

BRITISH COLONIALISM, COLONIAL THOUGHT AND THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY COLONIZED MALAY STATES: A REASSESSMENT¹

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***Abstract:** This paper is a preliminary chapter that reflects the overall idea of the research that will be carried out. This research aims to debunk, deconstruct and reassess colonialism, colonial thought on and about the 19th and 20th century Malay states. It will concentrate on fictional texts and historical works that discuss the Malays and the Malay colonized states of the 19th and 20th century. Some of the texts are Sir Hugh Clifford's fictional writings, Anthony Burgess' *The Malayan Trilogy* which consists of three novels written in 1956, 1958 and 1959 each. The colonial historical writings on Malaya that will be analyzed are Richard Winstedt's texts that were written at the peak of colonialism. Misconceptions about the Malays and their rulers will be dealt with and given a new reading from the 21st century Malaysian native intellectuals' point of view. It will be a rereading of the literature and history of 19th and 20th century colonial Malaya. There was an unequal binary opposition present in the colonial writings that dictated the idea of the superior West and the inferior Orient. This research will use Postcolonial and Occidental theories to analyze the literature and historical texts. The expected output of this research is a new way of thinking and writing about and deciphering fiction and history on Malaya, from the native intellectual's point of view. The significance of this project is that it will work in educating the society at large (the Malaysians) as well as the international public on the misconceptions of the Malays that were projected by the colonizers. It cannot be denied that there was an unequal binary opposition present in the colonial fictional and historical writings on Malaya that dictated the idea of the superior West and the inferior Malays.*

INTRODUCTION

This research aims to debunk, deconstruct and reassess colonialism, colonial thought on and about the 19th and 20th century Malay states. It will concentrate on fictional texts and historical works that discuss the Malays and the Malay colonized states of the 19th and 20th century. Some of the texts are Sir Hugh Clifford's fictional writings, Anthony Burgess' *The Malayan Trilogy* which consists of three novels

¹ This is the first chapter of a book that is being written on British colonialism in Malaya.

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written in 1956, 1958 and 1959 each. The colonial historical writings on Malaya that will be analyzed are Richard Winstedt's texts that were written at the peak of colonialism. Misconceptions about the Malays and their rulers will be dealt with and given a new reading from the 21st century Malaysian native intellectuals' point of view. It will be a rereading of literature and history and a thorough analysis and criticism will be done of the literature produced by the colonizers of Malaya during the 19th and 20th century. There was an unequal binary opposition present in the colonial writings that dictated the idea of the superior West and the inferior Orient. The perimeters were clear cut. This research aims to debunk, reassess and deconstruct the binary opposition. It will use Postcolonial and Occidental theories to analyze the literature and historical texts. It will use the famous Orientalist critique Edward Said, the foremost Postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon, Subaltern theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Occidental theorist Venn Couze to build a theoretical framework in order to debunk, deconstruct and reassess the Orientalist idea of and about the Malays.

The expected output of this research is a new way of thinking and writing about and deciphering fiction and history on Malaya, from the native intellectual's point of view. The significance of this project is that it will contribute to a new reading of colonial fictional and historical texts about the Malays and shed light on issues that were 'created' by the West to emphasize the binary opposition between the West and the Malays. It will work in educating the society at large (the Malaysians) as well as the international public on the misconceptions of the Malays that were projected by the colonizers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This Literature Review will present and discuss theories, literature and criticism related to the proposed research. It sets out to define the idea of colonialism via Postcolonial and Occidental theories and later goes into the proposed texts as well as related research.

The International Theorists

To understand the colonials and their discourse we have to look at Orientalism closely. Edward Said has classified the Orientalist and Orientalism into three different categories. His first definition of it states that an Orientalist practices Orientalism when he or she teaches, writes about, researchers the Orient and its people. It includes antropologists, sociologists, historians, and philologists. Said says Orientalism "lives on academically through its theses about the Orient and the Oriental" (Said 1978: 2). The second definition given by Said is that Orientalism exists because of ontological and epistemological differences between the East and

the West. This is done by poets, novelists, philosophers, theorists, economists, and imperialists. Said argues that they worked on producing massively complex theories, epics, novels, social information, political writings about the Orient, its people, its culture, its psyche, its fate and much more (Said 1978: 2-3). The third interpretation is that Orientalism was institutionalized at the end of the 18th century to allow the colonizers to make statements about it, give them the power to give views on it, describe, colonize it, live in the Orient and teach Orientalism. This created domination, authority, and a reconstruction of the Orient vis-à-vis Western style (Said 1978: 3).

The process labeled as Orientalism is didactic. According to Said it is a discipline that constitutes knowledge about the Orient that was institutionalized by the West towards the Orientals that is described by the West, towards the Orientalists that writes about the Orient, and towards the consumers of Orientalism that do not know the Orient first hand and the truth about it. The 'truth' about the Orient is not based on a physical Orient but on how the Orientalists understands it and portrays it. (1978: 67).

Franz Fanon's theory about the White man and the Black man is important in this research. This theory will be used to read the selected texts since the Western Orientalists generally looked with disdain at the other races in this world that were not White. They postulated the idea of the inferior Other and the superior West. The crimes of colonialism bread individuals that were hybrid and mimic men that were not truly accepted by the West and neither were they able to fit in with their own society.

The binary opposition between the African and the White man is depicted clearly by Fanon. According to him the White man works hard to attain humanism since they think that they are more superior than the Other. While the Africans want to be 'white' because they want to prove to the White man their intellectual capability is at par with that of the West (Fanon 1970: 9). Fanon argues that there are two dimensions to the African, one with his African friends and the other with the White man. He says the African shows different characteristics when facing each of the race because of colonial subjugation (Fanon 1970: 13). According to Fanon when the African communicates with the White man he becomes more aware of things, and if his psychic is not strong his ego will be destroyed and he will stop becoming an *actional* person. His aim is towards the White man and only the White man can give him his self respect (Fanon 1970: 105). Fanon concludes that the African's fate move towards the White man (1970: 9).

Let us discuss the dual relationship between the West and the East. The West 'stole' the history of the Other and interpreted it according to its own belief and

mindset and has become a figure that consumes the East and is put on the pedestal and worshipped by the Other. This is not only discussed by Fanon but also by other postcolonial critiques such as Ranajit Guha in his writings about the subalterns and Gayatri Chakravoty Spivak in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*

The history of the Other is viewed by way of Western history. It cannot be denied that Western history and a lot of Third World nations' histories are interlinked because of colonialism. However, the West writes the Other's history as if it began with the arrival of the West in the East. The nearest example is Malaysia. If we look at our history from the Western perspective. Pulau Pinang was founded by the British Sir Francis Light and Singapore also by a British man, Sir Stamford Raffles. The historical fact that once Pulau Pinang used to be part of the Kedah Sultanate and Singapore was founded and named by Sang Nila Utama is not emphasized.

Subaltern, a term widely used in theories and postcolonial criticism today is actually a military term applied to officers under the rank of captain. Its current reference has altered from the original concept. The usage in theories has been borrowed from Gramsci to define any oppressed person. Yet, Ania Loomba argues that subaltern does not mean only those lower in hierarchy. The "meanings of subalternity and domination" must be kept open (Loomba: 239-240) though it began with the idea of labeling the repressed.

The scheme of recovering the voice of the subaltern was initiated by a group of Indian historians who have been labeled as the Subaltern Studies Group (SSG) lead by Ranajit Guha. They have used Gramsci to rewrite Indian history from below and to bring the margins to the center of historical discourse. Their discourse has been criticized extensively and one of the most prominent critiques of SSG is Gayatri Chakravorthy Spivak. Spivak has come up with her own theory of the subaltern. Her concern is well presented in her essay "Can the subaltern speak?" (1988).

Spivak criticizes SSG's project because she is cautious of the fact of too easy a retrieval of the voice or agency of the subaltern. Spivak argues that to recover the voice easily "would be to undermine the devastating effects of colonial power which was so pervasive that it re-wrote intellectual, legal and cultural systems" (Loomba: 52). She questions the assumption that the postcolonial historian is able to recapture the position of the subaltern. She is for the postcolonial intellectuals to bring to fore the suffering of the oppressed and to provide their perspective, but the intellectual *must* represent the subaltern.

The Occidental theory will also be used in this research in order to come up with a theoretical framework that will be used to read the selected fictional and

historical texts. What is Occidentalism precisely? Occidentalism is a Western agenda to promote itself and to set itself apart from the Other.

Occidentalism consists of many things. Firstly it is a conceptual space. Secondly it is a historical space. Within these spaces a particular narrative of history and a particular narrative of subject have been constituted (Couze 2000: 2). The narratives have become hegemonic with modernization. They have effects throughout the world because of the universal scope of the project of modernity and the global reach of European colonization.

In order to understand Occidentalism we have to look at two facts. They are European colonialism and Western imperialism (Couze 2000: 2). These are accomplishments of capitalism of technocratic reason to find reasons for the triumph of modernity especially in its Occidental form (Couze 2000: 2). In other words the colonization of colonized countries has been legitimated through the management of the colonizers of the countries' resources technically. The modernization that this has brought to the Third World countries is applauded and justified through Occidental metanarratives. Occidentalism is a project of the West to show the interconnections between the West and the Other.

Malaysian Scholars on Colonialism and Postcolonialism

Let us now look at Malaysian scholars who have done research on colonialism, Postcolonialism, Occidentalism and colonial fiction. The National Poet Laureate has written an essay on Clifford, as well as two Malay authors and he discusses colonialism from the Western point of view as well as the native writers' lens. His essay is titled *Turning the Pahang Colonial Page: Narratives of Definition in Three Phases* (2009). The author concentrates on narratives of Pahang, a state in Malaysia which was colonized in 19th century by the British. Muhammad discusses the minds of the authors with regards to colonialism.

The works analyzed are Hugh Clifford's *Saleh: A Prince of Malaya*, that was published in 1926 and depicts an age of rebellion against the British from 1891–95; the second, Ishak Haji Muhammad's *The Prince of Mount Tahan*, was first published in Malay in 1937 during high colonial times, and contains a subplot of that same end-of-century uprising; and finally, Keris Mas's *Jungle of Hope*, first published in Malaysia 31 years after the 1957 Independence, is one of Malaysia's first truly post-colonial novels.

This research differs from Muhammad's study, because it does not look into Malay writers and their mindset. It is going to concentrate on colonial fiction and historical texts of the 19th and twentieth century Malaya. Muhammad's scope is limited to Pahang only, whereas this research will look at other Malay states too.

An eminent Malaysian scholar Zawiah Yahya has discussed Burgess's text *The Malayan Trilogy* using deconstruction in her book *Resisting Colonialist Discourse* (1994). However, this research goes further than the one done by her. It uses fiction as well as historical texts to question, reassess, debunk and deconstruct, and set right the colonial pictures of the Malay Peninsular and the Malays.

Halimah Mohamed Ali in her book *Orientalism From Within: Arundhati Roy and Her Contemporaries* (2011) uses postcolonial theorists like Edward Said and Franz Fanon to read and criticize Indian-English postcolonial writers. She labels these writers as Orientalists from Within, that is they are native's of India who produce Orientalism from within their own culture by depicting their own people in a negative light. Halimah is aware of the Western Orientalist project, but she goes further to argue that a new form of colonialism is taking place, neo-colonialism which is present *vis-à-vis* the postcolonial writers. She argues that these writers are dominated by the West to produce Western style Orientalism of their own people. This current research is different from Halimah's research because it goes back in time and looks at the Orientalist texts of colonial Malaya be they fiction or history. Halimah only analyzes and criticizes postcolonial contemporary Indian-English fiction, though at times she refers to British colonial writers like Rudyard Kipling and E.M. Forster.

Another research produced by Halimah Mohamed Ali is titled *The Occidental Agenda in Jules Verne's Around the World in Eighty Days* (2009). This paper uses Couze Venn's theory of Occidentalism to discuss and read Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*. The paper explores how Verne portrays India and Indian's in his fiction. Venn's theory of Occidentalism will be taken up in the current research. However, the difference is that the texts will be British colonial texts, both fiction and historical on colonial Malaya.

Mohamad Rashidi Mohd. Pakri in his essay *Keluarga Maxwell dan Kajian Mereka Tentang Adat Istiadat Melayu Utara* (2012) discusses colonial writings by Sir Peter Benson Maxwell and his grandson

Sir George Maxwell. He looks at the Maxwells' rendition of northern Malay culture. Mohamad concludes that though the Maxwells' through their writings elevated Western culture as a part of the imperial agenda, it does not mean that that they did not understand Malay culture. However, Mohamad does not make use of any theoretical framework to read the writings of the colonizers. Further, he does not discuss fiction. The current research is more extensive than Mohamad's research. It will look at more authors and different genres, fiction and history of the colonized Malays that were produced by the British colonizers. A theoretical framework built from the Postcolonial Theories and Occidental Theory will also be used to read the selected texts, which is not present in Mohamad's discourse.

Rahimah A. Hamid in her text *Fiksiyen Pascakolonial: Yang Menjajah dan Dijajah* (2010) discusses postcolonial Malaysian and Indonesian literature. The writers that she concentrates on are Keris Mas from Malaysian, and Indonesian writer Mochtar Lubis. They were chosen for this research because of their interest in the politics of their country. Their interest lead them to produce literature that is political and that disseminates postcolonial discourse. This books looks at colonialism from the natives' point of view. The atrocities of colonialism that are projected by the two postcolonial writers are discussed. The difference between Malaysian and Indonesian nationalism is also looked into. Though Rahimah uses a postcolonial framework , her research is different from the current research because it does not concentrate on colonial writings and history. It is not a reassessment, debunking and deconstruct colonial fiction and history. Rahimah reads the native's point of view of and about the colonizers, British in Malaysia and the Dutch in Indonesia, while this research is an effort to read and criticize the British binary opposition of Malaya and its people.

Discussion the Malaysian corpus on postcolonialism is not complete without looking at Syed Hussein Alt-Atas' *Myth of the Lazy Native* (1976). Syed Hussein Al-Atas's pondering of why the Western colonizer's considered the natives of the Malay archipelago as lazy produced this book, even before Said published his *Orientalism* in 1978. Al-Atas criticizes colonial discourse that label the natives of the archipelago as lazy. Where Al-Atas looked at the myth of the lazy native in the Malay archipelago, the current research only concentrates on colonial Malaya and writings of the British colonizers.

The Colonial Texts

Sir Hugh Clifford and other Orientalists though well knowing that the countries that they colonized had their own histories and past denied it. Even if they acknowledged the past and history of the colonized natives they treated them with disdain and saw them as inferior to their own history and past. The Orientalist discourses legalized colonialism and propounded the theory of the superior West and the inferior Orient.

Clifford through his writings on Malaya portrays wicked despots for our consumption. Malaya was a land filled with kings and princes. Clifford was posted in Perak and Pahang two princely states in Malaya. He was posted to Perak at the age of seventeen and later he went to Pahang at 21. Perak is a state where there are many Rajas and the throne is not hereditary. The Rajas are chosen by concession. While in Pahang the throne is hereditary. Clifford's picture of the royal rulers of Malaya were as despots. Thus, we will look at how Clifford painted the picture of Malayan rulers by analyzing his writings. Do these rulers fit the label of despots?

Being a westerner Clifford uses an Orientalist lense to look at Malaya, its rulers and its people. We will discuss in the reading of Clifford's works how true Said's definition is of the orientalist and his mind. Clifford has produced quite a number of books with relation to Malaya. Some of them are *In Court And Kampung* (1927), *Heroes in Exile* (1906), *At the court of Pelesu and other Malayan stories* (1993), *Saleh: a prince of Malaya* (1989), *Bush-whacking and other Asiatic tales and memories* and many more. For the purpose of this research two of his novels, *Saleh: A Prince of Malaya* and *Since the Beginning: A Tale of An Eastern Land* (1898) will be analyzed as well as two collection of stories *In court and Kampung* and *Further Side of Silence* using a framework formed from the Postcolonial and Occidental theories.

Saleh: A Prince of Malaya (1989) is about a Malay prince from the court of Pelesu who has been sent to England to study. He lives with an English couple and their children from the age of 13. He becomes anglicized and feels a part of the English world. However, one night his feelings are hurt by and English girl, Alice Fairfax, that he has fallen in love with. Through snippets of conversation between Alice and an English man that Saleh eaves drops to he feels Othered. He is heart broken since Alice says she entertains Saleh out of pity. He then leaves England and goes back to the court of Pelesu. It is this character's life that will be read and analysed in this research. We will see how he becomes a hybrid. He is the native intellectual that is referred to by Frantz Fanon in his work *Wretched of the Earth*. He is also Fanon's black man in a white mask, the hybrid of the British empire. The half native half western men that the British created to be intermediaries between them and the natives.

Clifford's other novel is titled '*Since The Beginning': A Tale of An Eastern Land* (1898). This story revolves around Frank Austin a British who is posted to Malaya. The setting is Pelesu and Kuala Senangan. It begins with the locals, we read about the king and his vociferous sexual appetite and one of his concubine Maimunah, a native woman, who is punished for having a lover. We are not introduced to our hero until the second chapter of part one of the novel. The hero seems to be "...one of the White men—a slender band, sprinkled sparsely over the East, - for whom things Oriental, and 'natives' of all sorts and conditions, possess an overpowering fascination" (Clifford 1898: 22). Clifford depicts that it is his fascination with the East that destroys him in the end. The moral that this novel preaches to its readers is that it is dangerous for a White man to associate himself too familiarly with natives. The price maybe one's life and also the lives of one's loved ones. It is a very strong text that warns the white man of the perils of turning native.

In court and kampung: Being tales and sketches of native life in the Malay Peninsula (1927) are a collection of stories that have been told to Clifford and some of them are from his own observation. These are stories about the natives of Malaya, how

they live their every day lives, how they socialize with each other and the way they solve their problems. There are nineteen stories. These tales are not a work of fiction like Saleh: A prince of Malaya. Clifford has specified that the stories are not fictional. However in the preface of the first edition he notes that the accuracy of the tales told to him by others might be in question. Nevertheless these tales are true stories unto which he has put the frame.

The Further Side of Silence first published in 1916 is another collection of short stories. Clifford confesses that his stories are not works of fiction as he says: "From this point of view I regard it as necessary, for it seems to me that the imposture involved in issuing as a work of fiction a volume which is in the main record of fact, should be frankly confessed from the outset" (Clifford 1927: vii). The stories are written by Clifford through his first hand experience with the natives and the land except for one story "The Ghoul" which was a second hand narration. He says that the stories are faithful depictions of the life that existed in the Malayan Peninsula before British intervention in the native states. The stories are from Clifford's twenty years of experience and life in the Malay Peninsula, ie. from 1883-1903. There are 19 stories and the book ends with a poem which he dedicates "To My Brethren in Malaya".

Clifford has portrayed an Orientalist and an occidental view of Malaya and its people. He paints pictures of the natives of Malaya be they kings or rakyat. The question is "Are these pictures accurate or are they a biased representations from an Orientalist mind that is forever in the believe that it is superior in every way to the East?" It is hoped that this study will shed light as to the motives and leanings of Clifford as an Orientalist writer.

Clifford's is not the only works that depict Malaya and the Malays in a negative light. There are other writers like Anthony Burgess, with his famous work *The Malayan Trilogy*. It has three volumes in it, *Time for a Tiger* (1956), *The enemy in the Blanket* (1958), *Beds in the East* (1959). It is the first attempt of Burgess at writing fiction. Like Clifford, Burgess had mastered the Malay language, thus he could collect raw data about the Malays first hand. It seems his knowledge of the language made him an 'expert' of the Malays and their land. He was posted as a teacher in Malaya in 1954 at the Malay College (MCKK), three years before Malaya's independence. Thus, his writings depicted the Malaysans' struggle to achieve independence. This research will try to determine how far the pictures are true.

Anthony Burgess' first book *Time for a Tiger* in his trilogy is about postwar Malaya at the time when people and governments alike are bemused and dazzled by the turmoil of independence. It is hilariously funny and comic and Rich in hilarious comedy and is a satire about the Malaysans and their country. The

protagonist in this fiction is Victor Crabbe, a teacher in a multiracial school in a squalid village, who moves upward in position as he and his wife maintain a steady decadent progress backward.

His next book *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958) is also a part of the *Malayan Trilogy*. The idiom in the title signifies “traitor” which comes from the Malay saying *musuh dalam selimut*. It discusses the struggles of marriage. The novel’s main character is again Victor Crabbe, now not a mere teacher but a headmaster in an imaginary sultanate Dahaga which means thirst in English. He is at the school at the time when Malaya was leading towards independence.

Beds in the East is the third novel in Anthony Burgess’s *Malayan Trilogy* and was published in 1959. The title is taken from a line spoken by Mark Antony in William Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, act 2, scene 6: “The beds i’ the east are soft”. The main character is still Victor Crabbe. There is also another character Robert Loo, who is a brilliant boy composer and Crabbe wants to help the boy further his musical career. There are Chinese and Indian characters too in this novel.

Apart from Clifford’s fiction and Burgess’, some of the historical texts that will be discussed will be those written by Richard Winstedt. He wrote at the peak of colonialism. Among his works are *Malayan Memories* (1916), *Kitab Tawarikh Melayu* (1925), and *A History of Malaya* (1935) to name a few. Sir Richard Olaf Winstedt (R.O. Winstedt) was born on 2 August 1878. He served in the Malay states from 1902-1935 holding various posts.

Winstedt was the first British scholar to make a systematic survey of Malay material for historical purposes. In *The Malays A Cultural History* (1947) he writes of Malay culture since his experience in Malaya has equipped him to do so. He presents the picture of primitive Malays that have been affected profoundly by Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and, finally, by the colonial European powers.

Kitab Tawarikh Melayu which he wrote in Malay and published in 1925 is a classic. It has been used by scholars like Anthony Milner, when writing about the Malays and their history. Reference to this text is made by Milner in his book *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya* (2002).

Thus, by analyzing fictional texts and historical texts this research will try to build a new framework about the Malays, Peninsular Malaya of the 19th and 20th century during colonialism. The texts and writers discussed above are among the few that will be used to debunk the theory of the binary opposition between the West and the Malay and his country. As the research is carried out other related texts will be read and analyzed as well. This list is not exhaustive.

CONCLUSION

This essay reflects an overall idea of the research that will be carried out. It cannot be denied that there was an unequal binary opposition present in the colonial fictional and historical writings on Malaya that dictated the idea of the superior West and the inferior Malays. The perimeters were clear. This hypothesis can be supported using Franz Fanon's and Edward Said's theories although they criticized the Western Orientalists in Africa and the Middle East respectively. They can be used to endorse the hypotheses that the British colonizers in Malaya created similar binary oppositions in order to rule over the Malays. This research aims to debunk, deconstruct and reassess the misconceptions about the Malays created by the British colonizers via their fiction and historical texts, and expose it as a misconception.

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