the unrestrained fierceness “of natures as

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423Ibid. 104.
424Conrad, Almayer’s Folly, 33.
innocent of culture as their own immense forests." It is a description that assumes that Malays live their lives as the necessity of survival instincts dictate. It implies that their lives are devoid of laws that govern them, wisdom that guides their sense of being, and faith that regulates their conduct, as their existence and motivations are driven by mere desires and passions.

The dichotomy of culture and nature is repeated in other texts by Conrad where it is used to suggest the linearity of human development. In a scene from the later novel The Rescue, European and Malay cultures encounter each other in the forms of Mrs. Travers and Immada, an indigenous Malay woman, on board Lingard’s brig. Here readers are shown the civilisational gaps that separate the two cultures. The face-to-face encounter of Mrs. Travers and Immada is described as an encounter between civilisation and savagery. It conjures a divide between the metaphoric cry of nature as opposed to the thoughtfulness of culture. The narrator explains:

Mrs. Travers fixed her eyes on Immada. Fair-haired and white she asserted herself before the girl of olive face and raven locks with the maturity of perfection, with the superiority of the flower over the leaf, of the phrase that contains a thought over the cry that can only express an emotion. Immense spaces and countless centuries stretched between

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425 Ibid. 38.
them: and she looked at her as when one looks into one’s own heart with absorbed curiosity, with still wonder, with an immense compassion.426

This paragraph reveals to us Conrad’s notions of barbarity as opposed to civilisation. What could have formed in Mrs. Travers mind the idea of her superiority and Immada’s inferiority is the physical impression of the female indigene. Immada’s looks do not conform to Mrs. Travers’ notion of beauty and the obvious material depravity of her culture is enough for Mrs. Travers (and Conrad) to make a value judgment on her culture. To Conrad, the material divide between the two cultures that covers “immense spaces and countless centuries” refers also to Immada’s sense of humanity.

The formulation of difference in the passage can only be explained through the lens of social Darwinism that argues that human civilisation progressed through social evolutionary stages. Immada lags behind Mrs. Travers in the civilisational scale and as such she is a savage who should be pitied “with an immense compassion” befitting the conduct of a civilised person of the likes of Mrs. Travers. Also to Mrs. Travers, Immada is a curiosity from the past who seems awkward being in the present. It is as if Mrs. Travers has come face to face with her ancestor who was brought back to the present. Her compassion for Immada is attributed to her sense of being

related to the past when her sense of humanity was still to be
developed to its present full potential. Mrs. Travers is a
civilised woman of the present and Immada is a savage who has
been unable to progress up the line of human evolution.

But whose perspective, Mrs. Travers’ or Conrad’s, is it
that paints Immada as a type of savagery? As I have argued a
writer cannot help but reveal his or her ideology in his or
her texts through the points of view of his or her characters.
This is especially true if the issues involved relate to
general truths derived from the writer’s worldview which
itself is influenced by contemporary epistemologies. A
literary fiction is largely devoid of relevance and meaning if
the author fails to relate it to the real human condition. As
Conrad himself states, “[f]iction is history, human history,
or it is nothing.”427 A writer of fiction, like a history
chronicler, has to take into account the historical aspect of
the era, to “provide”, in the words of Hayden White, “a verbal
image of reality.”428

In using a particular narrative technique, a writer also
reveals his or her own beliefs and ideology. Jeremy Hawthorn
makes this clear when he asserts that a writer’s
representation of the speech, thought and consciousness of his
or her characters also reveals his or her “attitudes to the
story told, something of his or her own values and

428 Hayden White, Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism
commitments."\(^{429}\) In analysing the encounter between Mrs. Travers and Immada the reader cannot but feel that the voice of authorial narrative, and not a character's perspective, plays a dominant role in determining the subjectivity of both female characters.

If there is for Conrad a civilisational divide between two cultures along a human civilisational continuum, where could the Malay culture be but behind that of Europe in Almayer's Folly? Conrad as an authorial authority actually transports us to the idea of the linearity of human progress in his representation of Mrs. Almayer. When Conrad repeatedly refers to her as a savage or half-savage it is an act of cultural positioning reminiscent of social Darwinism. It is true that Mrs. Almayer is the product of Conrad's fictional imagination but his representation of her derives its strength from his perceptions of reality as he understands it. And these perceptions are inherited from the knowledge repository of Orientalism in looking at the female Other as what a European female is not - an untamable female savage.

4.4 DECADENCE AND THE FEMALE OTHER IN AN OUTCAST OF THE ISLANDS

Conrad admits that he drew his inspiration for An Outcast of the Islands from a real-life social pariah whom he met in

Sambir. In his "Author’s Note," Conrad acquaints the reader with the fate of the man on whom he modelled Willems: his betrayal of the location of a river to some Arab merchants earned him the intense hatred of his fellow Europeans and pariah status among them. But what interests me is that after he is rumoured to have embarked on an expedition on an Arab-owned steam-launch, Conrad’s model for Almayer angrily voices a dark premonition of the fate of “Willems,” “[o]ne thing’s for certain; if he finds anything worth having up there they will poison him like a dog,”\textsuperscript{430} unintentionally or not invoking Eurocentric assumptions of the deceptive and treacherous character of the indigenes. This incident and “Almayer”’s outburst inspired Conrad and they provided the general plot of \textit{An Outcast of the Islands}.

This incident is significant in two ways. One, it shows that the colonial endeavours in Malaya, and for that matter in other parts of the Eastern world, were driven by trade and exploitation of indigenous resources based on monopoly capitalism. (In \textit{An Outcast of the Islands}, before Abdulla breaks his monopoly, Almayer is the sole merchant who links local traders and producers to the outside market.) That the European community felt that “Willems” had committed the sin of breaking the trade monopoly speaks volumes about how Europeans conducted their trade. The second significant point concerns how Eurocentric ideology shapes European views of

\textsuperscript{430}Conrad, \textit{An Outcast of the Islands}, 10.
their rivals. "Almayer" was convinced that "Willems" would be eliminated by the Arabs once his expedition bore positive results to prevent him from divulging the secret location to anyone else. That Arabs, Chinese, Japanese, or Malays would be treacherous and malicious was a given, a stereotype reflected in various Western travelogues and journals. Similarly, the same assumption of inherently malicious tendency underpins Eurocentric representations of the female Other. Unlike the men who are viewed by Europeans as treacherous, the female Other is often portrayed as corrosive to the morality of any Western male who is trapped by her Eastern attractiveness.

There is a sketch of a young Eastern woman by Conrad made when work on Almayer’s Folly was reaching its conclusion. The sketch was published in Jerry Allen’s The Sea Years of Joseph Conrad. I believe this graphic representation provides us a visual realisation of Conrad’s mental perceptions and suppositions of an Eastern woman. As Shearer West argues, “[t]he proliferation of race theories in the nineteenth century was in no small part fuelled by both visual and verbal texts which served to plant certain ideas of race into the minds of their audiences.” Furthermore, Tim Barringer argues that visual texts played a significant role in essentialising the concept of race in the consciousness of Victorians. As he explains:

[n]ot only were visual representations of

431West (ed.), The Victorians and Race, 5.
physiognomies and body-types read for signs of race: these representations also played an active role in establishing the tropes through which the idea of racial difference was articulated ... visual representations play an active and formative role in cultural discourses, notably that of race.432

In Jerry Allen’s text Conrad’s sketch of the Eastern woman displays some visual resemblance to contemporary Orientalist photographs and paintings of Eastern women.433 In Conrad’s sketch, the woman is depicted as bosomy with luscious black hair and a peacock-tailed tiara adorning her head. She is dressed in a garment that suggests the sexual allure of an Oriental woman. The most perceptible aspect of this sketch is the python that she holds in her left hand near the upper section of its body. The head of the python, with its extended tongue, is close to her face. The rest of the reptile’s slithery body swirls itself around her right arm, indicating familiarity rather than aggression. It is an amateurish sketch that if done by a lesser writer would have sunk into oblivion.

One cannot identify her cultural background by visual investigation nor does Conrad provide any explanation of his model. What is obvious is that she can be described as

433 As Schick notes, Orientalist photography (and other media representations) of Eastern women "served to define otherness; to express western men’s sexual fantasies in socially acceptable ... ways." See I Schick, "Representing Middle Eastern Women: Feminism and Colonial Discourse", 347.
beautiful (in a cartoonish sense) and exotically alluring in the manner of the beautiful and seductive Aïssa in An Outcast of the Islands. Although An Outcast of the Islands would be the next instalment of Conrad’s Malay texts, I presume, on the strength of the sketch, that he had already conceptualised the themes of the novel. Conrad’s sketch exhibits Orientalist stereotyping of all Eastern, and not specifically Malay, women. As a general rule, beauty and lethality, and seduction and degeneration become their hallmark. The lure of such women serves as a reminder to male colonialists of the danger they would face in relationships with them. The presence of the reptile signifies a femme fatale quality but at the same time produces an exotic magnetism that may represent the indigenous woman as both the alluring and the feared. But whatever the circumstance, she will always remain an exotic mystery to a European male’s mind.

Conrad would probably have read H. Rider Haggard’s colonial novel She (1886) that features Ayesha as the villainous immortal Queen who was Arab by birth and Oriental in virtues, the likeness between Haggard’s textual description of Ayesha and Conrad’s pictorial sketch of the Eastern girl justifying this supposition. In his adventure tale Haggard describes Ayesha as an alluring “beauty made sublime ... and yet, the sublimity was a dark one” characterised by “deep
acquaintance with grief and passion."\(^{434}\) This description of Ayesha by Haggard resonates with Conrad’s portrayal of Aïssa in *An Outcast of the Islands*. Equally interesting is Haggard’s depiction of Ayesha as wearing an ornament of a double-headed snake that fastens her white kirtle, and like Conrad’s Eastern girl she also wears sandals on her feet. It is a feature that Kenneth Inniss attributes to Conrad’s limited artistic skills, although I conjecture that Conrad’s sketch was partially inspired by Haggard’s Ayesha.

The names of Conrad’s Aïssa and Haggard’s Ayesha are also almost alike. Moreover, Haggard’s Ayesha’s other name is She-who-must-be-obeyed. Similarly, Conrad’s Aïssa is explained as possessing “something inarticulate and masterful which could not speak and would be obeyed.”\(^{435}\) Additionally, Haggard’s Ayesha is described by the narrator as possessing “a certain serpent-like grace that was more than human” and in a later description the narrator comments that “this beauty, with all its awful loveliness and purity, was evil.”\(^{436}\) Comparatively, Conrad’s descriptions of Aïssa are more sophisticated owing to, from my point of view, his greater deftness with language.

If we accept the justness of this comparison then Conrad’s anti-heroic Malay novels and Haggard’s colonial adventure fictions can be seen to share some of the same

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\(^{434}\) H Rider Haggard, *King Solomon’s Mines, She, Allan Quatermain* (London: Octopus, 1979), 305.


\(^{436}\) Haggard, *King Solomon’s Mines, She, Allan Quatermain*, 304.
Orientalist values. As Brian Street states with regard to the perception of non-European societies by nineteenth-century writers:

[t]he perception of other societies and their way of life by nineteenth-century writers is thus conditioned by a common set of ideas, however much individuals may vary within the limits of the framework given them by their own society.437

Orientalist images of the female Other mostly revolve around the representations of Eastern sexual allure in visions of harems, concubines or geishas. There were almost universal assumptions of the licentiousness and unrestrained sexuality of the female Other or of her mysterious and puzzling conduct. These assumptions fit into the Eurocentric ideology of the savage as representing “violence, sexual license, a lack of civility and civilisation, an absence of morality or any sense of it.”438

As much as oriental women are placed on the fringe through discursive practices of othering, they are at the same time central to the colonialists’ notion of sexual restraint being part of their own civilisation. The female Other, in this sense, inhabits a boundary of sexual and cultural difference. Thus, it is not surprising that the Orientalist

theme of the exoticism, eroticism and danger of the Eastern women is repeated in Conrad’s sketch. This practice of visual imagination that predicts Conrad’s Eurocentric inclination also underpins his textual reality in *Almayer’s Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*. As Barringer states in his analysis of the representations of otherness in Victorian visual media, "[i]t is not a question of individual intentionality but of a discourse of racial difference operating across a wide range of representational practices."439

*An Outcast of the Islands* is certainly not a love story. A love story would, in principle, conclude with the lovers joining each other either in life or in death. The Biblical Samson and Delilah and Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* represent those typical love stories that exemplify monumental love with tragic endings. Similarly Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, while tackling more complicated issues of class and gender, are basically romances that end happily. *An Outcast of the Islands* is neither. It is a literary allegory of the incompatibility of Europe and its Other and of the impossibility of a union between the two. *An Outcast of the Islands* is merely a literary realisation of this commonly held Eurocentric view. In *An Outcast of the Islands* Conrad interweaves psychological and cultural themes surrounding questions of morality and

human fallibility on the one hand, and of colonialism and cultural clashes on the other. The major theme revolves around the complexity of European morality in an Eastern setting. The background settings in Conrad’s Malay or African novels such as Sambir in *Almayer’s Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, Patusan in *Lord Jim* and the Congo in *Heart of Darkness* are locations viewed as at the periphery of European civilisation. At the heart of these four novels is an assumption that once the protagonist is transposed into a setting at the periphery of European civilisation, laws and social conventions determining the conduct of individuals dissolve. As Conrad muses through Lingard, “a man does not live for years beyond the pale of civilized laws without evolving for himself some queer notions of justice.”

This view, if we look deeper than the surface, implies that there are no laws as defined from European perspectives that dictate how the local populace should conduct itself within the bounds of a cohesive society. It assumes that since there are no civilised laws in evidence, the white men who trespass into local cultures do not have to subscribe to these local laws because they fail the standard of a European’s sense of morality and justice. As a consequence any European man who ventures out into the non-European world carries with him a Robinson Crusoe mentality. The land itself is deemed *terra nullius* and, as such, is ready to be inscribed into

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European laws and customs.

But how did it come into being that an outsider could impose his will on a land that is not his own in the first place? The "queer notions of justice" that materialised in the European psyche are made possible through the ability of the European man to impose his power on the indigenous society. It is not the superiority of their laws that enabled Europeans to view indigenous society as bereft of any meaningful code of conduct, but their "power over it; a power relation which applied equally, but differently, to fiction and painting as it did to government reports."441 This confidence in their power enabled Europeans to dictate which laws were superior and which were inferior. Lingard holds the power over the Malay world, as much as Kurtz in Heart of Darkness does over the Congolese, through superior firearms and knowledge of the world, thereby enabling him (and other Europeans) to determine whose laws apply in which place.

Those ideas of laws are intertwined with the idealisms of European morality because the conception and application of laws as part of a process of social construction determined European society as being civilised and cultured. This is in opposition to the perceived anarchy of the non-European worlds and their closeness to and semblance of nature.442 As such,

441 Reina Lewis, "Women and Orientalism: Gendering the Racialised Gaze", in West (ed.), The Victorians and Race, 180.
442 This connotation of law as a part of a cultural discourse marking the boundary between culture and nature is discussed by David Delaney. While Delaney’s analysis is restricted to the notion of nature in its
there was always the constant worry of European man losing his
civilised self once he was no longer bound by European laws
and social conventions. This theme of the actual practices of
Europeans and the discussion of their conduct vis-à-vis those
ideas and idealisms would naturally spill over to the realm of
literature, as Conrad’s texts testify. Thus, we find Kurtz and
Lingard both sharing the idealism constitutive of the European
civilising mission in its notion of the dispensation of
civilisation and justice to the savages or semi-savages. This
idealism includes the imposition of a European rule of law.
However and more importantly, Kurtz epitomises the failure of
self-restraint in such lawless settings, while Lingard never
faces Kurtz’s dilemma in confronting his sense of morality.
Conrad portrays Lingard more positively and consistently than
Kurtz as an embodiment of colonial benevolent paternalism.
After all, “[h]is trade brought prosperity to the young state,
and the fear of his heavy hand secured its internal peace for
many years.” To those who would criticise the colonial
endeavour he would retort, “[y]ou know nothing about it. I
would do it again.”

geographical and social construction, his argument is also significant in
decoding European construction of Others as part of the culture/nature
dichotomy. As he explains “Nature is a category marked off from other
categories. So are wilderness, animal, body, human and mind. It matters
where the lines are drawn. It matters which reasons are advanced as
justification for drawing the line in one place rather than another.” See
David Delaney, “Making Nature/Marking Humans: Law as a Site of (Cultural)
Production”, Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 91 (2001),
489.


Ibid. 193. This retort could be an allusion to James Brooke’s response to
his detractors back in England who accused him of being an unscrupulous
In An Outcast of the Islands Conrad’s description of the Malay landscape is redolent of natural decadence and corruption, metaphorically foreshadowing Willems’ moral and material downfall. What could be more emblematic of this corrupting influence than Aïssa whose Eastern feminine power over Willems accentuates the rot that emanates from the natural landscape itself?445 The thematic ideas in Conrad’s description of Malay landscape produce and signify a world that could only lead to the destruction of any European who trespasses across the nature/culture boundary. And the foreshadowing of Willems’ inevitable fate can be more or less determined by his “drinking the muddy water out of the hollow of his hand,”446 denoting the flawed decision he made to pursue his love for and attraction to Aïssa.

The theme of cultural and moral contamination is not restricted to novels with Eastern settings only. It resonates in other Victorian literature set in then contemporary Britain itself. As Kathleen Spencer notes, the urban Gothic and romance revival during the nineteenth century share another crucial characteristic beyond their common reliance on contemporary adventure and swashbuckler victimising the indigenous people of Borneo for his own benefits. See the chapter "Trials and Tribulations" in Payne, The White Rajahs of Sarawak, 66-82.

445John Butcher notes that European men who kept Asian mistresses claimed that their action was due to the exotic beauty of these women and because of "the tropical climate [that] made resistance to their charms doubly difficult". See John G Butcher, The British in Malaya, 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979), 204.

446Conrad, An Outcast of the Islands, 66.
exoticism: a concern for purity, for the reduction of ambiguity and the preservation of boundaries.447 It is this concern with racial purity and cultural boundary that shaped Victorian Eurocentric ideology as reflected in its literature and laws governing the interaction between the English and their Others. In Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë, for example, Heathcliff is described as a "dark-skinned gypsy in aspect, in dress and manners a gentleman."448 His implacable hatred of his enemies and destructive passion for Catherine serve as catalysts that poison the social stability of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Only his death could cleanse the air and bring stability to nineteenth-century social idealism. Similarly in Jane Eyre, Bertha Mason has to be imprisoned in Thornfield Hall due to her Caribbean cultural Otherness that is deemed corrosive to the stability of the idealism of nineteenth-century English morality. Her death serves the purpose of eradicating any lingering possibility of contamination. What is interesting however in An Outcast of the Islands is how Conrad employs death as the preserver of racial and cultural purity by claiming the life of Willems instead of Aïssa (although this can be explained by the respective settings of the fictions). Plots differ, but the outcome remains the same: European

447Kathleen L Spencer, "Purity and Danger: Dracula, the Urban Gothic, and the Late Victorian Degeneracy Crisis", ELH, 59 (1992), 1203.
racial purity remains intact.

The passage from nature to culture, as I have explained, is embedded in Western discourse as an explanation of the idea of the linearity of history. This is especially true during the nineteenth century when anthropology became a branch of science explaining the social development of humans. The distinction between nature and culture in nineteenth-century anthropology has always been used to identify the essential difference between animal and human. Being closer to nature constitutes the understanding that a people lacks the mental power to organise itself in a civilised manner as far as structuring cohesive political and social aspects of community are concerned. Nature means giving away reason for impulses and passions of the heart.

Conrad’s portrayal of Aïssa resonates with the view of the Eastern woman as being closer to nature and farther away from culture. Being a female Other she is alluring and mysterious, diabolical and devious. In An Outcast of the Islands Aïssa is the most prominent Oriental woman. She is the suffering daughter of Omar el-Badavi, an Arab pirate, and a Malay mother\textsuperscript{449} who watches her family members perish one by one fighting the colonial powers. She, with her blind father

\textsuperscript{449}I have decided to include Aïssa as an indigenous Malay woman although she is Arab/Malay in ancestry to align her with Conrad’s own portrayal of Aïssa as the Malay woman in consonance with the tropical setting and not with a notion of a Middle Eastern woman. In this sense, Aïssa is a representation of the Malay woman in the Malay jungle who “carries with her the sinister enchantment and vitality of the [tropical] jungle.” For further discussion on Conrad’s native girls see Inniss, “Conrad’s Native Girl: Some Social Questions”, 40.
and his loyal follower Babalatchi, barely escape being handed over to the Dutch by the Sultan of Sulu. In the discussion below, I will explain how Conrad’s narrational explanation of the encounter between Aïssa and Willems helps define Conrad’s idea of the Oriental woman.

As I have stated, in An Outcast of the Islands the love between Willems and Aïssa is not a love story in the traditional European sense. It is a love bound to end tragically due to the incompatibility of their skin colours. A love story of racial divide ending happily would violate European ideas of racial purity. Only death or estrangement could end such a story. The most salient themes of the story are the issue of European morality and how the female Other would destabilise the sense of its higher moral pedestal. For a European man to fall in love with a female Other is to descend into an abyss of moral degeneration. As I have explained a female Other was always viewed as a femme fatale who was seductively exotic and erotic and morally destructive to a European man. The outer appearance of passivity could be deceiving as she possesses the lethality only a female Other could have. In this Malay fiction Aïssa is portrayed as the stock Eastern femme fatale. Conrad portrays Willems’ relationship with her as the source of the corrosion of his morality and sense of civility who seductively draws Willems nearer to his destruction.

In An Outcast of the Islands, however, Aïssa does not
intentionally try to bring destruction to Willems. Her being a female Other is enough to bring the plot of the story to such a conclusion. Although after their first meeting it is Willems who is attracted to Aïssa and who wishes to capture her heart, in subsequent narration by Conrad there is ambiguity as to the role of the hunter and hunted. For her part, Conrad makes it plain that Aïssa’s attraction to Willems is due to what, and not who he is. Like Mrs. Almayer, who adores Lingard for his martial prowess, Aïssa believes Willems comes from a “victorious race.” But to her he is also a “dangerous thing.” Nevertheless, for Aïssa, Willems still has his weaknesses. As such he can also be “a terror vanquished, surmounted and made a plaything of” and finally “ready to be enslaved.” While Willems thinks that he is planning the “gradual taming of that woman by the words of his love,” unbeknown to him it is Aïssa who sets out to entrap his heart. Conrad explains that “[s]he felt that he was ready. She felt it with the unerring intuition of a primitive woman confronted by a simple impulse.” It is an impulse to dominate and control. Aïssa then allows Willems to seduce her, to make him feel that she is frightened of him in their early encounters.

Therefore, when Aïssa is absent it is Willems, the supposed hunter, who feels the torment of loneliness. As

450 Conrad, An Outcast of the Islands, 68.
451 Ibid.
452 Ibid. 69.
453 Ibid. 68.
Conrad narrates:

in the sudden darkness of her going he would be left weak and helpless, as though despoiled violently of all that was himself. He who had lived all his life with no preoccupation but that of his own career, contemptuously indifferent to all feminine influence, full of scorn for men that would submit to it, if ever so little; he, so strong, so superior even in his errors, realized at last that his very individuality was snatched from within himself by the hand of a woman.454

This passage explains Aïssa as the predator and Willems as prey. Willems realises that his perceived inner strength against all feminine seduction (which, of course, is understood in European cultural terms) crumbles upon his encounter with Aïssa.

What I wish to highlight here, however, is that Conrad’s depiction of Willems’ emotional entrapment by Aïssa suggests a process of attraction that is metaphorically presented as psychical violence. This psychical violence implies a reluctance on the part of Willems to succumb to such temptations, only to be overwhelmed nevertheless. The formulation that Willems’ “individuality was snatched from within himself” contextualises this episode within the narrative of the seductive and degenerative potential of the

454 Ibid. 69-70.
female Other. It is the same “individuality” that Willems, in conversation with Lingard, explains Aïssa “took away ... which I had to get back.”\footnote{Ibid. 221.} This theme of psychical violence is enforced by the metaphors and phrases used to describe their relationship. “Horror”, “fear”, “slippery prisoner”, “terror”, “precipice” and “inevitable destruction” are words and phrases Conrad uses to describe Willems’ feelings. Eventually, the language used serves to foreshadow the inevitably tragic ending of their love.

Faced with both the power of Aïssa’s attraction and repulsion Willems laments:

\begin{quote}
He, a white man whose worst fault till then had been a little want of judgement and too much confidence in the rectitude of his kind! That woman was a complete savage ... He seemed to be surrendering to a wild creature the unstained purity of his life, of his race, of his civilisation. He had a notion of being lost amongst shapeless things that were dangerous and ghastly. He struggled with the sense of certain defeat - losing his footing - fell back into the darkness.\footnote{Ibid. 72-3.}
\end{quote}

In the description above Willems both desires and fears Aïssa because of her Oriental allure. But eventually he is repulsed by her unscrupulous cruelty in attempting to dominate him by
spurring him to kill Almayer and Lingard with the intention of totally severing his ties to his Europeanness. His fear is also accentuated by her determination to possess him at all costs, even to the extent of injuring her own father. As Willems admits to Lingard, "[s]he would have stuck at nothing to defend her own. And when I think it was me - me - Willems ... I hate her."\(^{457}\) He indicates her willingness to even hurt her own father to protect her lover.

Additionally, Conrad projects Willems’ lust for Aïssa as counter to rationality. As Willems proclaims to Lingard, “I must have been mad. I was mad. Every time I look at her I remember my madness.”\(^{458}\) Furthermore, the impact of Aïssa’s love for Willems transforms him into a “ghost”\(^{459}\) and “a masquerading spectre”\(^{460}\) whose physical appearance speaks of mental suffering. In this description of Willems’ transformation Aïssa is compared to a disease that sucks the masculine vitality out of Willems. In his conversation with Almayer, Willems explains that

[a]t first ... my life was like the vision of heaven - or hell; I don’t know which. Since she went I know what perdition means; what darkness is. I know what it is to be torn to pieces alive.\(^{461}\)

In trying to understand the torment that befalls Willems

\(^{457}\)Ibid. 221-2.
\(^{458}\)Ibid. 225.
\(^{459}\)Ibid. 78.
\(^{460}\)Ibid. 79.
\(^{461}\)Ibid. 80.
the reader will be left to wonder over the destructive impact of the female Other’s love on a European who considers his human fallibility to be “the weakness of genius.” More importantly, what is the ideology that shapes Conrad’s portrayal of Aïssa who could produce such devastating love? How does the affection turn into a loveless nightmare? There are no clear indications in the text as to the real causes of Willems’ torment besides his being in love with Aïssa and her urging him to kill Almayer and Lingard.

To understand this situation I posit that Willems’ sense of utter helplessness can only be understood by laying the foundation of our analysis on the civilised/savage and moral/immoral dichotomies. When Willems falls in love with Aïssa he feels that he has fallen from the world of the civilised into the world of the savages. It is true that Aïssa has repeatedly cajoled Willems to “strike at his own people so that he could be mine.” But in Conrad’s novels set in Malaya violence, even against one’s own kind, is not a particular moral dilemma as far as Europeans are concerned. Lingard periodically employs violence to protect his commercial interests and the Dutch authority is ready to eliminate any potential threats to its hegemony by the use of force as the Dain Maroola episode in Almayer’s Folly testifies. Thus the cause of Willems’ psychological trauma can be found in his

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462 Ibid. 19.
463 Ibid. 207.
belief that he has degenerated by falling in love with the savage Aïssa and can find no avenue for escaping her dangerously obstinate passion and passionately animalistic love. When he implores Lingard to take him away from the settlement he exclaims that Aïssa is "an animal,"464 "a devil,"465 and "a sin."466 At this juncture of the story Aïssa is Willems' greatest nightmare he wishes to escape from.

In analysing the plot of An Outcast of the Islands and its themes, we as readers are faced with an interpretative dilemma in weighing the ideologies of author and characters as they interweave in the story. One of the defining characteristics of Conrad's narrative strategy is his employment of irony as a literary device to distance himself as the author from the ideology of his characters. Wolfreys et. al. refer to this method as structural irony, a device which allows a writer to "establish an ironic layer of meaning throughout the text, often by virtue of the ironic distance provided by the narration of a literary work."467 Thus, a reader needs to be mindful in interpreting the meanings encoded in the utterance and thoughts of characters to avoid misinterpreting them as being representative of the views of the author.

Conrad, as a chronicler of the gap between the moral

464Ibid. 221.
465Ibid. 223.
466Ibid. 227.
rhetoric and deeds of empire, stands as an exemplar of the structural ironist. His texts reveal the counter-currents of intention and reality and the contradictions between thought and material acts. These are major themes of his colonial texts. The reader, however, has to be able to differentiate between the author’s ideology and the ideologies of his or her characters. In *Almayer’s Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands* especially, the reader needs to understand the separate beliefs and values of characters and author because what a character says, does or thinks might not represent the author’s beliefs or values. When Willems, for example, senses that he is “surrendering to a wild creature the unstained purity of his life, of his race, of his civilization” how do we as readers make sense of this statement? First of all, this statement is loaded with inferences and presumptions about Self and Other. That he as a white and civilised man could fall in love with a semi-savage is incomprehensible to him. His act of “surrendering” to Aïssa negates the common practice of European domination over other cultures. And unsurprisingly Willems feels “lost amongst shapeless things that were dangerous and ghastly,” denoting a world that he presumes is lacking a guiding morality and laws that define his Self as civilised.

However, questions remain as to whose voice it is that

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469 Ibid.
encapsulates these Self/Other negations into a thought. Is it the inner voice of Willems only as a character in the text or does the author share the same view? At this juncture I posit that the views and assumptions revealed by Willems belong to him alone. In other words when Willems thinks that he is cultured and racially pure the inner voice belongs to him as a character. It is a literary device referred to as narrative interior monologue where the author presents “the thoughts of the character exactly as he is alleged to have thought them.” These views and assumptions of the character are not necessarily shared with the author. This is how structural irony as a narrative device works. However, there are other ways for the ideology of the author to surface in a text through narrative cracks and crevices.

All texts express views and values. My contention is that once authors put pen to paper they are articulating their points of view about certain issues. Writers choose issues to address and develop narrative strategies to explore them. As Helen Parr explains:

[w]riters make choices about the issues, ideas and situations they explore and about how these are represented in the text. What is selected, what is given emphasis and what is omitted (or taken for

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These issues have to be articulated somehow, singly or in combination, through theme, imagery and characterisation. And as Parr indirectly points out, there are omissions and silences that tell another story about an author’s ideology. By comparing, synthesising and analysing the many voices of the characters present in his text a reader can gauge the general thematic and ideological directions of an author’s narrative. Another method of textual dissection is to study the recurring images, motifs and symbolism present in the novel. These images and motifs serve to foreground the overall views and values of the author concerning certain issues. For example, the sombreness and deception of the Malay world could be interpreted as a metaphor of the female Other.

For the purpose of my argument I will examine these ideological cracks and slips of the author by analysing the confrontation between Willems and Lingard that occurs towards the end of the novel. This episode represents a climactic moment of the novel as it creates the highest tension of the story before Conrad resolves the many complications that have been building up prior to the showdown between protégé and mentor. I will show how Conrad’s ideological distance from his various characters in An Outcast of the Islands reveals his Eurocentric ideology.

I contend that Conrad shares a varying degree of ideological similarity with his characters. For example, Almayer and Willems can be said to stand further away from his ideological stance as they represent his notion of the fallibility of empire and the emptiness of claims of European civilisation. As such they are portrayed unflatteringly as selfish and obsessed in their superiority complexes while oblivious of their own moral shortcomings. Lingard, on the other hand, is closer to Conrad’s own ideology and thus is presented more favorably. Conrad portrays Lingard as honest and beneficent; he is just, but can also be harsh when circumstance requires it. He is generally free-spirited, without the pretence of being cultured like other European characters, although his main motivation of dominating trade can be construed as equally selfish. Nevertheless, he is closer to Conrad’s view of a chivalrous European than Almayer, Willems, Hudig or any other European characters in the Malay world by being steadfast to his principles where “[w]hite supremacy generally implied the domination of the white male as the supreme evolutionary exemplar of civilisation.”\textsuperscript{472} Saving the future Mrs. Almayer and sending her to the convent to learn the civilised way of life is a kind, though misguided gesture of generosity. Conrad understands this. Even Aïssa notes of Lingard that “even while you fought, your ears were

open to the voice of children and women.” Hence, Lingard is a truer representation of an Anglo-Saxon adventurer who possesses a civilised sense of manliness without losing his humanity and civility. My argument is that since Lingard is the most morally favourable character in Conrad’s Malay fiction his actions and thoughts could give us some indications of Conrad’s ideology as an author with regard to his perception of Aïssa.

The confrontation between Willems and Lingard revolves around Willems’ “sin” of betraying the river to Abdulla to the detriment of Lingard’s trading interests that he refers to as “part of my life.” But, as Willems confides to Lingard, it is not “what I have done that torments me. It is the why. It’s the madness that drove me to it.” Willems is attempting to shift moral responsibility for his actions and moral ruin to Aïssa. Willems then goes on to explain how Aïssa metaphorically confines him under her watchful eyes, when he exclaims, “[t]he eyes of a savage; of a damned mongrel, half-Arab, half-Malay. They hurt me! I am white!” Willems further claims that Aïssa is the cause of his predicament, sense of loss, and transformation from being “a civilized European, and clever” into what Lingard refers to as “a something without

474 Ibid. 224.
475 Ibid. 221.
476 Ibid. 222.
477 Ibid. 221.
a body ... that must be hidden.”\textsuperscript{478} Willems’ lengthy rambling over Aïssa’s role in his misfortune is interesting as it shows Conrad’s preoccupation with the idea of the savage female and her detrimental effect on the morality of any European man who has a relationship with her. In fact the confrontation is singly the deepest analysis of the female Other, albeit voiced through a character. While we may interpret Willems’ claims and beliefs as representative of the character, Lingard’s thoughts and actions and the recurring images and motifs representing the Malay world could reveal the author’s ideology vis-à-vis the female Other.

The confrontation between Willems and Lingard can be viewed as partly a confession of a European seeking redemption from a sin from a fatherly figure in the form of Lingard. (After all Lingard addresses the old woman sentry as “daughter”\textsuperscript{479} implying his power and status in the Malay world.) It is a secular version of the religious confession but with Lingard as the high priest of reconciliation. As such, Willems feels that Lingard is the only person who can save him from further degeneration by taking him out of the settlement, as he feels “[h]ate is better than being alone! Death is better.”\textsuperscript{480} For Willems, to be hated and to face death in the civilised society of Europeans is better than being in his present predicament with a woman he no longer loves and

\textsuperscript{478}Ibid. 226.
\textsuperscript{479}Ibid. 200.
\textsuperscript{480}Ibid. 224.
certainly fears.

However, what is significant for the purpose of this analysis is Lingard’s apparent silence about Willems’ accusation of Aïssa. While Willems vehemently blames his degeneration on Aïssa, “Lingard listened, fascinated and amazed like a child listening to a fairy tale.”481 For all that Willems has told him about Aïssa’s role in his moral degeneration Lingard does not chastise Willems as the person responsible for his own misconduct as a civilised and clever European in control of his own destiny. His silence after a lengthy explanation by Willems of Aïssa’s guilt could only be construed as his acceptance of Willems’ assumptions. This silence could be construed by a Victorian reader as the true historical condition of Aïssa as the female Other and the world that she inhabits. That Aïssa’s exoticism could even attract the civilised and clever Willems only to destroy him correlates with the Eurocentric ideology concerning the female Other.

Lingard’s silence on this matter is one of Conrad’s ideological slips, revealing such beliefs, for in this scene silence means affirmation and belief in what is stated by others without having the need to incorporate approval of the view. If we then relate this silence to the images and motifs of the Malay world that are foregrounded in the narrative of An Outcast of the Islands there is a convergence of view that

481Ibid. 221.
at the heart of this savage world lies the seeds of decadence and deception. At the centre of this world in *An Outcast of the Islands* is Aïssa, the symbol of Eastern savagery, sensuality and depravity.

Preliminary to Willems and Aïssa’s conversation in their first encounter near Lakamba’s stockade, Conrad warns the reader of the mysteriousness of the Malay world and of the sense of dualism that resides at its core. Later Conrad’s lens gradually shifts its textual focus from the deceptive and illusory nature of the surrounding forest to an eventual transfixion on Aïssa as a symbol of that illusion itself. As Conrad describes it:

[Willems] had been baffled, repelled, almost frightened by the intensity of that tropical life which wants the sunshine but works in gloom; which seems to be all grace of colour and form, all brilliance, all smiles, but is only the blossoming of the dead; whose mystery holds the promise of joy and beauty, yet contains nothing but poison and decay. He had been frightened by the vague perception of danger before, but now, as he looked at that life again, his eyes seemed able to pierce the fantastic veil of creepers and leaves, to look past the solid trunks, to see through the forbidding gloom – and the mystery was disclosed – enchanting, subduing, beautiful. He looked at the woman. Through
the checkered light between them she appeared to him with the impalpable distinctness of a dream. The very spirit of that land of mysterious forests, standing before him like an apparition behind a transparent veil - a veil woven of sunbeams and shadows.\textsuperscript{482}

This paragraph, in actuality, serves as the background to the trajectory of the theme of humankind’s ambivalence about the unknown, perennial fear and attraction. But it, inadvertently, also leads the reader to Conrad’s own Eurocentric ideology of looking at the Malay woman as sinister in her unfathomably mysterious beauty as well as lethality.

It is, therefore, apt that Conrad’s description of the Malay forests is coded in its dual articulation of appearance and deception. The forests are full of colour and brilliance but in actuality are only a blossoming of the dead where promises of joy only contain poison and decay. And Aïssa, as a symbol of the mysterious East, holds the chalice that promises the liquor of sustenance but in reality contains the moral poison that leads to the destruction of a European man who dares love her.

4.5 CONCLUSION

Joseph Conrad has proven to be the most ambivalent of colonial writers. For an author writing in an era of

\textsuperscript{482}Ibid. 64.
imperialism he shows exceptional insights into the machinery of colonialism and its impacts on indigenous societies. Therefore, if we consider Conrad as a writer of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, he is a liberal humanist. And as a modernist who decries the inconsistency between the words and deeds of European colonialism he truly is an enlightened critic. In this era of imperial triumphalism Conrad is radical in articulating the fictional voices and concerns of indigenous characters. It is also unusual to have Europeans defeated by the designs and strategies of local characters.

But in our contemporary postcolonial world, Conrad’s voice is merely considered a shade different from the racialist ideology prevalent during the Victorian era. While far from condemning Conrad I have shown how Eurocentric assumptions could still find their adherent even in the most enlightened of writers. Conrad’s Malay novels reveal how Eurocentrism as an ideology operates in representing the reality of European colonisation of the Malay world. The most enduring image of the Malay as innately piratical also captures Conrad’s imagination. This is especially evident in his Malay novels discussed above.

Conrad also holds to be true the assumptions of the Malay female Other. Therefore, Mrs. Almayer and Aïssa, as his representations of Malay women, still conform to Eurocentric notions of the savage, exotic and degenerative female Other. In the end, these Malay female characters will neither be
tamed by the tender glove of European civilisation nor will they cease, in loving European men, to be the cause of their moral degeneration without redemption.
The themes of European prestige, racial boundary and miscegenation are central to Maugham’s Malaysian short stories. Basically, his short stories revolve around the trials and tribulations of colonial European characters, and his indigenous characters and their dilemmas are marginal to the narrative interest. Unlike Conrad’s Malay fictions, in Maugham’s short tales indigenous women are the voiceless female Other. However, the twists and turns of plot in his short stories reveal an underlying theme of the decadence and lethargy of empire which accords with a more general feeling of European decline after the Great War of 1914-18.483

While referring to a range of his Malaysian stories, I analyse in “A Force of Circumstance” and “The Four Dutchmen” how assumptions around miscegenation and white prestige influence narrative technique and present the Malay woman as exotic, erotic and promiscuous with characteristics of reasoning and behaviour that are beyond human (or at least European) understanding. These representations of the Malay woman reflect Maugham’s Eurocentric perception of the degenerate and degenerative Malay female Other. Either consciously or not, he develops the narrative moral that the Malay female other is a danger to unwary European men. In the

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483 Christie, "British Literary Travellers in Southeast Asia in an Era of Colonial Retreat", 674. See also Lockhart, Return to Malaya, 368.
Malay short stories selected, Maugham’s use of particular narrative techniques not only serves to expose his Eurocentric ideological inclination vis-à-vis the colonised female Other but also reflects general racial sentiments of Europeans towards the Malay indigenous population in colonial Malaya.

5.1 PRESTIGE, RACIAL BOUNDARY AND MISCEGENATION IN COLONIAL DISCOURSE

Sexuality illustrates the iconography of rule, not its pragmatics; sexual asymmetries are tropes to depict other centers of power.484

In his Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation, Philip Holden elucidates the dissimilarity between Maugham’s texts about Asia and Kipling’s and Conrad’s works with the same Asian settings. As Holden explains, Kipling’s works are literary imaginings of the collision of unequal cultures whereas Conrad’s “exhibit the fractured structure [and] the overlapping of narrational voices and their ultimate undermining of the status of truth.”485 Instead, Maugham’s narrators “sit in the clean, well-lighted place of reason; they observe with irony, but they rarely doubt.”486 What Holden alludes to is the sense of complacency that marks the

486 Ibid.
difference between Maugham’s writings and Kipling’s racial confidence or Conrad’s ambivalences about the altruistic justifications of imperialism. We can begin to contextualise Holden’s point by examining the spatial and temporal positioning of early twentieth-century British colonialism that Maugham was a part of as distinct from nineteenth-century British imperialism.

At the core of Maugham’s ideology vis-à-vis the colonised Other is his attachment to imperialism’s vision and the interconnectedness of the themes of European prestige and miscegenation. After the absorption of colonies during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the early twentieth century was for Britain an era of consolidation. By the early decades of that century the machinery of colonisation came to a standstill and British imperialists could finally stop to survey all the subject dominions and peoples under their control. Militarily, politically and economically Britain was at the pinnacle of its supremacy. It was, thus, easier for Britain during this period of its ascendancy to consolidate the notion of centre and periphery and, as Maugham’s works testify, to “naturalize such concepts as Britishness and masculinity by aligning them with the implied reader and thus exempting them from scrutiny.”

487By 1937 Britain was more concerned with preserving her Empire than expanding it. See Roy Douglas, Liquidation of Empire (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 27.
488Holden, Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation, 3.
As Britain began to assert its political and cultural hegemony over the colonised lands the sense of racial superiority that lubricated its colonial ideology began to solidify and took on a normative nature. Eventually there was a pressing necessity to maintain white prestige in fear of steady resistance from colonised peoples. Prestige became a symbol of colonial authority and there was always a constant concern that the colonisers maintain their prestige at all costs. Prestige, or what Gerard de Nerval refers to “as a kind of theatrical confidence-trick”\(^\text{489}\) was fundamental to the preservation of imperial authority in safeguarding colonial superiority by demarcating the supposed moral and social lines between coloniser and colonised. Prestige provided Europeans with a sense of the superiority of their lifestyles, the depth of their intellectualism, and the formidable military power that they wielded.

Prestige also required Europeans to practice a particular standard of behaviour that would exemplify their purportedly superior morality and characteristics that would mark them as different from the non-Europeans whom they ruled. As illustrations, in his short memoir “Shooting an Elephant” it is the maintenance of prestige that forced George Orwell to shoot an apparently harmless elephant merely to buttress the façade of European superiority in colonial Burma. The same

\(^{489}\)Qtd. in Christie, “British Literary Travellers in Southeast Asia in an Era of Colonial Retreat”, 683.
concern also grounds the requirement that Emily Innes have indigenous female attendants on her boat ride in Malaya so as to project an aura of importance to the local population,\textsuperscript{490} and underpinned the colonial practice of indigenous guards presenting arms in honour of Europeans at landing-stages.\textsuperscript{491} The issue of prestige also explains Isabella Bird’s disappointment at the cowardice shown by a white policeman in the face of danger posed by a trapped wild tiger in Malaya.\textsuperscript{492}

Prestige played a central role in defining the relationship between coloniser and colonised. To emphasise the role prestige played in the maintenance of Empire, John Butcher explains that “prestige rather than military might”\textsuperscript{493} was the foundation of the power of the British Empire. Prestige was important to create a façade of power that prescribed the social, moral and material divides between Europeans and indigenes, and to justify colonisation of their lands. As Nerval points out:

A European’s sweet way to triumph in the Orient — perhaps, indeed, his only way — is to deploy every possible theatrical device; the most imposing actor on the stage subdues not only the audience, but also the rest of the cast.\textsuperscript{494}

\textsuperscript{490}Innes, The Chersonese with the Gilding Off, ii, 11.
\textsuperscript{491}Somerset Maugham, Maugham’s Malaysian Stories (Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann, 1977), 75.
\textsuperscript{492}Bird, The Golden Chersonese, 145.
\textsuperscript{493}Butcher, The British in Malaya, 1880-1941, 77.
\textsuperscript{494}Qtd. in Christie, "British Literary Travellers in Southeast Asia in an Era of Colonial Retreat", 683.
Prestige, as a strategy, entailed various performances and deceptions. It could encompass airs of superiority and condescension towards colonised peoples, and decisions barring lower-class Europeans, women of loose morals and drifters from colonial territories as these Europeans did not typify prestige. As Clive Christie further explains:

"[t]he requirements of prestige imposed on the whites in Asia a complex hierarchy and a code of behavior, an immutable order of things designed to have the magical effect of hypnotizing the indigenous inhabitants into submission."\(^{495}\)

Decadent Europeans\(^{496}\) could only undermine "the magical effect" for the colonised. As Bilainkin empathetically asserts, "[r]espect, like virtue, once lost, cannot easily be regained." The consequence is that, as Bilainkin continues, "those gestures portraying an otherwise solemn and important Briton are dangerous propaganda in a country where the governing and subject races are co-resident."\(^{497}\)

\(^{495}\)Ibid.

\(^{496}\)Maugham deals directly with the issue of European prestige and undesirables in his short story "The Vessel of Wrath" in his characterisation of Ginger Ted whose behaviour "was a disgrace to civilization"(6) and a "discredit on the white race"(7) that did "incalculable damage to the prestige of the white race"(8). As such Mr. Jones strenuously emphasises to the Contrôleur that he be expelled from the Alas islands. And holding true to the European notion of prestige Ginger Ted eventually mends his ways thereby eliminating the need to eject him from the colonial setting. "The Vessel of Wrath" in Maugham, *Maugham's Malaysian Stories*, 1-45.

\(^{497}\)Bilainkin, *Hail Penang*, 63. With regard to white prestige Aldous Huxley and George Bilainkin are particularly concerned with the role Hollywood played in portraying for the colonised indigenes "this white civilization ... [as] a world of silliness and criminality" (198). See Aldous Huxley, *Jesting Pilate: The Diary of a Journey* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1936),
Prestige also entails a recognisably clear differentiation between coloniser and colonised. The most apparent marker in this colonial backdrop is the distinction of skin colour that was the basis of European racial ideology. Historically, this European racial ideology, or what Daniel Segal refers to as "an aristocracy of the skin" that posited the idea of whiteness as a mark of racial superiority, was not as simple as we might at first assume. Mere differences in skin pigmentation were not enough to explain the racial dogma adopted by Europeans since lighter skin colour as a biological attribute was not exclusive to Europeans. The Chinese, the Middle Eastern peoples and even Native Americans during the early period of European colonialism in North America regarded themselves as whites vis-à-vis surrounding cultures. However, the non-European sense of whiteness was more tied to perceptions of cultural differences than racial ones. For example, Alastair Bonnett explains that Chinese racial whiteness was "not scientific but a self-consciously symbolic, mytho-poetic, rhetoric of white identity." It merely defined the social groups of a particular society to explain their social standings or elite backgrounds since

499See ibid. 7-9.
501Ibid. 1032.
whiteness is not attributed to biological differences. What
distinguishes the Chinese and other cultures' notions of
whiteness from European racial ideas was the lack of emphasis
on natural science as a method of explaining the cultural
differences.

The European idea of whiteness, on the other hand, in its
pseudo-scientific explanation, formulated civilisational
differences by assuming human mental capacity to be based on
skin colour. Since there are other races who could claim
whiteness of skin this definition of whiteness, in the
European sense, was actually a classification to discriminate
against the skin colour of non-European peoples. Later, it
eventually became a tool of asserting the European form of
whiteness as superior. Thus, the idea of European whiteness
became part of the discourse that established European racial
ideology. The colour of the skin then coalesced into an idea
of white prestige. As Bonnett further explains:

 Europeans racialized, which is to say naturalized,
the concept of whiteness, and entrusted it with the
essence of their community. Europeans turned
whiteness into a fetish object, a talisman of the
natural whose power appeared to enable them to
impose their will on the world.\footnote{Ibid. 1043.}

The concept of biological difference based on the colour
of the skin is problematic since such simplification was not
as clear-cut and all-inclusive within the borders of Europe itself. The definition of whiteness and its rules of inclusivity became problematic even within the ethnic and class divides of the European social spectrum. Thus, the British regarded the biologically white-skinned Irish as "Black Celts." And true to European notions of the natural hierarchy of humankind, the Slavs, the French and other Latin peoples were often viewed as inferiors by the Germanic Teutons or English Anglo-Saxons. To problematise matters even further the working class in Britain was often racialised as inferior. Lord Milner, a British statesman and colonial administrator, for example, was surprised to see lower-class Britons having white skins when he observed some bathing. But outside of Europe the racial dynamics took their own, more obvious course due to what was perceived as the gulf of difference between Europeans and Others. Europeans reasoned that since humankind was part of nature, the superiority of one race over another could also be explained by the study of natural hierarchy as part of the chain of being.

Prestige defined along colour lines also underpinned regulation of sexual activities between Europeans and non-Europeans. The maintenance of the colour and cultural line was as important as political and economic hegemony in ensuring the stability of the colonial status quo. Any form of sexual

503 Ibid. 1045.
504 Ibid.
relations with members of the indigenous society was, therefore, deemed detrimental to the social standing of the white race as it was believed to have a dilutive effect on the purity of whiteness, thus lowering European prestige in the eye of the colonised. Miscegenation - as the sexual union of European and non-European would eventually be termed - could be seen as subverting the idea of the prestige of the European race in the eye of the colonised by blurring the cultural line between the coloniser and the colonised. Thus, the prohibition of miscegenation was due to the colonial belief that it "would undercut the colonisers’ claim to superiority as surely as equal citizenship."\(^{505}\)

Miscegenation in British colonial discourse differs in its spatial and temporal specificities. At the beginning of colonialism, especially in late seventeenth-century India, sexual relationships between male coloniser and indigenous women were permissible and even encouraged. This was due to the perceived advantage in creating a class of Eurasians knowledgeable about indigenous customs as well as loyal to British colonial interests. As Herbert Stark explains, Eurasians are "an invaluable asset to those whose chief concern was with the wealth to be derived from a lucrative

\(^{505}\)George Steinmetz, "Return to Empire: The New U.S Imperialism in Comparative Historical Perspective", Sociological Theory, 23 (2005), 347.
But British policy in India with regard to Eurasians would later depend on their usefulness in advancing the interests of Empire. Eventually circulars prohibiting cohabitation with indigenous women in 1909\textsuperscript{507} and the influx of British women to India (and also Malaya) in the early twentieth century resulted in fewer cases of intermarriage.\textsuperscript{508} In Malaya those who formed the Eurasian sub-group were mostly descendants of Portuguese conquerors of the Malay kingdom of Malacca. There were cases of miscegenation between Europeans and indigenes but the practice was not rampant enough to produce a noticeable number of Eurasians that could later become a problem for British colonial administration.\textsuperscript{509}

British narrative representations of Eurasians in Malaya usually take the form of the pseudo-scientific sketch of the ambiguous racial Other. Eurasians do not belong securely to any racial group and within the concept of Europeanness they are considered as the enemy within. It is a social situation that the German philosopher Johann Fichte defines as "interior

\textsuperscript{506}Qtd. in Loretta M Mijares, "Distancing the Proximate Other: Hybridity and Maud Diver's Candles in the Wind", Twentieth Century Literature, 50 (2004), 109.
\textsuperscript{507}In 1909 the Colonial Office in London, by the directive of Lord Crewe, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, issued a circular prohibiting officials from the practice of concubinage with indigenous women. Rather than focusing on moral objections to the practice Crewe views the sexual relationship in more practical terms as detrimental to the prestige of the white man. See Butcher, The British in Malaya, 1880-1941, 206-7.
\textsuperscript{508}Strobel, European Women and the Second British Empire, 4.
\textsuperscript{509}Lockhart, Return to Malaya, 363.
frontiers” indicating the refusal on the part of Europeans to accept Eurasians as their own. In travel writings, Innes refers to them as “half-caste,” while Bird calls them “a race of half-breeds” whose dynamism is “lowered by native marriages.” Conrad highlights the issue of miscegenation in his fictions although he is more ambivalent about how to represent mixed-race characters. For instance, Conrad portrays the mixed-blood Da Souza family as dirty, indolent and disloyal, only serving as leeches in their unquenchable insistence on money from Willems. The family throws him out of its house once his fortune declines. On the other hand, Conrad’s representation of Nina, Almayer’s daughter with his native wife Mrs. Almayer, is more positive both in his portrayal of her physique and her cognitive faculty. In Conrad’s portrayal, Nina “was tall for a half-caste, with the correct profile of the father” and a “gleam of superior intelligence” and “thoughtful tinge inherited from her European ancestry.” In the end, Nina leaves her father and chooses to align with her mother’s native ancestry.

A reader would be able to make sense of these little episodes by analysing them through a Eurocentric perspective. 

511Innes, The Chersonese with the Gilding Off, ii, 2.  
513Ibid. 135.  
514Conrad, An Outcast of the Islands, 27.  
515Conrad, Almayer’s Folly, 27.
Understandably, it is the Da Souzas, with their claim to whiteness, who are portrayed more disapprovingly. The Da Souzas who attempt to pass as whites are viewed as tainting the European notion of racial purity and can only be portrayed negatively. Nina is instead portrayed positively because of her decision not to violate the colour line, thus ensuring the hegemonic status quo of the colonial hierarchy. Conrad himself proclaims, through Nina, “[b]etween your people and me there is ... a barrier that nothing can remove.”\textsuperscript{516} The racial barrier that separates Europeans and non-Europeans ensures the stability of the coloniser/colonised and civilised/savage dichotomies and, subsequently, the inviolable continuity of white prestige in the eyes of the indigenes.

Miscegenation as a particular social phenomenon in the colonial setting became less of a problem to white prestige with the influx of European women into the colonies in the early twentieth century. If the nineteenth century was a period of intervention and political strategising to assert British influence in Malaya, the early twentieth century was the era of consolidation and maintenance of British power and prestige. The influx of British women into Malaya had a considerable influence on how British officials interacted with the indigenous population. As Margaret Strobel explains:

the arrival of wives occasioned a decline in the

\textsuperscript{516}Ibid. 144.
incidence of indigenous mistresses, from whom administrators learned much about colonial society and culture. Finally, English wives in substantial numbers made possible the creation of an exclusive group, socially distanced from indigenous peoples and containing its own hierarchy.\textsuperscript{517}

The most telling effect of the presence of English women was the existence of a ruling elite more noticeable by their skin colour. Unlike previous officials who lived among Malays and who spoke their language fluently, the early twentieth-century British elite made up of government officials and planters became more exclusive of and remote from the indigenous peoples whom they ruled. Strobel describes the effect of European women on the colour line between European communities and indigenes: "[i]n her role as hostess, the wife led the rituals that maintained this boundary and internal hierarchy."\textsuperscript{518} This era of British exclusivity is the one Maugham understands and about which he writes.

Despite the sense of imperial decline, or probably due to it, there was a hardening of the racial boundary between Europeans and indigenes among Europeans already entrenched as little rajas and memsahibs. Colonial privilege was, as Susan Tanner explains, "[s]unshine, servants, wonderful memories."\textsuperscript{519}

\textsuperscript{517}Strobel, \textit{European Women and the Second British Empire}, 1-2.
\textsuperscript{518}Ibid. 2.
\textsuperscript{519}Qtd. in Shennan, \textit{Out in the Midday Sun}, 108.
The colour line became more evident in the establishment of recreation clubs exclusively for Europeans. To make it a fully entrenched policy there was also rail coach segregation and the Colour Bar rulings in the Malayan Civil Service, issues that further strained relationships between Europeans and non-Europeans. The racial boundary was now very clearly defined and to transgress it was to risk the full force of the European community’s wrath. With regard to miscegenation, Bilainkin asserts that “where it happens it is frowned upon so firmly that it does not show its face to the world.”

Thus, it is not surprising that Maugham was more concerned with the trials and tribulations of British (or more appropriately, English) men and women since there was already a social boundary that few Europeans would cross and those who did traverse it went through the experience of being

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520 This phenomenon can be understood in the way clubs were established. If previously recreation clubs were open to all races, by the early 1930s Europeans began to exclude other races from joining their more prestigious clubs. An example of the extent to which this exclusive attitude was taken was told by an Australian serving officer in Singapore before the World War of 1939-45, a particular club, when he asked for native fruits for breakfast he was categorically told that “the club did not serve native food.” See John Wyett, *Staff Wallah at the Fall of Singapore* (St Leonards, New South Wales, Allen and Unwin, 1996), 19. See also Margaret Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun*, 145-7.

521 The period beginning from 1904 to 1915 saw the deterioration in race relations in Malaya as Europeans began to enforce physical separation between them and non-Europeans which in the Malay colonial setting would include Malays, Eurasians, Chinese and Indians. This was more prominent in the railway service where coach segregation was introduced to separate Europeans from non-Europeans. Colour bars were also applied in the Malaysian Civil Service where, as a rule, non-Europeans must not be allowed to rank above Europeans thereby limiting the prospects of promotion for non-Europeans. For further reading see “Chapter 5: Tension in European Relations with Asians, 1904-1915” in Butcher, *The British in Malaya, 1880-1941*, 97-125.

ostracised by the majority of the British enclave. Hence, with regard to Maugham’s fictional characters in his Eastern setting Klaus Jonas explains:

in his exotic work, he is most of all concerned with the English living in the East. As a rule, he deals only with them in his stories, seldom with Americans or Frenchmen, and never, except as minor characters, with natives.523

Jonas highlights a racial bias in Maugham’s choice of major and marginal characters. As Anthony Burgess writes in his Introduction to Maugham’s Malaysian Stories, “Maugham belonged to an age in which the only people to be taken seriously in fiction were people of European stock.”524

It is, therefore, not strange to find in Maugham’s works the East that is often looked at from afar but never interesting enough to be part of the larger picture of his fictional world. As M.C. Kuner states:

[...] though Maugham is beguiled by the strangeness and the mystery of the East, he does not use them to project his dream-impressions; rather they serve for the most part as backdrops for his novels. With him ... Man occupies the centre of the stage, while landscape is a décor to physical or intellectual

524 Maugham, Maugham’s Malaysian Stories, xvi.
Kuner's statement is merely a polite way of stating what was a general attitude and assumption of European superiority over the inferior Eastern cultures. Therefore, Maugham is prejudicial "against natives or half-castes, who are usually looked upon as inferiors, pariahs, or who lack the white man's sense of honour." Consequently there is a fear that racial purity would be contaminated by the prevalence of miscegenation. Therefore, "Maugham's texts," as Holden observes, "are not so much concerned with the question of absolute racial difference as with the fear of interracial sex and miscegenation." It is this fear of racial contamination that is the undercurrent of Maugham's thematic trajectories in his Eastern tales.

5.2 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE AND THE SILENT FEMALE OTHER IN MAUGHAM'S MALAYSIAN STORIES

At this juncture we need to examine the narrative techniques employed by Maugham in his Malaysian short stories as they reveal his Eurocentric ideology in his narratives. This account of his technique will especially enable us to delve deeper into his representations of Malay women. As

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525 M.C Kuner, "Maugham and the West", in Jonas (ed.), The World of Somerset Maugham, 73.
Jeremy Hawthorn explains:

[a] novelist’s decision concerning what the reader knows and how he or she knows it inevitably has a bearing on a range of issues: the relationship between narrative and story, the relationship between writer and reader, the relationship between writer and work, and the relationship between the writer and the world which inspires and receives his or her creative work.\textsuperscript{528}

What Hawthorn implies is the narrative power of writers to determine the who, why and how of fictional texts. These shape the organisation of technique and regulation of moral order. Either self-consciously or not, writers persuade readers to be sympathetic to certain values aligned to their experience and worldview. Therefore, it is not surprising that in Maugham’s case, “some scholars have suspected in his stories a warning of the manifold dangers of the East.”\textsuperscript{529}

I will focus especially on Maugham’s literary techniques of characterisation and point of view and how these bring about the cohesion of the story. These elements also help shape and influence the reader’s sympathies to particular characters and not to others. Additionally, determining who sees and speaks and who does not provides writers with greater narrative flexibility and mobility in achieving the implied

\textsuperscript{528}Hawthorn, \textit{Joseph Conrad}, 1.
\textsuperscript{529}Jonas, "The World of Somerset Maugham", 131.
impact of the narrative. Specifically, Maugham uses distance as a particular form of character point-of-view. Point-of-view refers to "who tells the story and how it is told." In telling a story, writers have at their disposal practically an unlimited choice of narrative voice or voices. Oftentimes even a simple story can have a multiplicity of narrative voices colluding and colliding with each. Point-of-view may be from the given perspective of an author (or implied author), a narrator or characters. Chains of events and the reader's understanding of them are filtered through these selected perspectives.

Point-of-view is also closely related to the literary concept of character distance. Character/characterisation is important because it is a powerful tool of representation and is normally the most remembered element in a work of fiction. Conversely, it can also be a powerful tool of misrepresentation. Character distance as a literary device refers to "the degree of sympathy or antipathy which the reader is invited to feel towards a particular character or characters." It determines the emotional proximity that writers work to allow between their characters and readers.

Characters in fiction have a varying degree of importance that is denoted by their major or minor roles depending on how

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530 Michael Meyer, The Bedford Introduction to Literature: Reading, Thinking, Writing (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005), 199.
531 Gibbons, Literature and Awareness, 35.
they contribute to the overall thematic scheme of the writer. A protagonist in a text will usually be emotionally closer to the reader compared to other major or minor characters. Similarly the reader’s sympathy will normally be developed along the same character distance continuum. It is within this framework that the character distance concept should be understood in my analysis of Maugham’s Malaysian short stories.

The main method of applying distance between the character(s) and the reader is the writer’s gifts of access to or denial of inner thoughts and feelings to characters in their texts. Readers more readily sympathise with a character or characters whose inner thoughts and feelings are accessible to them. A character or characters whose inner thoughts and feelings are screened from readers are more likely to be denied sympathy. This method of character distancing created by authors through character arrangement also determines our notions of hero/heroine and villain as it serves to impose and regulate the reader’s understanding of who is good or bad or whose conduct is acceptable or comprehensible and whose is not. As Tom Gibbons further explains, even a villain may gain reader sympathy if his inner thoughts and feelings are shared as they will discover that he “was human like ourselves, with the same human problems, the same human hesitations and the same human mixture of good and bad points in his mental make-
up."\footnote{532} For example, in Maugham's "The Letter" Leslie, who kills her lover Hammond, may still attract reader sympathy once the author discloses the reason for her actions. Leslie confides to Mr. Joyce: "Oh, if you knew what agonies I endured. I passed through hell. I knew he didn't want me any more and I wouldn't let him go. Misery! Misery!"\footnote{533} Had readers not been privy to this motivation Leslie might remain in their mind as a callous, selfish and cold-blooded killer.\footnote{534} In Maugham's stories he uses distance of characters from his reader as a method of centre-staging European characters and by the same device marginalises Malay women characters. As a result, in his stories European characters often cease to be villains as the role, through distance, is transferred to the voiceless Malay women.

All of Maugham's Malaysian stories have as their setting the then Malaya when the peninsula was still under British protection. The two stories, which are central to my analysis, deal with the issue of miscegenation, specifically in the sexual relationship between European men and Malay women and

\footnote{532}{Ibid.}
\footnote{533}{Maugham, The World Over, 1354.}
\footnote{534}{The Letter" is based on a true story. Ethel Proudlock was put on trial in Kuala Lumpur for shooting to death William Steward at her bungalow while her husband was away. At the trial she claimed that Steward was attempting to rape her and, in self-defence, she shot him six times. But unlike the fictional Leslie, Ethel was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. Only public (European) uproar saved her from the gallows. Throughout the trial there were rumours that Ethel was in fact Steward's lover and he was about to leave her for a new lover. This was what caused Ethel to kill her former lover. Undeniably, white prestige and the fact that Steward's live-in mistress was Chinese played a role in the real-life drama, especially in public opinion in favour of her acquittal. See Shennan, Out in the Midday Sun, 62-5.}
their destructive consequences to the white men. While not overtly didactic these stories reflect Maugham’s, as well as British colonial perceptions of and concern with the issue of miscegenation and its detrimental effects on white prestige.

In the Preface to his travel narrative A Gentleman in the Parlour, Maugham asserts:

Though the variety of human nature is infinite, so that it might seem that the writer need never want for models on which to create his characters, he can only deal with that part of which is in accordance with his own temperament. He puts himself in the shoes of his characters; but there are shoes he cannot get into.535

There are individuals or peoples whom Maugham concedes are beyond his understanding and probably sympathy. And without sympathy, as he states, he can never appreciate their human perspectives. Since, as Burgess explains, Maugham never "gained, or wish to gain, any direct knowledge of the lives and customs of the native peoples of the East,"536 he would never be able to create, nor wish to create, the human side of the indigenes. Indigenous people remain as stock characters understood through the ever-ready epistemology of Orientalism in which the Malay woman is doubly distanced from civilisation

536Maugham, Maugham’s Malaysian Stories, xv.
by virtue of her race and her gender.

"THE FORCE OF CIRCUMSTANCE"

"The Force of Circumstance" is a short story that deals with the issue of miscegenation as the main theme. It exposes the racial and cultural markers that delineate the European/Other and coloniser/colonised dichotomies in British Malaya or in this case the fictional Malay sultanate of Sembulu in Borneo. Maugham’s assumptions about Malay women function to racialise the divides between orderliness and chaos, centre and periphery, and purity and miscegenation.

The short story begins with the author inviting the reader to an Eastern vista with its threat to maintenance of white vitality suggested by its “white pallor of death” at noon and “ashy and wan” palette, “the various tones of the heat.” Doris, the fairly new English wife of Guy, is sitting on the verandah overlooking a river and, far away, a native can be seen in a dugout “so small that it hardly showed above the surface of the water.”537 It presents a typical panorama of a Malaya hardly touched by modernity. The setting resembles an Eastern melody, in the minor key, which exacerbates the nerves by its ambiguous monotony; and the ear awaits impatiently a resolution, but

537Ibid. 46.
waits in vain.\textsuperscript{538}

The monotony of the East reverberates from the past to the present indicating a civilisation trapped in time. Like an Eastern melody that offers no variation to its beats and rhythms the Malay culture is regarded as being unable to progress beyond the repetition of human activities since time immemorial. Even the menu served by the indigenous servant has the monotonous elements that require Worcester Sauce to spice it up.\textsuperscript{539} Thus, when Doris hears the "loud singing of a bird, mellifluous and rich" that interrupts the "continual and monotonous" singing of the cicadas she is suddenly reminded of the English blackbird, and of England itself. The nostalgic memory suggests that the marriage, like the "morning" has "lost its freshness."\textsuperscript{540} The England that she, and Maugham, know is the greatest nation on earth whose empire is the biggest and richest known to humankind. As Maugham himself says, England conjures a hundred things - the lovely countryside of Kent and Sussex, the Thames estuary and St. Paul’s, lines from Shakespeare, Keats, and Collins, visions of Sir Francis Drake and Henry VIII, Tom Jones and Dr. Johnson, the beautiful posters in the ugly but

\textsuperscript{538}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{539}Ibid. 51.
\textsuperscript{540}Ibid. 46.
England, in contrast to Malaya, is the exciting variation of landscapes and landmarks, the long tradition of literary and social history and the tidbits of things that mark the uniqueness and peculiarities of London. Sembulu and Malaya, as opposed to London and England, are at the fringe of empire. As Guy informs Doris, Sembulu is so peripheral to civilisation that even the old native Sultan told him that he “didn’t think it was a white woman’s country.”

Guy’s journey back to England is an attempt to break from the immoral past in which he has had an indigenous mistress of ten years and three children by her into a moral and legitimised life of the future. When Guy, who was born and raised in Sembulu, goes to England to find an English wife he is not seeking an individual as a life partner. That Doris is the woman Guy meets and falls in love with is a mere process in attaining the purpose of achieving order, sexual legitimacy in marriage, and legitimate white heirs. Guy’s name even encourages readers to see him as a representative male.

Once they are married and as soon as Doris arrives in Sembulu it is the disorderliness of Guy’s living room that attracts her attention. But the objects found there hint to the reader the nature of Guy’s relationship with his Malay

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541 Qtd. in Richard Cordell, Somerset Maugham: A Biographical and Critical Study (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961), 25.
542 Maugham, Maugham’s Malaysian Stories, 51.
female companion and from the colonial perspective his degeneration as he bonds with the indigenous culture. The narrator explains:

On the floor, when she arrived, was a torn and dirty matting; on the walls of unpainted wood hung (much too high up) photogravures of Academy pictures, Dyak shields and parangs. The tables were covered with Dyak cloth in sombre colours, and on them stood pieces of Brunei brass-ware, much in need of cleaning, empty cigarette tins and bits of Malay silver. There was a rough wooden shelf with cheap editions of novels and a number of old travel books in battered leather ... It was a bachelor’s room, untidy but stiff; and though it amused her she found it intolerably pathetic.\textsuperscript{543}

On the one hand, the decoration of Guy’s living room serves as a statement of European masculinity and domination of the indigenes as signified by the appropriation of the Dyak shields and parangs on the wall. But the living room also functions as a symbolic representation of Guy’s immoral life, with its Dyak cloth, dirty Brunei plate, and “torn and dirty matting,” with “matting” and mating providing the phonetic allusion. The dirty matting symbolises miscegenation and how it is perceived by colonial Europeans. It is what Stoler

\textsuperscript{543}Ibid. 53.
refers to as “an embodiment of European degeneration and moral decay” and “a threat to white prestige.” Doris confirms that “[i]t was a dreary, comfortless life that Guy had led there.” Maugham’s narrator further explains that Doris had deft hands and she soon made the room habitable. She arranged this and that, and what she could not do with she turned out. Her wedding-presents helped. Now the room was friendly and comfortable. In glass vases were lovely orchids and in great bowls huge masses of flowering shrubs.

The room, once chaotic and dirty, is now transformed into a friendly, comfortable and habitable room indicating the sense of order and stability that Doris, as a memsahib, manages to bring to Guy’s life. The author explains that prior to marriage, Doris was “a very competent secretary,” a commendation that suggests organisational skill and a desire for class mobility in her decision to marry and settle in Malaya.

In contrast to Doris’s deft domestic skills and despite ten years of living with Guy, the Malay woman fails to acquire European notions of cleanliness and hygiene. But, as Doris’s psychical nausea on learning of their relationship exposes, it is not physical hygiene that is of concern here but the racial

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545 Maugham, Maugham’s Malaysian Stories, 53.
546 Ibid. 52.
hygiene that Doris symbolises. In his short story “The Book-Bag” Maugham expresses the metaphorical boundary between the two cultures in his description of the physical separation between the Residency, where the narrator is a guest, and the surrounding Malayan jungle. The narrator feels how the bungalow is “so strangely English” with its well-kept garden and large trees in contrast to the “savage growth of the jungle beyond.”\(^547\) Similarly, Guy and Doris’s redecorated home establishes it as a European cultural island amidst the savage Malay cultural surroundings. Within their little island Guy and Doris are presented as cultured through their reading of “letters, English papers and papers from Singapore, magazines and books.”\(^548\) And the Malay woman is like a wild creeper from the surrounding “savage growth” infiltrating and attempting to destroy the English island.

The makeover of the home, in a way, is allegorical of the historical progress of British intervention in the Malay Archipelago itself as I have outlined earlier in this chapter: early presence and interventionism in the 1870s to consolidation of the racial boundary through the presence of European memsahibs in the early twentieth century, especially in the inter-war years. As European women came into the colonial scene there was a hardening of the racial barrier between the ruler and the ruled. And these European women,

\(^{547}\)Maugham, The World Over, 1046.
\(^{548}\)Maugham, Maugham’s Malaysian Stories, 56.
like Doris, served as the moral and sexual gatekeepers for European men to behave according to values found at home.

My analysis of the short story finds that Maugham has structurally divided "The Force of Circumstance" into three narrative phases, namely exposition, conflict and resolution. These phases contain their own individual narrative dynamics that are then linked together to produce a unified story. In the exposition phase the reader is introduced to Guy and Doris as the main characters and the Malay woman as a minor but pivotal character. At this narrative stage Guy and Doris are set to have a happily married life when Doris starts turning the "bachelor's room" into a more "friendly and comfortable" English home, although Maugham hints at Doris's uneasiness. But the tenor of their life is disturbed by the presence of a Malay woman whose acts and behaviours are perceived as mysteriously inexplicable. In the story, the Malay woman is described as remaining in "exactly the same position" with the same "expressionless face" while watching Guy and Doris play tennis. A week later she creates a "disturbance" at the bungalow. To a reader these behaviours of the Malay woman suggest diabolical intention and exotic strangeness. Later Guy tells Doris that "she began to blackmail me" as an explanation of the Malay woman's perplexing behaviour.

549 Ibid. 55.
550 Ibid. 59.
551 Ibid. 64.
The conflict phase is marked by tension between Guy and Doris and Guy and his mistress, but it is the conflict within the psyche of Doris that is foregrounded here as she is told the truth by Guy. It is the conflict within Doris that produces the look of “strange fear”\textsuperscript{552} that Guy notices and that Doris admits is a sign that she is “frightened by the feelings.”\textsuperscript{553} This tension within Doris arises from an ingrained notion of racial purity, her sense that Guy has betrayed her and English standards through miscegenation with the Malay woman, and her investment in the fact of marriage and class mobility. The conflict is resolved outwardly with her eventual rejection of Guy and demand for a separation.

This phase is notable because the rationale for miscegenation is given from Guy’s point of view only. Therefore, Guy’s character positionality here is closest to the reader as he attempts to save his marriage by justifying his immorality as due to, as the author has aptly titled the story, the force of circumstance. His account of the event receives at least Doris’s sympathy if not that of some readers. She categorically accepts his statement as the whole truth, saying “I know what the loneliness is here” and “I don’t blame you for a single thing you did.”\textsuperscript{554} Revealing Guy’s past life from the character’s own perspective allows Maugham to distance himself from endorsing the truth-value of Guy’s

\textsuperscript{552}Ibid. 66.
\textsuperscript{553}Ibid. 69.
\textsuperscript{554}Ibid. 71.
story. Thus the reader is given scope to conjecture about the truth of Guy’s claim that, for example, “[f]ive out of six men do it”\textsuperscript{555} or that he was offered the girl by the mother, or that “she always knew it was only a temporary arrangement,”\textsuperscript{556} or even that the Malay woman is actually attempting to blackmail him.

The resolution phase is the most critical stage of the story. It is at this narrative juncture that we find the cracks and fissures that expose Maugham’s Eurocentric ideology. The close of Guy’s explanation to Doris is an example:

Now she had heard everything. He waited for her to speak, but she said nothing. She sat motionless.

“Is there anything more you want to ask me, Doris?” he said at last.

“No, I’ve got rather a headache. I think I shall go to bed.” Her voice was as steady as ever. “I don’t quite know what to say. Of course it’s been all very unexpected. You must give me a little time to think.”\textsuperscript{557}

To her this new development is merely “very unexpected.” Her headache, a stock excuse for female rejection of sex, indicates a core meaning of “a little time to think.” Since

\textsuperscript{555}Ibid. 64.  
\textsuperscript{556}Ibid. 63.  
\textsuperscript{557}Ibid. 65.
Doris fails to question the veracity of Guy’s account she can be regarded as accepting his side of the story as true. As a consequence the uninformed reader might also readily accept as historically and culturally factual his representation of the Malay mother as merchandising the body of her daughter for material benefit, his sense of the deviousness of the Malay woman in her scheme to separate him and Doris, and his view that Malay women are incapable of loving a white man, as they are only interested in “all sorts of perks” when cohabiting with them.

Maugham also reveals how the issue of miscegenation is treated in colonial Britain and Malaya. In stating her decision to leave Guy, Doris reveals that she is haunted by a graphic revulsion at Guy’s sexual past:

When I see the woman and her children in the village I just feel my legs shaking. Everything in this house; when I think of that bed I slept in it gives me goose-flesh ... It’s a physical thing. I can’t help it, it’s stronger than I am. I think of those thin black arms of hers round you and it fills me with a physical nausea. I think of you holding those little black babies in your arms. Oh, it’s loathsome. The touch of you is odious to me. Each night, when I’ve kissed you, I’ve had to clench my
hands and force myself to touch your cheek.\textsuperscript{558}

This passage reveals how miscegenation is viewed and treated as damaging to white prestige in blurring the racial and cultural boundary between coloniser and colonised. In “The Force of Circumstance” a reader will note how Maugham’s narrative brush shows the couple’s exhibition of a supposedly characteristic English stiff upper lip. Thus, it is appropriate that Doris merely asks “[m]ay I speak now?”\textsuperscript{559} to intervene as Guy explains his past. Even their discussion ends with only passive aggression as Doris complains about having a “headache” and asks for a period of six months to think things over.

Within that period the pair plays out the civilised European role well by suppressing their inner feelings and showing the outwardly dignified lives of a colonial couple. At the end, in reply to Doris’s pleading for a separation, Guy meekly answers, “[o]f course I don’t want to keep you here against your will.”\textsuperscript{560} Doris’s inability to keep up a stiff upper lip while feeling herself to have been vilely contaminated is rationalised by her as being “a silly, hysterical woman.”\textsuperscript{561} Again, maturity and compassion are shown in the manner of their departure when Doris “wanted desperately to say one last word of comfort, once more to ask

\textsuperscript{558}Ibid. 71-2.  
\textsuperscript{559}Ibid. 63.  
\textsuperscript{560}Ibid. 72.  
\textsuperscript{561}Ibid.
for his forgiveness.  

562 These episodes provide the reader with a sense that a stiff upper lip might project maturity, responsibility and politeness in the handling of such delicate and potentially explosive marital matters. To Doris Guy’s racial transgression is beyond redemption, a fact that does not escape Guy as he begins again to “put on a loose native jacket and a sarong”  

563 and re-accepts his female Malay companion once Doris leaves the house for good. In Maugham’s elaboration of the theme of miscegenation in the story Doris is a symbol of British public opinion and the Malay woman is a symbol of transgression and racial contamination.

In “The Force of Circumstance” the implication of character distance is that the Malay woman receives no or less sympathy from readers since we are not allowed to delve into her mind to understand and probably sympathise with the rationality behind her actions, if she was indeed scheming as claimed by Guy.  

564 The Malay woman is central to the story but she is peripheral in Maugham’s narrative perspective. And in the greater fictional context of the story she is the villain (rather than a victim of the colonial practice of commodifying resources and the labour of the colonised) who finally manages

562 Ibid. 74.
563 Ibid. 75.
564 Zawiah Yahya has eloquently discussed the status of Guy’s and the Malay companion’s marital relationship from the perspective of Malay/Islamic cultural values. In summary, Zawiah Yahya posits that from a Malay cultural position they are legally married and she further elaborates that the Malay companion’s actions are culturally appropriate from this perspective. See the chapter “Cultural Dialogue: Somerset Maugham, ‘The Force of Circumstance’” in Yahya, Resisting Colonialist Discourse, 98-123.
to destroy Guy and Doris’s marriage.

The reader is first introduced to the existence of the Malay mistress through Doris’s sense of hearing. When Guy goes to the bathhouse she hears an exclamation of his followed by indistinct conversations between him and the Malay woman that ends with Guy’s ordering the woman to leave. While their conversation is barely audible, Doris, nevertheless, could sense Guy’s emotional state but not the Malay woman’s beyond her raised voice and Doris’s assumption that “she had a complaint to make.” Later when Doris and Guy are discussing the woman Doris tells him that she could be the same woman who slipped out of their house earlier in the morning. As she further explains, “I asked her what she wanted and she said something, but I couldn’t understand.” The author clarifies that she communicates merely in “whisper[s]” and “shrill[s].” These assumptions of the Malay woman being beyond human communication help to accentuate her Oriental incomprehensibility and impenetrability.

Marginalisation of the Malay woman also appears in another narrative form. Textually, she appears in the line of Maugham’s narrative vision only to further confirm her characteristic Oriental mysteriousness. For instance, the Malay woman exists as a textual character (rather than being

565Maugham, _Maugham’s Malaysian Stories_, 49.
566Ibid. 49-50.
567Ibid. 48.
568Ibid. 57.
mentioned in conversations) in the episode where she waylays the colonial couple on their way to the tennis court. Midway to the court Doris notices and mentions the Malay woman to her uneasy husband. It is worth quoting how she is described:

They passed her. She was slight and small, with the large, dark, starry eyes of her race and a mass of raven hair. She did not stir as they went by, but stared at them strangely. Doris saw then that she was not quite so young as she had at first thought. Her features were a trifle heavy and her skin was dark, but she was very pretty. She held a small child in her arms. Doris smiled a little as she saw it, but no answering smile moved the woman’s lips. Her face remained impassive. She did not look at Guy, she looked only at Doris, and he walked on as though he did not see her.569

There is a defining feature that is prominent in this description of the Malay woman: the way she looks at them strangely with an impassive face.

The Orient in Western texts has always been associated with a sense of mystery and Maugham is noted for being a "conjurer of the enigmatic East."570 In Maugham’s "The Book-Bag" when news of Featherstone’s engagement with Olive reaches other Europeans, despite their avowed secrecy, Featherstone

569Ibid. 54-5.
570Kuner, "Maugham and the West", 37.
comments that, “[n]ews travels mysteriously in the East.”\textsuperscript{571} In “P&O”, pondering over Gallagher’s inexplicable sickness, Mrs. Hamlyn muses, “[s]trange things happen there.”\textsuperscript{572} Similarly, the inscrutable face or facial expression of the Orient has also become part of a Western narrative of the puzzling East. Most often, the puzzling expression of the Oriental’s face or some of his or her characteristics is likened to the unfathomable expressions of animals and insects. For instance, Bird finds the faces of the Orientals to be unreadable as “the dark liquid eyes are no more intelligible to me than the eyes of oxen. It is the [a]sian mystery all over.”\textsuperscript{573} She also notes the “snake-like step”\textsuperscript{574} of the Malay policeman who guards the Stadhaus and the “vigilant and lynx-eyed” Babu who “wrapped himself in Oriental impassiveness.”\textsuperscript{575} Similarly, Innes writes of a Chinese shopkeeper whose grin at seeing a European memsahib “reminded me of a spider that, instead of the hoped-for fly, finds a strange insect in its web, and does not know what to do with it.”\textsuperscript{576} In “The Force of Circumstance” the water-carrier for the young couple’s household is noted for his sensitive hearing, being able to catch Guy’s “footsteps before they were audible to [Doris],”\textsuperscript{577} indicating the animal-like hearing sensitivity of the loyal servant who is attached

\textsuperscript{571}Maugham, The World Over, 1063.
\textsuperscript{572}Maugham, Maugham’s Malaysian Stories, 145.
\textsuperscript{573}Bird, The Golden Chersonese, 122.
\textsuperscript{574}Ibid. 139.
\textsuperscript{575}Ibid. 172.
\textsuperscript{576}Innes, The Chersonese with the Gilding Off, i, 8.
\textsuperscript{577}Maugham, Maugham’s Malaysian Stories, 58.
Maugham’s representation of the Malay woman merely confirms his appropriation of Orientalism as the discourse from which he draws his knowledge of the Malay woman. By denying the Malay woman the gift of intelligible speech and also by creating an atmosphere of mystery surrounding her actions Maugham reduces her to a symbol of Eastern cultural impenetrability. Allusion to her animalistic traits positions her within the wild/domestic and nature/culture dichotomies. She is viewed as being closer to the wild and nature than to the domestic and cultured. More importantly, she is the villain in luring a European man away from the moral life into the life of sexual immorality. And, as “The Force of Circumstance” and Maugham’s other Malaysian stories testify, once a European man transgresses racial boundaries he cannot be reintegrated into his white culture unscathed.

“THE FOUR DUTCHMEN”

“The Four Dutchmen” is told from the point of view of a narrator presumably male and English. During the course of the narrator’s Eastern travel he meets four Dutch crew members of a tramp called S.S. Utrecht. The narrator does not remember their names beyond their professional positions: captain, chief officer, engineer and supercargo. He is singularly impressed by the immense size of the four men and their
unusual sense of camaraderie with each other. The narrator and the four sailors eventually part ways but a month later he reads news about the trial and acquittal of the supercargo and the chief engineer for the murder of a Malay woman. Apparently the captain has taken a Malay woman on board the boat, an act that causes frictions among the homosocial sailors affronted by the captain’s excessive heterosexual attention to the woman to the neglect of his friends. One night the supercargo and chief engineer hear a shot coming from the chief engineer’s cabin where they find him shot dead by the captain with the Malay woman cowering behind the door. The captain then commits suicide. The next morning the Malay woman is missing, presumably strangled by the remaining friends and thrown overboard during the night. The friends are then arrested on suspicion of murder but, as the narrator explains, they are acquitted due to lack of evidence.

My interest in this story is stimulated by my speculation about what the ending might have been if the captain were infatuated with a white woman. Would Maugham have written such an unceremoniously tragic end for the white woman? Or would the European-governed judiciary have been more strenuous in tracking and verifying the status of the white woman instead of dismissing the case due to lack of evidence?578 In some of

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578 Such investigative vigilance and endurance are shown in the short story "Footprints in the Jungle" in the murder case of Bronson, a European planter who was shot and killed in the jungle. Gaze, the head of police tells the narrator his investigative methods and willingness to wait until
Maugham's Eastern stories - "The Letter", "Footprints in the Jungle", "Flotsam and Jetsam" and "Before the Party" - murders are committed by European characters and the victims are also Europeans. In all these stories, interestingly, the murderers are never caught and successfully prosecuted. But these flawed characters are, in a sense, humanised since the reader is given access to the reasons for their crimes. The killing of the Malay woman in "The Four Dutchmen" is singular in its callousness and lack of a strong motive (since the narrator cannot quite clearly establish the event that leads to the murder of the chief officer by the captain). We can only understand the murder of the Malay woman by positing that Maugham has already established her guilt by her being the exotic and seductive female Other and nothing else.

In the expository episode, Maugham has already opened out the possibility that heterosexual desire, and especially cross-racial desire, might test homosocial bonds and fidelity. The narrator notes that the Dutchmen "had been shipmates ever since they came out from Holland" and had "been on this run together for five years and ... [t]hey had made up their minds that when the first of them retired they would all retire." In a different narrative twist the narrator explains that the captain had a weakness for native women:

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580Ibid. 119.
the captain was very susceptible to the charms of the native girls and his thick English became almost unintelligible from emotion when he described to me the effect they had on him. One of these days he would buy himself a house on the hills in Java and marry a pretty little Javanese.^[581]

This weakness is not approved of by all of his friends, especially the chief officer. As the chief officer remarks:

"Silly all dat is. Silly. She goes mit all your friends and de house boys and everybody. By the time you retire, my dear, vot you’ll vant vill be a nurse, not a vife."

"Me?" cried the skipper. "I shall want a vife ven I’m eighty!"^[582]

Maugham suggests that the captain is a victim of the alluring exoticism of the Malay woman with the passive phrases "susceptible to the charm" and "the effect they had on him." This suggestion relieves the European man of responsibility for his uncontrollable libidinal desire for the female Other. In the conversation that ensues between the chief officer and the captain, the officer excoriates the licentious nature of the native girl who is likely to be promiscuous with every man she meets. This is because sex in the Orient is always viewed,
in colonial literature, as legally and culturally unregulated by notions of morality and fidelity as understood in the West.

"The Four Dutchmen" is a story about a story about a story. The short story is told from a narrator’s point of view. In turn, the story about the incident is related to the narrator by the manager of a hotel where the narrator stays. But the most important part of the incident, what actually happened, is told by either one of the two remaining friends during the trial since they are the only witnesses to the chain of events that lead to the deaths. What is missing from the story (that serves as a narrative lacunae left to the reader’s imagination) is what actually happened to the Malay woman. The effect of such a technique is that the reader is presented with a continuum of character distance between the narrator and the Malay woman. The reader is given access to only the thoughts and emotions of the narrator who is the interpreter of the events.

There are, however, two defining features of his interpretation of the deaths. One is the ambiguity of the chain of events. The narrator receives the news of the incident in bits and pieces ranging from newspaper stories to a conversation with the manager who himself is unsure about parts of the story. The sense of ambiguity is heightened by the narrator’s own conjectures about the turn of events. As the narrator explains, “there were things I wanted to know
that he couldn’t tell me. It was all confused. It was unbelievable. What actually had happened was only conjecture."583 These statements indicate the mist of uncertainty and confusion surrounding the incident. The second feature of the interpretation is the narrator’s sympathetic partiality for the Dutch sailors. Statements such as “[i]t would spoil everything” and “[i]t was the end of the good fellowship that had so long obtained between the four fat men”584 indicate where the narrator’s (and author’s) sympathies lie. The narrator’s conclusion reveals the ideological underpinning of the author’s narrative:

throughout the East Indies they knew that the supercargo and the chief engineer had executed justice on the trollop who had caused the death of the two men they loved.585

There are incongruities in this short story that reveal how Maugham as an author manipulates the images and representations of the Malay woman to suit his tale. While constructing a narrative based on ambiguity and uncertainty Maugham manages to guide the reader, through the narrator, to be sympathetic to the actions of the two murderers of the Malay woman. Thus in the end, locals “knew” that “justice” had been carried out by the two remaining friends. This certainty, the “knew” mentioned in the story, is not developed in the

583 Ibid. 123.
584 Ibid.
585 Ibid. 124.
story itself but is based on the certainty of the guilt of the Malay woman. And that guilt is produced, not so much by what she has done but by what she was - an immoral and licentious female Other who leads innocent European men toward the road of degeneration and depravity. In the end she is the unwitting villain in the drama.

Thus, like the nameless and voiceless Malay woman in "The Force of Circumstance", the Malay woman in "The Four Dutchmen" is also villainous due to the character distance technique used by Maugham to suit his tale. In the story she is denied the voice to tell her own perspective on the events. Instead, in both the short stories the stock images of the speechless, sensual and depraved Malay woman are an essential element. Without these pre-determined images there would be textual incoherencies due to narrative lacunae in the structure of the stories.

There is another aspect of this short story that is worthy of discussion. I am also drawn to the narrator’s justification of the idea that the two friends have “executed justice” that seals the fate of the Malay woman in the narrative as the guilty party, or “trollop”:

The captain had found them in bed together and had killed the chief. How he had discovered what was going on didn’t seem to be known, nor what was the meaning of the intrigue. Had the chief induced the
girl to come to his cabin in order to get back on
the captain, or had she, knowing his ill-will and
anxious to placate him, lured him to become her lover? It was a mystery that would never be
solved.\textsuperscript{586}

Another possible interpretation is that the chief officer might have forced the Malay woman to his room and attempted to impose himself on her. The only certainty is that the Malay woman was found in bed with the chief officer. The truth is secreted with the demise of the Malay woman, the captain and the chief. As the narrator explains, conjectures abound. But in both scenarios the narrator insinuates that the Malay woman is a willing party to promiscuity with the chief officer and sexual immorality is a way of life of the Eastern woman, as the officer has already warned.

The only guilt that we can establish on the part of the Malay woman is being found in bed with the officer. So what precisely is the crime she commits that justifies death by strangulation and unceremonious dumping into the sea? Is the breaking up of male friendship a capital crime that should be applauded by “all throughout the East Indies”? As the author suggests, the Malay woman’s guilt in this story is in her daring to transgress the racial boundary between the ruler and the ruled, the civilised and the savage, and the superior and

\textsuperscript{586}Ibid.
the inferior. She is guilty of undermining the racial stability and hierarchy of the colonial world with her sexual liaison with a white man. Thus, this vigilante meting out of justice can only be understood through the lens of Eurocentrism with a stock idea of the female Other as inherently licentious and immoral.587

5.3 CONCLUSION

As in other parts of the colonised world, the later phase of colonialism in Malaya separated the ruler and the ruled even more strenuously. And this social threshold was hardened by colonial perceptions of miscegenation and its concomitant degenerative influence on white prestige. Maugham’s “The Force of Circumstance” and “The Four Dutchmen” exemplify these colonial perceptions of white prestige and the sexuality and degenerative influence of Malay women. And as the two short stories testify, once a white man transgresses he is a persona non grata to white civilisation. Only exile and death await such characters.

But Somerset Maugham, as a writer, is a product of the 587 Kuner explains the three textual genres by which Maugham aligns his themes. The plays are typically comedic, the short stories normally invoke the mysteriousness of the East and the novels that mostly deal with the West reveal his role as the “reporter of humanity’s fetters” (37). But what I wish to draw our attention here is how Kuner explains that in Maugham’s tales of the West, “the promiscuous woman usually has the familiar heart of gold”(38). This representation of the licentious Western woman with a benign heart provides a stark contrast with the promiscuous female Other whose heart, as well as morality, is beyond redemption. See Kuner, "Maugham and the West", 37-8.
historical temporality of his era. And even more so, he is not as enlightened as Conrad or as sympathetic as Swettenham. Maugham is merely an articulator of a collective ideology. And as T.S. Eliot explains a writer must have a "historical sense" in order for him or her to be more "acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity." Understandably, Eliot is referring to the long tradition of literature that informs and defines the writer’s own temporal and geopolitical consciousness as he or she begins to put pen to paper. But at the same time the sense of history will also be a part of his or her literary awareness derived from the long Western historical tradition. As Somerset Maugham’s Eastern tales indicate, the tradition can both enrich our perception of one reality as well as blind us to another.

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A narrative is never neutral. Behind each word there is always an ideology that encourages interpretation and meaning to be understood in certain ways. Whether some of the meanings are consciously or unconsciously intended by the author is irrelevant since it is the author’s ideology that shapes the sentences, paragraphs and the text into a cohesive whole. This holds true of the colonialist narratives that I have analysed above.

In my thesis I have brought to light the pervasive nature of Eurocentrism as an ideology in a range of colonial texts. Eurocentrism is complicit in the production of cultural discourse grounded in dichotomous representations of Self and Other as represented in the simplistic white/black binary. Further, I have highlighted the centrality of the representation of the Malay female Other in selected colonial texts about or set in Malaya as an index of Eurocentrism. I have also sought to critique some of the images of Malay women as not reflective of reality but rather representative of the pervasive power of Eurocentrism as an ideology that helps construct those realities based mostly on representations produced from the epistemological mould of Orientalism.

The three narrative genres that I have studied place different emphases on their subject matter and even major themes. The travel narrative genre in Chapter Three takes the Malay nation as its key subject matter. The writings of the
authors are mostly based on their experience in the Malay world either as part of the machinery of empire or merely as a sojourner before departing for some other exotic Eastern location. However, Swettenham, Thomson and Innes can claim to have lived a part of their lives in Malaya. They spent years there either as an officer, a professional or, in Innes’s case, a wife accompanying her husband. Bird, on the other hand, is a mere five-week sojourner. At the outset of The Golden Chersonese Bird’s account appears to be based more on visual objectivity compared to the judgmental attitude of other narrators. Nonetheless, at times she draws on the strength of a Eurocentric episteme to explain phenomena beyond her visual surveillance. For example, the notion of the lethargic nature of Malay women could only be drawn from Eurocentric stereotype, given the short duration of her stay in Malaya that limited her ability to make judgments that normally require an extended period of study.

In this chapter I have included the narratives of male and female colonial writers. This is deliberate on my part to determine if there are patterns recognisable in their writings based on their gender. As the research shows there are differences in terms of how the male and female colonialist writers that I have chosen cast the images of the Malay woman. What is obvious is that Swettenham and Thomson, besides stating the stock savage and cruel nature of the Malay, are preoccupied with the notion of the unmitigated sexual
instincts of Malay women. Their views are that Malay women are inclined to fulfil their sexual desires given the opportunity even beyond the social and religious norms that bind their personal conduct. Stories of Malay women’s illicit sexual encounters are anecdotes in their narratives. Thomson goes even further in explaining the moral decadence of British officials who marry Eastern women. The same degenerative influence of Malay women is also one of the major themes of Conrad’s and Maugham’s Malay fiction.

Bird’s and Innes’s texts tread a different thematic territory in conceptualising the subjectivity of Malay women. What is different is their disinterest in the subject of Malay women’s sexuality/promiscuity that so interests male writers. Rather, Bird’s views of the Malay women focus more on their social and intellectual qualities. As for Innes, besides remarking on the cultural patriarchy that constrains the Malay women, is fascinated with the notion of Malay female savagery symbolised by Tunku Chi. Bird’s and Innes’s gender also influences the formation of their own colonial identity vis-à-vis the Malay world. Therefore the reader will notice the ease in articulating their sense of racial superiority but hesitation in defining their gendered position within the colonial setting. Ultimately, however, Bird’s and Innes’s narratives are aligned to the grand narrative of imperial discourse. Thus, instead of negating imperialism and Eurocentrism as inherently forms of cultural and ideological
violence imposed on other cultures, their narratives actually endorse British imperialism as producing positive effects on indigenous societies. And their representations of the Malay woman, although different in focus, still adhere to the same Eurocentric ideology.

In Chapter Four I have analysed two of Conrad’s Malay novels. From my perspective, Conrad’s two Malay novels are the most complex texts that I analyse in this thesis. This is due to the fact that Conrad’s writings are more psychological and that a fuller understanding of his texts should focus on his use of artistic forms rather than narrative plots. As Peter Nazareth explains, with regard to Conrad’s texts, “[i]t is not just the what happened in the story that is important, however; it is in the way the story is told that meaning is to be found.” 589 As I have analysed in the chapter on Conrad it is through these narrative loopholes that we can find his ideology with regard to the Malay nation and Malay women.

It is true that considering the era in which he wrote his fictions, Conrad’s sense of humanity was far more advanced than any of his peers for showing greater sympathy for non-Europeans. I am aware of that. But at the same time I am also aware of the fact that there are many shades of kindness and sympathy. Achebe, as I have stated, is too harsh on Conrad considering the era in which Conrad lived. But Conrad’s habit

of using derogatory adjectives such as savage or semi-savage to describe Malay female characters should not be cast aside as mere accident of word selection. They are, from my perspective, also tied to Conrad’s perception of the realities of Malay culture and its women. Such concentration of disparaging words, images and metaphors could not but be construed as reflective of Conrad’s own ideology fabricating the real conditions of the world of Others.

Conrad is a mere ship-deck observer of the Malay world since he does not have the experience of living among the Malay people and the Malay culture that he encountered. He, therefore, lacks the in-depth appreciation that a writer like Swettenham has. He is a bystander who sees firsthand the machinery and machination of imperialism and laments the contradiction between words and deeds. But he feels that had imperialism been able to reconcile intents and actions the civilising of indigenous cultures would be a worthy ideal. This is the cause of his ambivalent feelings about imperialist enterprises. And this reveals how he actually feels about the Malays (or Africans). The fact is that Conrad regards indigenous cultures as what he consistently labels them. This fact also enables us to understand the real intended meaning of his representations of the Malay culture and Malay women as savage, degenerate or degenerative.

In Chapter Five I have explained how Maugham’s narrative technique of character distancing has portrayed Malay women as
voiceless villains. Unlike Conrad, Maugham is not generous with his gift of voice to the female Other. He consciously writes for Western audiences and his themes draw on gossip and scandals that would interest them. Eastern characters are merely an incidental part of the exotic settings. His assumptions are borrowed from the long tradition of Oriental discourse and they need only to correspond and fit into the overall theme of his narratives. Thus, whenever he utilises Malay women as part of the narrative plot they are usually portrayed with reference to stock Eurocentric assumptions—promiscuous, vengeful and mysterious.

But why are Conrad’s narratives more generous in bestowing voice on indigenous characters than Maugham? Can we attribute it to the historical circumstances that confront the two writers? I submit that there are bases to this narrative difference. For one, there are certainly differences as well as similarities in Conrad’s and Maugham’s worlds as far as European predominance was concerned. It is true that in Conrad’s and Maugham’s world most of the non-European nations were still dominated and colonised by European powers. Europe still predominated in political, material and intellectual spheres when Conrad’s anti-heroes fall at the feet of female indigenes and Maugham’s white characters dabble in their schemes and plots.

But in Maugham’s colonial world European supremacy was not as secure as in Conrad’s. There were numerous warning
signs and premonitions of the eventual demise of empire as alluded to by writers such as Bruce-Lockhart and Aldous Huxley. Perhaps this was the reason why the display of white prestige was more imperative than the exhibition of men-o-war or military parades at Eastern ports. It was certainly more effective and less costly. White prestige defined the racial barrier of perceived superiority over inferiority, of benign rule over despotism and of culture over savagery. It was a façade designed to put the colonised in perpetual awe of the coloniser. And Maugham’s tales merely unlock the anxieties of the façade being discovered.

Maugham’s Malay tales are also distinct from Conrad’s in their concern for Europeans as a collective rather than as individuals. Conrad’s European male characters are colonial pioneers of sorts. Almayer and Willems are islands to themselves as they are physically and psychically separated from their European communities. In Conrad’s Malay novels the central European male characters are confronting their personal moral degeneration when they commit to sexual liaisons with Malay women. Thus, their confrontation with their moral conscience and eventual demise are theirs alone. Consequently, they die alone and are forgotten.

Unlike Conrad’s individual anti-heroes who live in isolation with their indigenous partners, Maugham’s European characters are part of a larger European community. Europeans during Maugham’s era lived in cantons separated from the
indigenous population that they ruled. And Maugham’s Eastern tales are somehow connected to the concern for the wellbeing of Europeans as a community. The stakes of miscegenation, in this sense, are higher. In “The Force of Circumstance” it is Guy and Doris’s marriage, and in “The Four Dutchmen” it is the bond that ties the four friends together. When the European males trespass over the racial barrier it is not only their individual moral wellbeing that is in danger. More than that, they also imperil the integrity of the white communities of which they are a part. In Maugham’s short stories miscegenation destroys social bonds as well as the individual: Guy and Doris’s marriage falls apart and the friendship of the four friends is in tatters as two of them lie dead. Therefore, we can sense Maugham’s concern about the breakdown of the racial barrier. To Maugham miscegenation will dilute the barrier and that, in turn, would lead to the demise of European preeminence.

In general an underlying premise of all the texts I have analysed in this thesis resides in the notions and definitions of morality that predicate the universalisation of the experience of Europeans and Malays. In this thesis, the repercussion of the repertoire of images presented is the signification of Europeans as moral and virtuous and Malay women as licentious and degenerative. Furthermore, the Malay women’s immorality is regarded as inherently part of her cultural and gender subjectivity. Therefore we discover that
Western fiction such as Conrad’s and Maugham’s is able to construct a seemingly seamless narrative coherence and rationality merely by assuming such representations of the Malay female Other to be normative.

Eventually, questions remain as to the contribution to and implication of this thesis for the propagation of knowledge especially in the field of the Humanities. I propose two areas in which my thesis may contribute to the advancement of knowledge. As I have stated earlier, this thesis is a resistance reading against hegemony especially in the realm of colonial discourse criticism. But it is not limited to such a sphere. Our societies are complex. Even within a single society the different social and ethnic structures may accentuate the problematic of identity and subjectivity. This is especially true where the power to shape reality resides with a dominant class or ethnicity thereby leaving the subaltern to the mercy of the dominating gaze of the strong. It is within this totalising regime that the methodology and argument of this thesis may be helpful in providing a platform for centre-staging the voices of the marginal. By positing the fluidity of identity and values and by acknowledging the equally valid voices of the marginalised, a more progressive and pluralistic ideological consciousness can develop for a more successful and harmonious co-existence of peoples and cultures.

At another level this research may make a pedagogical
contribution to Malaysian educational syllabi. Texts analysed in this research may be used as part of the reading materials at higher secondary or tertiary level. Since Malaysia is culturally multiracial these texts can also be read alongside works by local writers of different cultural backgrounds who make issues of subjectivity and identity-formation central to the themes of their narratives. The approach of my thesis might offer a model for other relevant issues related to race and culture to be analysed in a more methodical manner. This thesis also opens the way for research into other areas where representation of Malay women is crucial. One area where extended research is possible is in Western representations of Malay women in texts written after colonialism, by Western authors such as Anthony Burgess, David Piper and William Riviere. A possible research trajectory is finding if the representations of women in Malaysia still follow the same Eurocentric ideological perspectives or if the images have changed somewhat.

Discourse and counter-discourse will and should remain relevant in the context of the globalised world as different cultures and races collude and collide for each other's interests. By allowing for the multiplicity of voices to be heard we can ensure that no singularly dominant voice is able to dictate its own version of reality only. In the end, the polyphonicity of different voices will, hopefully, contribute to a more positive acceptance of difference as part of the
many faces of humanity, be it social, cultural or ideological.
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