



**Farish A. Noor**

**Data-Gathering in Colonial Southeast Asia 1800-1900**

**Framing the Other**

Empire-building did not only involve the use of excessive violence against native communities, but also required the gathering of data about the native Other. This is a book about books, which looks at the writings of Western colonial administrators, company-men and map-makers who wrote about Southeast Asia in the 19th century. In the course of their information-gathering they had also framed the people of Southeast Asia in a manner that gave rise to Orientalist racial stereotypes that would be used again and again. *Data-Gathering in Colonial Southeast Asia 1800-1900: Framing the Other* revisits the era of colonial data-collecting to demonstrate the workings of the imperial echo chamber, and how in the discourse of 19th century colonial-capitalism data was effectively weaponized to serve the interests of Empire.

<https://youtu.be/93FY5L61ZX8>

## Data-Gathering in Colonial Southeast Asia 1800-1900



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*Framing the Other*

*Farish A. Noor*

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*To my wife Amy,  
As always*

No one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man's and yet as mortal as his own; that as men busied themselves about their various concerns they were scrutinised and studied, perhaps almost as narrowly as a man with a microscope might scrutinise the transient creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of water.<sup>1</sup>

H.G. Wells,  
*The War of the Worlds*

<sup>1</sup> Wells, 1898: 1.

# Table of Contents

<b>A Note on Spelling</b>	11
<b>Introduction</b>	13
The Panopticon in the Indies: Data-Gathering and the Power of Knowing	
I. Lost no longer: The House of Glass that is Postcolonial Southeast Asia	13
<b>1. Caught in the Eye of Empire</b>	23
Stamford Raffles' <i>1814 Java Regulations</i>	
I. <i>An English government does not need the articles of a capitulation to impose those duties which are prompted by a sense of justice: Lord Minto's brand of benevolent imperialism in Java</i>	23
II. The Lieutenant-Governor is Watching You: Raffles' <i>1814 Regulations</i>	29
III. Knowing Java and Policing Java	39
IV. Policing Bodies: Corpses, Prisoners and other 'Asiatic Foreigners'	45
V. Policing and Profit: Raffles' <i>Regulations</i> of 1814 as the Foundation of Regulated and Racialized Colonial-Capitalism	55
VI. Framing the Javanese as both <i>Useless and Useful</i> : Native Labour in Imperial Policing	63
<b>2. Deadly Testimonies</b>	69
John Crawford's <i>Embassy to the Court of Ava</i> and the Framing of the Burman	
I. Stabbing at the Heart of their Dominions: John Crawford's <i>Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Court of Ava</i>	69
II. <i>I shall have the honour soon to lay an abstract before the Government: Crawford's Embassy to Ava</i> read as an Intelligence Report	72
III. <i>Who Can I Trust?</i> John Crawford's Search for Reliable Data from Reliable Witnesses	79
III.A. <i>Our Man in Rangoon</i> : The Merchant-turned-Informant John Laird	83
III.B. <i>Our Man from London</i> : The Merchant-turned-Informant Henry Gouger	88



III.C.	<i>The Unquiet American: The Yankee Missionary Adoniram Judson</i>	93
III.D.	Everything including the Kitchen Sink: The Testimonies of Jeronimo de Cruz, John Barretto and the mysterious Mr. ***** from *****	99
IV.	Racial Difference and the Framing of the Burmese in the Writing of John Crawford	105
V.	Deadly Testimonies: Weaponised Knowledge in the Workings of Racialized Colonial-Capitalism	109
<b>3.</b>	<b>Fairy Tales and Nightmares</b>	115
	Identifying the ‘Good’ Asians and the ‘Bad’ Asians in the Writings of Low and St. John	
I.	Fairy Tale Beginnings: Hugh Low Spins the Tale of Sarawak’s ‘Redemption’	115
II.	Knowing the Difference: Differentiating Between the ‘Good’ and the ‘Bad’ Asians in the works of Hugh Low and Spenser St. John	124
III.	Protecting the Natives from other Asiatics: St. John’s negative portrayal of Malays and Chinese as the oppressors of the Borneans	132
III.A.	Spenser St. John’s construction of the ‘Malay threat’	133
III.B.	Spenser St. John’s construction of the ‘Chinese Peril’	137
IV.	<i>Bloodsuckers and Insurgents</i> : Knowing the Asian Other and the Maintenance of Colonial Rule	146
V.	And the Narrative Continues: The Fairy Tale Ending to Sarawak’s Story	150
<b>4.</b>	<b>The Needle of Empire</b>	153
	The Mapping of the Malay in the works of Daly and Clifford	
I.	Elbow Room for Empire: Britain’s Expansion into the Malay Kingdoms	153
II.	Stabbing at the Heart of the Malay: Seeking Justification for Britain’s Expansion into the Malay States	160
III.	Enter the Imperial Needle: Dominick D. Daly, Geographic Intelligence, and Colonial Mapping	164
IV.	<i>To Bring Darkness to Light</i> : Hugh Clifford, Colonial Geography, and the Duty of ‘the Great British Race’	172
V.	The Geography of Empire: Mapping and Colonial Power	186

<b>5. The Panopticon in the Indies</b>	189
Data-collecting and the Building of the Colonial State in Southeast Asia	
I. <i>We want to know you better</i> : Data-collecting in the service of Empire	189
II. Text and Context: Empire's Power Differentials and the Framing of the Colonized Other	197
III. Imperial Hubris: When Empire's Archive Fell Apart	211
IV. The Panopticon Today: Data-Gathering and Governance in Present-day Postcolonial Southeast Asia	218
<b>Appendix A</b>	225
Proclamation of Lord Minto, Governor-General of British India, at Molenvliet, Java, 11 September 1811	
<b>Appendix B</b>	228
Proclamation of Stamford Raffles, Lieutenant-General of Java, At Batavia, Java, 15 October 1813	
<b>Appendix C</b>	231
The Treaty of Peace Concluded at Yandabo	
<b>Appendix D</b>	234
The Treaty of Friendship and Commerce between Her Majesty and the Sultan of Borneo (Brunei). Signed, in the English and Malay Languages, 27 May 1847	
<b>Appendix E</b>	238
The Racial Census employed in British Malaya from 1871 to 1931	
<b>Timeline of Events and Developments in Southeast Asia 1800-1900</b>	241
<b>Bibliography</b>	251
<b>Index</b>	263



## A Note on Spelling

A note on the spelling of words and names as they appear in this book:

I have retained the spelling of words and names as they appeared in the texts that I refer to in the following chapters, and in some cases there have been differences in the way some names were written by different authors. In the case of place-names, I have retained the original spelling as found in the texts I refer to in the first instance, but have otherwise used contemporary local spellings in subsequent references. Whatever discrepancies or inaccuracies in spelling found in the originals have been retained, and indicated as well.

## 5. The Panopticon in the Indies

### Data-collecting and the Building of the Colonial State in Southeast Asia

The question of the state is a question of knowledge, especially scientific knowledge; and the classing of knowledge must be underwritten and directed by the state in its various capacities; that all epistemology became and must remain state epistemology in an economy of controlled information.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Richards,  
*The Imperial Archive* (1993)

#### I. *We want to know you better: Data-collecting in the service of Empire*

From the late-19<sup>th</sup> to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the European colonial powers continued to build their respective colonies in Southeast Asia for the sake of expanding the power of their respective countries and to address the growing demands of their own populations back home. Governor Sir Andrew Clarke's claim that the Malay Peninsula was the perfect place to send Britain's failures – a kind of second home for dullards – was in some ways correct, for it doesn't require that much intelligence to run the machinery of Empire – though building an Empire does. Empire-building was not solely related to questions of prestige and standing in the Western world, for as Pankaj Mishra (2017) – via Arendt – has argued, 'this debasing hierarchy of races was established (overseas) because the promise of equality and liberty at home (in Europe) required imperial expansion abroad in order to be even partially fulfilled. We tend to forget that imperialism, with its promise of land, food and raw materials, was widely seen in the late 19th century as crucial to national progress and prosperity. Racism was – and is – more than an ugly prejudice. It involved real attempts to solve, through exclusion and degradation, the problems of establishing political order, and pacifying the disaffected, in societies roiled by rapid

<sup>1</sup> Richards, 1993: 74.

social and economic change'.<sup>2</sup> In the face of rapid socio-political change and growing public unease both at home and in the colonies, the need to know more about colonial society in order to manage and police it better was paramount.

The building of the all-seeing and all-knowing colonial apparatus has been the subject of this book, and in the previous chapters I have looked at the writings of colonial functionaries like Raffles, Crawfurd, St. John, Low, Daly, Clifford, as well as their supervisors and subordinates, who were the architects of this system of data-gathering, mapping and framing of the colonised Other. Their efforts did require intelligence, and the outcome was more (economic, political, strategic and military) intelligence that served the ends of empire-building.

In *The Imperial Archive* (1993) Thomas Richards talks about the great data rush that consumed the time and energy of thousands of colonial bureaucrats and researchers from the Victorian era onwards. Indeed this quest for information spanned a period of several decades and was not confined to colonial functionaries alone: equally strong was the desire to acquire and possess more and more scientific knowledge and data, as the Western powers raced ahead to prove just how far advanced they were and how far ahead of their peers they were too. By then the march of science and the march of Empire went in tandem, and as I have shown elsewhere in my reading of the works of the American natural scientist Albert S. Bickmore (1839-1914) (Noor, 2018), the men of science from the Western world were more interested in the advancement of scientific knowledge than the quotidian realities of life in the colonies, and like Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913) were quite content to carry out their scientific surveys, mapping and data-collecting under the protective umbrella of colonial rule. Bickmore was happy to receive the assistance of the Dutch colonial authorities while he went looking for precious seashells in the Dutch East Indies, while Wallace was said to have amassed a vast collection of more than 110,000 insects, 7,500 shells, 8,050 birds and 410 assorted mammals and reptiles as he moseyed about the territories of Southeast Asia under British and Dutch colonial rule.<sup>3</sup> Neither of these men commented at length about the conditions of life of the colonized subjects in these territories – though they wrote quite a lot about seashells and orangutans.

<sup>2</sup> Mishra, Pankaj. *How Colonial Violence came Home: The Ugly Truth of the First World War*. 10 November 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Siew, 2018: 50.

At some point the paths of science and Empire converged and intertwined, creating opportunities for various forms of pseudo-scientific research to emerge. One of the best examples of this marriage of imperialism and pseudo-science was the racial census that was introduced by the various colonial powers in the parts of Southeast Asia that came under their control. Hirshman (1987) was the first to show how the colonial racial census – introduced in the parts of the Straits Settlements that were under British control in 1871 – effectively brought the various communities living in Penang, Singapore and Malacca together and grouped them into increasingly homogenous racial blocs over time.<sup>4</sup> (The racial census was first conducted in 1871, and then in 1891, 1911 and 1931.) The aim of the colonial racial census was to gain detailed information about the number of non-Western colonial subjects then living and working in the Straits Settlements (and later the Federated Malay States), and also to organize them into racial blocs that were summarily divided into the neat categories of ‘Malay’, ‘Chinese’, ‘Indians’ and ‘Others’. That these categories were nominal and wholly invented by the census-makers themselves was clear in the manner in which they were perpetually shifting and changing, and how the definition of ‘Malay’ initially included Bugis, Dayaks, Jawipekans and ‘Manilamen’ (all of whom were distinct ethnic communities with cultures and languages of their own) but would eventually – by 1931 – embrace practically every other ethnic group in the colony as well as all other native groups from the Dutch East Indies. (See Appendix E.)

A classifying device like the colonial racial census, clumsy though it was, could only make sense in the context of a colony where the logic of racialized colonial-capitalism operated in a segregated society where divisions had to be maintained in order to legitimise and rationalise a racial hierarchy that kept the Europeans on top. Such exclusionary practice became the norm in colonial Southeast Asia where the native Other could only be seen and framed in inferior terms, and such praxes permeated all levels of colonial governance and spilled into the public domain as well, into realms like education, public policing and healthcare.

In her study of the relationship between colonial governmentality and the regime of colonial healthcare in British Malaya, Manderson (1990) has highlighted the fact that many of the health regulations and medical ordinances that were introduced in the colony reflected a Eurocentric view

4 Charles Hirshman, ‘*The Meaning and Measurement of Ethnicity in Malaysia*’. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 1987.

of Asians as being a diseased and dirty race.<sup>5</sup> Apart from the concern about the spread of diseases like malaria and beri-beri, Manderson also notes that there remained the belief that Asian settlements were always filthy and squalid, and the vector for all kinds of contagions. The belief that Asian climates were dangerous to Europeans lay in the theory of miasma and how environmental differences would impact on the health of Europeans who were unused to the climate.<sup>6</sup> Knowledge of Asian tropical diseases therefore went hand-in-hand with the colonisation of Asia, and as she notes the establishment of the Institute for Medical Research (IMR) in Kuala Lumpur in 1900 contributed to this body of colonial medical knowledge.<sup>7</sup> Winzeler (1990) and Manderson have argued that many of the health campaigns that were introduced then – against mental disorders, malaria, beri-beri and the gamut of regulations that controlled the running of brothels – were designed to ensure that the wellbeing of the European colonisers was not jeopardised by the climate of the colonies and the potentially infectious bodies of the colonised subjects.<sup>8</sup> Healthcare, sanitation, public cleanliness campaigns, etc. were thus all part and parcel of a broader attempt to impose total control over the colonies.

Colonising Southeast Asia meant having to *know* Southeast Asia, but that also meant that the thing that was known had to be objectified in a manner that rendered it not only exposed and knowable, but also static and passive enough to be studied safely and surely. The problem with this entire enterprise was that the thing-to-be-known, namely Southeast Asia, was not something that could be epistemically arrested, like a dead butterfly stuck on a pin under a magnifying glass. The fluidity and mobility of Southeast Asian society – with its long history of continuous migration, movement and settlement – meant that whole communities were often misunderstood, moved about from one analytical category to another, or sometimes summarily lumped into the vague category of ‘Others’ – an example being the somewhat elusive category of ‘Jawi Peranakans’ who were moved about from one category to another in the colonial racial census that the British carried out in the Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States, who were sometimes seen as ‘native’ and at other times seen as being closer to Eurasians.

5 Manderson, Lenore. *Race, Colonial Mentality and Public Health in Early Twentieth Century Malaya*. 1990.

6 Manderson, 1990: 198, 201-202.

7 Ibid, p. 194.

8 Winzeler, 1990; Noor, 2015.



In some instances the reaction of the colonial authorities was to respond to such complexity and fluidity with even more surveillance and control, and it is not surprising to note that in British Burma, British Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, French Indochina and the Spanish Philippines it was the policing and security arms of the colonial state apparatus that grew in time.

In the case of the Dutch East Indies the policing apparatus of the colonial state can be dated back to even before the British interregnum and the reforms that were put in place by Raffles (Carey, 1992) and the Java War of 1825-1830 (Carey, 1981) as well as the Padri War of 1821-1837 (Dobbin, 1983).<sup>9</sup> As a result of these conflicts the Dutch colonial authorities developed a fear of the 'itinerant Muslim' who was seen as a transmitter of subversive ideas. As the 19<sup>th</sup> century wore on, the colonial authorities in the Dutch East Indies expanded not only their colonial army – the *Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger*; KNIL – but also the policing arm of the colonial administration, with attention given to intelligence-gathering and surveillance, and an emphasis on keeping an eye on both native communities as well as other non-Dutch foreigners in the colony. So effective was Dutch colonial intelligence that they not only monitored native dissenters but also managed to intercept and arrest other Western filibusters like the notorious American adventurer Walter Gibson (Noor, 2018).

Across the British Empire, the laws and regulations that governed the lives of millions of its subjects had been streamlined with the passing of the *Act to Remove Doubt as to the Validity of Colonial Laws* on 29 June 1869. In British Burma the colonial state's security apparatus was designed to keep the natives at bay, but as we have seen earlier this concern for security was

9 The Padri War was so-called thanks to the label that had been given to one of the groups engaged in the revolt against the traditional elite of Minangkabau and the Dutch, the Padri reform movement. For centuries Minangkabau society had held on to its matrilineal customs and traditions, and was known for its mercantile activities with the Minang diaspora spread out across Southeast Asia and beyond. But during the Napoleonic wars the Minang lands came under the control of the British who occupied the Dutch East Indies as Holland had sided with France in the war in Europe. During this period tensions arose among the Minangs who were partisan in their support for either the traditional elite or the new wave of Muslim reformers who were known as the Padris. The Padri War was fought between 1821 to 1837, and led to the signing of the Masang treaty with the Padris in 1824 which brought about a temporary cessation of hostilities. As a consequence of the Padri War, Dutch colonial attitudes towards Muslims in Sumatra began to change and there arose the new perceived threat of itinerant Muslim scholars from Arabia and India, as well as the fear of Indonesian Muslims travelling abroad for Islamic studies. [See: Christine Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847*. London: Curzon Press. 1983.]

– from the time of Crawfurd – tainted by subjective bias and the view that the ethnic Burmans were a people not to be trusted. Consequently the policing of British Burma bore all the traits of racialized colonial-capitalism at work, with notions of racial difference foregrounded in security calculations we well. As Hingkanonta (2013) has shown, during Sir Charles Crosthwaite's pacification campaign from 1887 to 1890 'troops were brought in from India to suppress the extreme disorder that occurred following the final annexation of 1885'.<sup>10</sup> Reliance on Indian troops would grow as 'British officials began to see their Burmese subjects as enemies rather than as law-abiding subjects' and 'the pacification phase was fought largely with alien troops – up to 16,000 soldiers were recruited from as far as the Punjab and Nepal to impose order on a hostile society. [...] While the coercive aspects of policing were undertaken mostly by peripheral forces, largely composed of Indian and then the ethnic minorities, Burman civil police were left mostly with clerical work or petty guard duties.'<sup>11</sup>

In French Indochina (est. 1887) the role of the French colonial police was similar to that of their British counterparts in British India, British Burma and the Straits Settlements. France's *mission civilisatrice* was not without its obvious contradictions: notwithstanding the often-professed egalitarian ethos of the French republic, French power abroad was demonstrated in no uncertain terms, and the guillotine – once dubbed 'the revolutionary razor' made its appearance in the East Indies in the same way that it had been used to deadly effect in the West Indies decades earlier. Indochina was exploited to the hilt for the sake of serving France's imperial economy: from 1880 to 1900 the amount of land set aside for commercial agriculture quadrupled and the provinces were turned into gargantuan rubber plantations to serve the needs of French industry. Native education was given much less attention and by 1939 the colony had only one university with less than a thousand Indochinese students enrolled. In such a setting the French colonial policing system was developed to ensure that the colony would be kept stable for the sake of economic exploitation, and also to ensure that the boundary between the white colonists and the native Southeast Asians would be policed. The conduct of the French colonial police in Indochina was often brutal with excessive force being the norm<sup>12</sup>, and their role was also to police

10 Hingkanonta, 2013: 9.

11 Hingkanonta, 2013: 48.

12 Blanchard has noted that in many of the French colonies the 'lack of personnel is sometimes put forward as an explanation to the disproportionate use of force by policing authorities: gunfire in this case is interpreted as a means of compensating the powerlessness of outnumbered police doing their best to keep the crowd at a distance. Much like its British counterpart (e.g.

the behaviour of colonists and natives alike to ensure that the racial barrier between the two communities would not be transgressed – though that was easier said than done due to the frequency of inter-racial liaisons between Europeans and Southeast Asians there.<sup>13</sup> (Tracol-Huynh 2010; Blanchard 2014)

As Europe entered the *Belle Époque* and celebrated its achievements, life in the colonies of Southeast Asia was not as pleasant as some might have thought. The race for knowledge and data-gathering led to growing interest in pseudo-scientific theories of racial difference and the introduction of more racial typologies, and as Anderson and Roque (2018) have noted Southeast Asia would come to serve as the ‘imagined laboratory’ where these modalities of information-gathering and colonial state policing would be put to work.<sup>14</sup> The colonial racial census in British Malaya was not the only instance of colonial ‘scientific’ surveillance in the region (Hirshman, 1986, 1987; Manickam, 2015, Sysling, 2016), and would be used in the other European colonies of the region as well from British Burma to the Dutch East Indies to the Spanish, and later American-controlled, Philippines. Southeast Asians were drawn and photographed, had their height and weight measured, and were slotted into neat categories that fitted according to the racial typology that was used to frame, locate and know them. The end result of these surveys, censuses and social mapping was the creation of racialized spaces where racial hierarchies would be maintained, and where as Stoler (1989, 1992, 2002), Kramer (2006.a, 2006.b) and Anderson (2006) have noted the respectability of Empire could be upheld while keeping the native Other in check. With Victorian-era science came Victorian-era morality as well, and so pervasive were the modes of enquiry and documentation that even the most intimate aspects of native bodies would come under scrutiny.<sup>15</sup>

with the 1919 Amritsar massacre), the French empire was marked by the permanence of this logic consisting of slaughtering protesting crowds of colonised people, as evidenced by the now well-documented case of the December 1952 repression of the Casablanca riot’. (Blanchard, 2014: 1846.)

13 Blanchard (2014) has noted that across Indochina ‘where marriages between colonisers and colonised were more frequent than in North Africa, and mixed-blood children more numerous, indigenous concubines of Europeans were even considered prostitutes’. (Blanchard, 2014: 1848.)

14 Anderson, Warwick and Ricardo Roque, *Imagined Laboratories: Colonial and National Racialisations in Island Southeast Asia*. October 2018: 358.

15 By the 1870s colonial law in British Burma and the Straits Settlements displayed a conservative attitude towards human sexual relations, and introduced laws against certain forms of sexual conduct. The Indian Penal Code of 1833 was initially drafted under the direction of Thomas Macaulay and was adopted for use throughout British India in 1860. Included in the code was Section 377, which listed a number of ‘unnatural offences’ that could be committed against the human body, and this included sodomy; though this category of offence was taken from the 1826

Despite the growing evidence that the peoples of Southeast Asia – as with the rest of Asia and Africa – were not all that keen to live out their lives as colonial subjects with less political rights than their colonial masters, the march of Empire and knowledge-gathering continued. The men of science and the builders of Empire concurred with the view that imperialism was a benefit to all, and such blinkered confidence was reflected in the mindset of the rulers of Europe too. Queen Victoria (1819-1901) was reported to have said that ‘we are not interested in the possibilities of defeat; they do not exist’ in 1899.<sup>16</sup> In the same year that the *Empress of India* denied the possibility of defeat the colonial commissioner and advocate for the scramble for Africa Sir Harry Hamilton Johnston (1858-1927) published his work *The History of the Colonization of Africa by Alien Races* (1899), wherein he included a map of Africa where the entire continent was divided into four different zones; where the northern coast and southern tip of Africa were labelled as ‘Healthy, colonisable Africa, where European races may be expected to become in time the prevailing type, where European states may be formed’; and the central parts of Africa dubbed as ‘Unhealthy but exploitable Africa’ and ‘Extremely unhealthy Africa’ in turn.<sup>17</sup> Johnston’s map and the book he wrote bore the hallmarks of the kind of knowledge-based scientific imperialism that by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had become the dominant discourse among the powers-that-be in Western Europe and North America; laced as it was with factual data, tons of statistics, detailed maps and a heavy sprinkling of scientific racism. Johnston would be made a Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath (KCB), honoured by the Royal Geographical Society and conferred an honorary doctorate by Cambridge University – but even that could not prevent the fact that the colonies which he helped to plan and build were beginning to fray at the seams, and that across much of Asia and Africa local voices of dissent were growing louder. Native dissent did not however resonate as loudly in the corridors of power in the West as it was then deemed unreasonable by those who thought they knew better. Just how this echo chamber was built, and how the logic of scientific data-based imperialism made sense to those who were its builders, will be the topic we shall turn to next.

*Offences Against the Person Act* of Britain. (The offence was in fact derived from an act passed in 1533 during the reign of King Henry VIII.)

16 Queen Victoria, in a statement to Balfour at Windsor Palace, recorded in Lady Gwendolen Cecil, *The Life of Robert Marquis of Salisbury*. London: Hodder and Stoughton. 1921. Vol. 3: 191.

17 Johnston, Harry Hamilton, Sir. *The History of the Colonization of Africa by Alien Races*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1899.

## II. Text and Context: Empire's Power Differentials and the Framing of the Colonized Other

We do not see things as they are, we see them as we are.<sup>18</sup>

Anaïs Nin,  
*Seduction Of The Minotaur* (1961)

Colonialism is first of all a matter of consciousness.<sup>19</sup>

Ashis Nandy,  
*The Intimate Enemy:  
Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (1983)

In *The Conquest of America* (1984) Tzvetan Todorov pointed out that 'nomination is equivalent to taking possession', reminding us of the arresting power of language and the epistemic violence that comes with knowing and naming the world around us.<sup>20</sup> Though I agree with the spirit of Todorov's assertion I would also argue that the claim that all knowing/knowledge is colonial/colonising can sometimes be stretched a tad too far, for if *all* knowledge is colonising in nature then *everything* has been colonised; and as a result colonialism no longer has a specific place where it can be identified and located clearly. In this book I have looked at instances of knowledge-building and data-gathering that were clearly aligned with a colonial agenda, undertaken by men who were themselves committed to the enterprise of Empire. This in turn opens the way for a discussion of agency and responsibility, and the related question of how we can and should read the works that were produced by men like Raffles, Crawfurd, Low, St. John, Daly and Clifford. When re-reading these works today we ought to place them in their historical context, and that context was the age of Empire. It would be impossible for us to discuss the age of Empire without taking into account the very real differentials of power that, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were so painfully obvious to the natives of Southeast Asia who felt that they had lost the race for progress and modernity, and whose anxieties were later recorded by the likes of Munshi Abdullah Abdul Kadir (1796-1854) as he watched the world of the Malay archipelago carved up by the Western powers. (Abdullah, 1838, 1849)

18 Nin, 1961: 124.

19 Nandy, 1983: 63.

20 Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, New York: Harpers Collins. 1984:27.

My argument has been that racialized colonial-capitalism in 19<sup>th</sup> century Southeast Asia was a data-intensive and data-reliant enterprise, and that through the data that was gathered the natives of Southeast Asia were framed as the constitutive Other to white colonial agency as well. But we do not encounter data or information as readily-constituted things in themselves. Data and information, as Cohn (1996) has shown, are things that need to be selected, identified as worthy/relevant and deemed as such via modalities of information-gathering and data-acquisition that are regimented. Cohn's emphasis on the workings of these modalities of knowledge-gathering reminds us that there is *always* human agency at work, and *we never accidentally stumble upon bits of data* lying on the pavement as Goffman (1974) has noted. Schama (1991) has further argued, 'even in the most austere scholarly report from the archives, the inventive faculty – selecting, pruning, editing, commenting, interpreting, delivering judgements – is in full play'.<sup>21</sup> For something to be deemed as *information* it has to be seen and appraised as such, and that necessarily points to the workings of a human mind that makes that judgement. Colonialism's information order, as Bayly has argued, was 'not separate from the world of power or economic exploitation, but stands both prior to it and dependent on it'.<sup>22</sup> In the East India Company's 'empire of opinion' the colonial subjects were invited, compelled or coerced to aid the process of data-gathering 'by the reputation or scientific and cultural superiority of their conquerors'.<sup>23</sup> Here is where the power, authority and agency of men like Raffles, Crawfurd, et al. come in, and it is their role in this process of colonial data-collecting that I wish to address now.

When Raffles formulated his *Regulations of 1814* for the better governance of Java, he was laying the foundation for a data-collecting system that foregrounded his own concerns as a colonial governor and the overlord of the island under his command. Raffles was not interested in the favourite colour of the Javanese subjects he governed, or their favourite dish or their favourite song. But he was certainly interested in where they stayed, the agricultural products they produced, how many members of their families were of working age, and what their collective output as producers could be. It was *socio-economic intelligence* that he sought, as well as a means to maintain control over a population that would be put to work for the sake of developing the colonial economy of Java. To that end his *Regulations of*

21 Simon Schama, *Dead Certainties (Unwarranted Speculations)*, London: Granta Books, 1991: 322.

22 Bayly, 1996: 4-5.

23 Bayly, 1996: 365.

1814 had all the trappings of a sophisticated surveillance system that would be able to monitor and police that captive workforce, and its goals were two-fold: To add to the databank of information about the population of Java as well as the coffers of the ever-quomodocunquizing East India Company. Data-collecting has always been a part of empire-building and that can be traced back to the oldest empires known. But what is different about the sort of data-collecting that was carried out in the colonies of Southeast Asia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was how the process was guided by the belief that societies could be made known and thus regulated and policed, in line with the logic of the Enlightenment itself.

When placing men like Stamford Raffles and James Brooke – and their admirers and successors such as Charles Brooke, Hugh Low, Spencer St John and Hugh Clifford who came later – we can see that they were firmly located in the world of their time, as men who believed in the values of the Western Enlightenment project and who felt that through the study of the non-Western world that world could be denuded, comprehended and ultimately better governed, like Nature itself. Europe's sustained war on Nature would be exported to Asia and Africa, and as Green (2019) has noted by the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

[...] A general trend in European thought was that different experiences, material influences, and varying geographical and climatic environments produced specific individual and national behaviors. It was believed that education based on reason would give rise to the same institutions, moral beliefs and scientific truths in all societies, with the progressive perfection of rational decision-making constituting an important marker in the European construction of social hierarchies.<sup>24</sup>

The desire to know Southeast Asia and Southeast Asians better, in order to be able to change and transform them more effectively and lastingly, was among the drivers of the data-collecting projects we see in the writings of men like Raffles, Brooke, Crawford et al. And yet in the course of doing so these colonial data-gatherers were oblivious to the fact that their data-collecting was also an instance of *data-assembling*; and in the course of their work they were also effectively discursively framing the object of their research and enquiry. But the blinkered manner in which these colonial functionaries carried on their work meant that they were blind to the eurocentrism of their own gaze, and how as Rattansi (1994) has noted

24 Green, 2019: 24-25.

'the 'discoveries' the West made were as much discoveries, and productions, of *itself* as of the peoples and lands encountered'.<sup>25</sup> (Nandy (1983) has noted that 'Max Müller, for all his pioneering work in Indology and love for India, forbade his students to visit India; to him the India that was living was not the true India, and the India that was true had to be dead'.<sup>26</sup>) Yet the project of Western Enlightenment was precisely that: A *Western* project that bore all the hallmarks of an Occidental mindset that had been developed since Europe emerged from its dark ages and saw its closest and oldest cultural-civilizational neighbour – the Arab-Muslim world – as its enemy and constitutive Other. Bartlett (1993) has noted that exclusionary laws were already at work in Western Europe since the medieval period, and that long before the Western European powers developed and expanded their empires across Asia and Africa they were already discriminating against minorities in Europe itself, through laws that forbade intermarriage between the victorious English and the colonised Irish, and restrictions on subdued subjects that prevented them from joining trade guilds, town councils, etc.<sup>27</sup> By the time that Britain and the other European powers began to establish their footholds in Southeast Asia the images and praxes of exclusion and colonial hierarchies were already in place, for 'the mental habits and institutions of (later) European racism and colonialism were born in the medieval world. [...] The European Christians who sailed to the coasts of the Americas, Asia and Africa came from a society that was already a colonizing society'.<sup>28</sup>

Such mental habits did not change, and despite the universal claims that were made by the Enlightenment that came later, 'the roots of Enlightenment universalism are full of contradictions and limitations, which suggests that universalism was (paradoxically) particular and Eurocentric', as Lloyd (1994) has pointed out.<sup>29</sup> The data-gathering and knowledge-building that these men undertook was thus from the outset a Western colonial-epistemic project, guided by a Western/Occidental gaze that invariably framed the Other in oppositional-dialectical terms, for as Rattansi argues:

Identities such as 'the West' and 'Europeans', even 'white', their confluences with conceptions of rationality, 'civilization' and Christianity, and

25 Rattansi, 1994: 36.

26 Nandy, 1983: 17.

27 Bartlett, 1993: 236-239.

28 Bartlett, 1993: 313-314.

29 Lloyd, 1994: 223.



the superimposition on these of images of paganism and savagery as constituted by binaries such as naked/clothed, oral/literate, technologically backward/advanced, were not already 'in place' – they *came into being in processes of imperial exploitation and colonial domination*.<sup>30</sup> (*Emphasis mine.*)

Such binaries were evidently useful in the projects that these colonial data-gatherers attempted, for they justified the positioning of the Western knowledge-producers at the top of the social hierarchy of colonial society (on the grounds that the rational and knowledgeable ought to govern the ignorant and untutored), and also rationalised the colonial project itself (on the grounds that the acquisition of native lands and commodities, the commodification of native labour and the dismissal of native knowledges/epistemologies was justified as the native Other had little to contribute to the Enlightenment project unless they came under European supervision.)

Embedded within the logic of the Enlightenment was the understanding that history was linear and that societies and cultures could be compared to one another and located on a singular historical track – with Europe leading the race. Yet as Cohn (1996) has noted, such a comparative approach 'implied linear directionality', where 'things, ideas, institutions could be seen as progressing through stages to some end or goal. It could also be used to establish regression, decay and decadence, the movement through time away from some pristine, authentic, original starting point, a golden age of the past'<sup>31</sup> – in the manner that Raffles had seen and cast the Javanese as a people who had fallen from their glory days and who had declined to the point that they (and their cultural achievements) could only be saved by Western colonial intervention. The linear teleology at work in this form of 'enlightened imperialism' meant that other societies could be ranked in terms of their progress towards a Western model, and with the West as the guiding standard it was hardly a surprise if other societies invariably failed to meet the mark and ended up being deemed backward, ill-governed or lawless.<sup>32</sup>

As Green (2019) has noted, this was the mindset that led Raffles to the conclusion that the Javanese – as a 'degenerate race' – could *not* have

30 Rattansi, 1994: 36.

31 Cohn, 1996: 55.

32 Cohn (1996) has noted that 'English historians [...] stressed that the arbitrariness of the political order (in India) caused the salient characteristic of despotism to become the insecurity of property', and that 'although it was recognized that there was "law" in India, that "law" was seen to be different from the European kind'. (Cohn, 1996: 63.)

developed their civilization on their own and that they *must* have been colonised in the past by Indians, and therefore could be made to progress again under British colonial guidance.<sup>33</sup> It was also the same mindset that accounted for the wholesale colonial theft and looting that occurred during the British occupation of Java, for it was believed that the Javanese were no longer able to fully appreciate the value of their artefacts and manuscripts and that such objects would be better preserved and studied by Westerners in Europe. (Cohn, 1996; Noor, 2019; Wang, 2019; Murphy, 2019.) Bauman (1989) has noted that the holocaust was not an aberration in the development of Modernity but was in fact one of its outcomes; and in the same vein it can be argued that Raffles' propensity towards colonial policing and the looting of antiquities that took place during his tenure as Lieutenant-Governor of Java *was not an aberration in the workings of racialized colonial-capitalism, but rather its logical outcome too* – driven as it was by the belief that Southeast Asians needed to be saved by an external civilising power.

Not to be outdone, John Crawfurd – who was Raffles' contemporary, a fellow East India Company-man, and according to Hannigan (2012) also a rival of Raffles – was also on a data-gathering mission while he sailed up the Irrawady to the court of Ava. Like Raffles, Crawfurd was keen to gain as much information as he could about Burma, though the circumstances of his stay in the kingdom were very different from Raffles' longer tenure as Lieutenant-Governor in Java. Java was, during Raffles' time, under the rule of the East India Company and British forces, while Burma was then seen as an adversary and an obstacle to British ambitions in the Indian subcontinent. Crawfurd's data-collecting was not limited to gathering information about the land of Burma but also to gain vital strategic data about the state of the kingdom's defences, economy, political system and its relations with other Asian powers and potential Western allies. Crawfurd's data-collecting was as guided a process as Raffles'. The testimonies that he collected – though interviews where leading questions were the norm – provided him with accounts of Burma that were used to strengthen his argument that Burma was a rogue state that might threaten Britain's position in Bengal in the near future.

From his *History of the Indian Archipelago* (1820) – where Crawfurd 'used the circular decline-and-fall narrative as his explanatory tool'<sup>34</sup> – to his *Journal of an Embassy to the Court of Ava* (1829) and all the way to his

33 Green, 2019: 32.

34 Knapman, 2017: 211.

*Physical and Mental Characteristics of the European and Asiatic Races of Man* (1867) that he wrote shortly before his death, Crawfurd had repeatedly demonstrated his polygenetic leanings and his belief that there were distinct and different races; and that the different races were clearly unequal in terms of their capabilities and achievements. Though Crawfurd's attitudes towards colonial race-relations differed from those of Raffles, Brooke or his peers and contemporaries, at no point did he object to the workings of the racialized colonial-capitalist system. (A case in point would be the stance that he took against the anti-opium lobby in colonial Singapore, for he was 'firmly of the belief that opium was, and should be, a legitimate, tradeable commodity'<sup>35</sup> despite the obvious deleterious effect it was having on the Asian coolies who grew addicted to it.) What Crawfurd *did* object to was the notion that colonised Asians could be 'civilised' by having Western culture imposed upon them, on the basis that 'the savage was not an empty vessel waiting to be filled by civilised thought' and that such 'savages' should be left alone while their lands and labour were being appropriated by the colonial government for profit.<sup>36</sup> Crawfurd may have wanted to 'promote legal equality amongst the races' in the colonies as Knapman (2017) has argued, but he did not see the races as equal at the same time.<sup>37</sup> The Asians who were living under British colonial rule were, for him, British subjects and therefore subject to British colonial law, but that did not make them racially equal to their colonisers, and at no point did Crawfurd show sympathy towards the evangelical humanitarians back in England who lamented the workings of Empire overseas.<sup>38</sup>

While the sun of Empire was at its height, the land-grabbing, colony-building imperialists could indeed have their cake and eat it. Men like Raffles, Crawfurd and Brooke were able to present themselves as economic liberals who were indeed keen to open up markets (in the territories of others) and to promote free trade in the most liberal terms, but that was also where the limits of their liberalism ended: In Crawfurd's eyes the Asian Other was seen as legally equal in the eyes of colonial-company law, *but at the same time was never deemed racially equal to Europeans*. One could be an economic liberal and a racist at the same time, and that was true in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as it is today. But the upshot of Crawfurd's belief in polygenesis was that Asians could be brought within the ambit of the colonial economic-political

35 Knapman, 2017: 132-133.

36 Knapman, 2017: 228.

37 Knapman, 2017: 133, 134.

38 Knapman, 2017: 133, 154, 155.

system, though they remained racially different and were seen as 'savages'. While Crawfurd may have disagreed with Raffles and Brooke about the redemptive power of Western civilization and the 'civilising mission' that the latter sought to impose, and preferred a colonialism with a smaller footprint<sup>39</sup>, all of them regarded Southeast Asians in terms of an Other framed in a disabling manner: as the lazy Asiatic, the savage Asiatic, the cunning Asiatic, etc. *These men may have taken different sides in the debate over whether Empire should be maximalist or minimalist, but surely these were two sides of the same imperial coin.* And while the colonisers debated it was the Southeast Asians – be they enemies or allies – who were perpetually framed as the Other who stood on the opposite side of the dialectical fence, as the constitutive Other to the European.

In present-day academic circles there appears to be a debate as to who among the colonisers of the past belonged to the minimalist or maximalist camps; between the school of 'benevolent' imperialism and its sanguinary counterpart. It has to be noted that not only were there very different approaches and styles of empire-building that were employed by the different Western imperial powers (Tarling, 1969; Steinberg, 1985; Taylor, 1987; Carey, 1992; Gopinath, 1996; Taylor, 2003; Tracol-Huynh, 2010; Blanchard 2014; Sysling, 2016; Boshier, 2018; et al.), so were there different modes of colonisation – both direct and indirect – within each of these western imperial domains too. Yet as Vucetic (2011) has noted, the 19<sup>th</sup> century was also a time when a growing consensus would emerge across the Atlantic as to what the Western world was, where its duty lay and what Empire would come to mean in terms of Western identity and purpose.

While European policy-makers, colonial-capitalists, missionaries and intellectuals debated about the modalities of empire-building – whether it should be aggressive or subtle, maximalist or minimalist – it should be remembered that this was largely a Western debate among Westerners themselves, that took place in the corridors of power and the pamphlets and broadsheets of the Western European world where the non-Western Other was hardly ever invited to speak. There were those like John Crawfurd who might have preferred an empire with a smaller footprint, consisting of well-defended trading outposts in the East surrounded by a sea of 'savage' natives; and men like Stamford Raffles, James Brooke, Hugh Clifford and Andrew Clarke who dreamt of an expansive empire where huge swathes of Asia would come under the Union Jack – though a cynic may argue that a choice between submitting

39 Knapman, 2017: 179.

to maximalist or minimalist imperialism was hardly a choice at all for the Asians themselves. (In any case even if Empire could manifest itself in minimalist terms, Empire's bullets and cannon shells would not be reduced in size or deadly potential.)

An academic exercise to note and highlight the subtle differences between full-on imperialism and 'imperialism lite' is not, in and of itself, problematic; and it may in fact yield interesting insights that are of value. But in the course of doing so we should not forget the fact that *Empire was Empire*, and that notwithstanding whatever methods that were used by the Western imperial powers to extend and entrench their imperial power across Asia – be they harsh or smooth – it was the Asians who were robbed of their political sovereignty in the end. To suggest that there could have been another kind of Empire – a sort of 'softer' imperialism with a smaller footprint – and that such an Empire would have been kinder and more respectful of the native Other foregrounds yet again the prerogatives of the coloniser over the colonised. For even in cases where colonialism was selective in its appropriation of smaller territories (such as the acquisition of Penang by Francis Light, of Singapore by Stamford Raffles and John Crawfurd's wish that the British capture Rangoon) it was the choicest, most strategically important parts of Asia that were acquired and it was the needs of the colonial companies and their Western governments that were prioritised over the needs of the Asians. In these cases the colonial powers were engaged in the acquisition of native territories at minimum political risk and military cost to themselves, and it was the maximization of their economic gains that came first. (As in how the acquisition of Penang did not lead to the East India Company coming to the aid of Kedah when it came under attack by Siam, and how the plight of the Kedahans was later dismissed as 'their' problem and not the Company's.) And even if some like Crawfurd felt that Western culture and education should not have been imposed on other 'Asiatic races', he was not alone in the wider assembly of 19<sup>th</sup> century empire-builders then: The Dutch in the East Indies and the French in Indochina had opted for precisely the same sort of minimalist approach, preferring to keep the natives in their 'natural state' and not making the mistake of 'over-educating' their colonial subjects. (Thus while Crawfurd may have been in a minority among his British counterparts he was in fact closer in spirit to other European imperialists of the time.)

Men like Raffles, Brooke and Crawfurd, along with their admirers who wrote the accounts of them later such as Low, St. John and Clifford were believers in the idea that the natives of Southeast Asia were a *race apart*,

and that they had 'degenerated' over time and were no longer able to manage their own affairs.<sup>40</sup> From the point of view of the Southeast Asian – be it the rulers of Java, Brunei, Burma and other kingdoms who were forced to submit at gunpoint, or the Asian coolies who were co-opted to serve the colonial economy – it did not matter if Empire had arrived with a smile on its face or not, for they were the ones who lost. Again it has to be stated: Even 'benevolent' imperialism was *still* imperialism, full stop.

In the decades that followed there would be some events of importance, though these did not radically alter the modalities of knowledge-gathering in the age of Empire. The East India Company would breathe its last but that did not ameliorate the workings of colonial-capitalism in the East, and many of the men who would later take up the task of empire-building were cut from the same cloth as their predecessors. In the works of St. John, Low, Daly and Clifford we have seen how the desire to know all that could be known about Southeast Asia did not wane in time. These men produced books that were full of data – much of it correct, it should be noted – as well as numerous maps and charts, reams of statistics and tables, and accounts of their travels across native lands. But in the course of producing all this knowledge, they also injected into their works their own views about the native peoples they had set out to study; and their views of the Southeast Asian Other was hardly a flattering one. From St. John and Low's apprehension about the Chinese in Borneo to Clifford's jaundiced perception of Malay society being trapped in the mire of Asiatic feudalism, none of these knowledge-builders were ever able to see Southeast Asians as human beings equal to Westerners; and few of them were inclined to see value in Southeast Asian systems of belief or local knowledge.

The men whose writings we have looked at did not find themselves in the middle of Java or Burma or Borneo or the Malay Peninsula by a fluke. Nor were they a bunch of dilettantes faffing around whiling away their time: They were willing actors in the drama of racialized colonial-capitalism and in the case of Raffles and Crawfurd in particular were not blind to the fact that the East India Company which they served was also the biggest militarised corporate entity the world had ever seen. When Crawfurd put together his selection of interviews that were crafted in a manner that could only lead his readers to the same conclusion as his own – that Burma was a tyrannical state that needed to be brought down a peg or two – or when Raffles attempted to create an island-wide policing network to control the lives of millions of Javanese, or when Daly attempted to

40 Knapman, 2017: 169.

penetrate into the kingdom of Johor to map its interior while the ruler of Johor was trying to defend his kingdom's sovereignty, these were not instances of colonial functionaries breaking bad. Some of them (like Raffles and Daly) would later face charges of financial impropriety and misconduct, *but none of them were never faulted for wanting to expand the power and dominion of the British Empire*. Hunters and gatherers of data, they were all men of their time and the time they lived in was the age of Empire. It was their active rational agency that led to their elevation in the ranks of the companies and governments they served, and it was also their active mental agency that led to the writing of the books we have looked at here.

Related to the question of Western rational agency in the composition of these works is the question of Southeast Asian agency and the role played by Southeast Asians who may have been invited to assist in the data-collecting that took place, as in the case of the army of native informants that Raffles wished to create through his *Regulations of 1814*. Some historians such as Bayly (1996) have claimed that the building of Empire's information order was a two-way process that required the active participation and support of the colonized as well. And some may argue that the result of all the data-collecting that took place then was a body of knowledge that bore the hallmarks of East and West, and would not have been possible without the help of Asian knowledge-providers. While the latter is undoubtedly true, we must also remember that it was not chance that brought the European powers to Southeast Asia, but that colonialism was driven from the outset by the logic of an imperial political economy that sought to subjugate Asian lands and peoples for political-economic gains. As such it would be inaccurate to suggest that the relationship between the colonial bureaucrat-data-seeker and the native colonial subject in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was an equal one, any more than the kingdoms of Western Europe stood on an equal footing with their Southeast Asian counterparts. Colonial knowledge-production may have involved the agency of both Europeans and Asians, but theirs was never a relationship of equals and it was the latter that would provide the data, the statistics, the geographical information, etc. that would be compiled, ordered and interpreted by the former. Likewise it would be far-fetched to suggest that the imperial economies were somehow 'hybrid economies' that brought together the best of Europe and Asia, for the truth of the matter was that it was Asia that surrendered its commodities while Europe processed these raw materials in order to manufacture goods that would later be sold back to those who resided in their captive colonial economies. Asia and Asians may have provided the data for the knowledge-building and the commodities for

colonial manufacturing, though the end result was not some kind of 'syncretic' or 'hybrid' knowledge or goods that were entirely untainted by the colonial encounter – and I would argue that it would be wrong of us to celebrate such knowledge for its hybridity while overlooking the power differentials that brought the coloniser and colonised together in the first place.

Southeast Asians did play their role as data-collectors and as helpers in this knowledge-production process, but their role was often relegated to the background, as in the case of the dozens of native porters who lugged the baggage and equipment of Daly, St. John and Clifford as they went about mapping the interior of Borneo and the Malay Peninsula. But their agency was rarely, if ever, credited; and that in itself speaks volumes about how the role and opinions of the native Other was valued by the authors we have looked at. The contemporary reader should therefore not be surprised by the blinkered attitude of these colonial functionaries for they belonged to the same circle of like-minded 'men of knowledge' who were themselves convinced that theirs was the only epistemology worthy of the name. Just how these works could have been seen as 'knowledge' and deemed scientific is another question that begs to be addressed, and here we need to look at the roles played by their respective authors in the wider context of the institutions and societies they worked for and in.

The present-day reader may be appalled by the blatant racism put on display in some of the works we have looked at. But it has to be remembered that Raffles, Crawford, St. John and the other authors we have considered here were not writing for the sake of the Southeast Asians whom they were studying and whose lands they were occupying and mapping: They were writing for their own like-minded contemporaries who, like them, held positions of power in militarised companies or colonial administrations – and it could be added that Raffles, Crawford and company were probably indifferent to the plight of the white working classes in their countries too.<sup>41</sup> The books we have looked at here were reports that provided information and data to serve the needs of power, written by men in power for other men in power, for the sake of expanding and perpetuating that power. They were not written for the edification of the colonised native communities or for the benefit of the lower classes of European society either.

41 It has to be remembered that attitudes towards colonial subjects abroad were not all that different to attitudes towards the lower working classes back in Europe and America by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Bayly (1996) has argued that notwithstanding their proximity to political power the writings of European Orientalists never had a massive impact on their respective societies. (Bayly, 1996: 169.)



By the second half of the nineteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic there emerged a consensus among men of learning who spoke the same language of scientific racism, peppered with pseudo-scientific theories of polygenesis and racial difference, for whom the ascendancy of the white races was an inevitability. Racism was of course not a new invention then, for as Bartlett (1993) has noted ‘while the language of race is biological, its medieval reality was almost entirely cultural’.<sup>42</sup> The leap that was made in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was in the manner that the earlier *cultural* understanding of race was overtaken by a scientific, biological understanding of it. That the British authors we have looked at in this book shared similar beliefs about the necessity of Empire was not an aberration, and across the Atlantic men like Theodore Lothrop Stoddard (1885-1950) – graduate of Harvard College and Boston University as well as member of the American Historical Association and the American Academy of Political Science – were echoing the same sentiments in later works like *The Rising Tide of Color Against White-World Supremacy* (1921).<sup>43</sup> America’s eventual embrace of Empire brought it closer to Western Europe, and led to the emergence of what Vucetic (2011) has dubbed the *Anglosphere*. Back in Southeast Asia the region would see more and more of such ‘scientific’ works that would further the cause of colonial-scientific enquiry, such as D.J.H. Nyessen’s *The Races of Java* (1929) – whose subtitle was *The Acquisition of Some Preliminary Knowledge concerning the Influence of Geographic Environment on the Physical Structure of the Javanese*; and which even came with a map of ‘Racial Elements’ from Africa to the Pacific islands – was the kind of work on racial theory that was deemed scientific and respectable, at least to the *Indisch Comité voor Wetenschappelijke Onderzoekingen* (East Indies Committee For Scientific Research). Such works – with their propensity to classify and categorise anything and everything – belonged to a tradition of writing that was instrumental to colony-building. And as Mignolo (2015) has pointed out, ‘classification is an epistemic manoeuvre rather than an ontological entity that carries with it the essence of the classification. It is a system of classification enacted by actors, institutions and categories of thought that enjoy the privilege of being hegemonic or dominant, and which imposes itself as ontological truth reinforced by ‘scientific’ research’.<sup>44</sup> To look for ‘truth’ in such works

42 Bartlett, 1993: 197.

43 Stoddard, Theodore Lothrop. *The Rising Tide of Color Against White-World Supremacy*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1921.

44 Walter Mignolo, *Yes, We Can*. Foreword to Hamid Dabashi, *Can Non-Europeans Think?* London: Zed Books. 2015: xi.

would miss the point that the truth did not matter as much as the *power* of these texts to provide a coherent narrative that justified the workings of a racialized colonial system. It is this factor that locates these works and their authors at the very heart of the colonial-capitalist power-knowledge complex.

The discourse of scientific data-based imperialism was in many ways a 19<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon, and we can understand it today by looking at it from a Wittgensteinian perspective. Edward Said's central argument in *Orientalism* (1978) holds true, though it could be added that within the broad framework of Orientalist writing there existed a plethora of different types of writing-enquiry, of which the kind of data-collecting we have looked at in this book was but one. Here is where Wittgenstein's theory of language-games becomes relevant, for it was he who noted that within language-use in general there are in fact many types of language-use, each with its own set of rules and norms, in the same way that within the broad array of games that can be played there are a myriad of different games, each with rules of their own. In his *Philosophical Investigations* (1945, 1958) Wittgenstein alludes to the fact that learning a language is never simply a case of learning *a* language, but rather learning the different sets of rules that are at work when we use language differently. We are never 'born' liars any more than we are 'born' jokers. (Regardless of what your teacher may have told you at school.) We have to *learn* how to lie, as we need to *learn* how to joke – and by extension we also learn, in the process of language-acquisition – how to speak and write rhetorically, literally, poetically, sarcastically and scientifically. In this respect the discourse of scientific data-based colonial-capitalism was a language-game as described by Wittgenstein. *And the upshot of this is that one is never born a colonial-capitalist, but one has to learn how to think and write like one.*

Related to this learning process is situational context, and as Wittgenstein also noted, the learning of the rules of various language-games is dependent on the context in which those language-games arise and make sense. As we learn how to joke, we also learn where and when to joke and we come to understand that one does not joke at a funeral. The language-game of the army is learned on the parade ground and the barracks; the language-game of finance is learned in corporate boardrooms and shady tax havens, and so was the language-game of racialized colonial-capitalism developed in the context of the militarised colonial companies and colonial administrations where it was spoken and used. This reminds us of the fact that the works we have looked at in this book were books of a particular kind, written by writers of a particular kind and addressed to a readership of a particular kind – who happened to be the elites at the top of the steamy colonial-capitalist pile. The authors I have looked at in this book were all men who chose to join the colonial companies and governments that they willingly served, learned the

language-rules of those organisations and laboured with the goal of Empire in mind, which places the burden of moral responsibility squarely on their shoulders. In the same way that Bourdieu's *homo academicus* (1990) lived and worked in a rule-governed environment where academic discourse abided by conventions agreed upon by its language-users, so did *homo colonialismus* speak and write according to their own set of *Sprachregelungen* that was distinctive. It is that which makes the works we have looked at look so dated, so 19th century, and so very colonial to boot.

Wittgenstein also made the important observation that new language-games may emerge while some language-games may die as a result of changes in historical circumstances; and there is ample evidence to show that his argument was correct. The kind of seaside humour that was once popular in the 1960s – typified by comedy shows such as the *Benny Hill Show* – are no longer seen as funny, while new forms of humour – including memes and insider jokes commonly found on social media – seem to be appreciated by millennials the world over. It is not as if one fine morning the world decided that Benny Hill wasn't funny after all, but that other changes in society – the advancement of women's rights, growing consciousness about racism and sexism in the media – rendered the language-game of the *Benny Hill Show* untenable. The same can be said about how the language-game of racialized colonial-capitalism eventually lost its captivating grip, thanks to the shifting geopolitical realities that became increasingly evident as the era of Empire drew to an end, heralding the 'information panic' (Bayly, 1996) that came with it.<sup>45</sup>

### III. Imperial Hubris: When Empire's Archive Fell Apart

As with panics with witches, heretics, Jesuits and freemasons in Europe, (colonialism's information panic) reflected the weakness of the new quasi-bureaucratic state in its own hinterland rather than premeditated attempts to master society.<sup>46</sup>

Christopher Alan Bayly,  
*Empire and Information* (1996)

45 Bayly (1996) had concluded that colonial data-gathering which brought with it its own modalities of knowledge-production, policing and surveillance ironically helped to prepare South Asians for the intellectual revolution that would lead to calls for independence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Bayly, 1996: 375-376.)

46 Bayly, 1996: 171

Data-collecting, surveillance and social-geographical mapping were not preoccupations unique to the European colonial powers, and as Firges, Graf, Roth and Tulasoğlu (2014) have shown the same desire to know all that could be known across the length and breadth of the empire was a preoccupation of the Ottomans as well.<sup>47</sup> Another non-Western country that readily accepted the tools of the modern panopticon state was Japan during the Meiji era (1868-1912). (In fact one of the first modern prisons built during the Meiji period was based exactly on Bentham's panopticon model, and is preserved today at Japan's Meiji Mura historical park.) With the backing of influential statesmen like Inukai Tsuyoshi and Okuma Shigenobu, the government of the Meiji emperor began sending delegations to Southeast Asia to learn more about Southeast Asian societies and began mapping Indochina in earnest.<sup>48</sup> While the Ottoman Turks and the Japanese may have regarded the Western imperial powers as competitors and adversaries, they did not hesitate to embrace Western modes of data-collecting and knowledge-production that contributed to the development of their own imperial domains.

By the last quarter of the 19th century the peoples of Southeast Asia had been classified and catalogued, and appointed their respective roles in the plural economic system that would be the standard in almost all of the colonies. Their identities were also fixed, and reproduced *ad infinitum* in later works where Asia and Asians were put on display – such as in Blackie and Son's *Comprehensive Atlas & Geography of the World* (1882) where a chromolithograph bearing the title 'The Malay Race' featured samples of Southeast Asians taken from the earlier works of Marryat (1848), Hardouin (1872) and others. That the image lumped together Dayaks from Borneo and Javanese from Java together as 'Malays' did not seem to matter, for by then the native Other had been epistemically arrested for good and shoved into categories not of their own choosing. (Noor, 2016.b.)

The end of the era of the gunboat meant that a new kind of colonial power was rising, one that increasingly relied on researcher-administrators and data-collectors. In British Malaya the perpetuation of colonial power was thanks to the work of men such as Richard Olaf Winstedt (1878-1966), Herbert Deane Noone (1907-1943) and Oliver William Wolters (1915- 2000). Winstedt, as Assistant Director of colonial education in Malaya, was the one who was later

47 See: Pascal Firges, Tobias Graf, Christian Roth and Gülay Tulasoğlu (Eds.), *Well-Connected Domains: Towards an Entangled Ottoman History*. Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2014.

48 See: *Indochina Country Map: Southeast Area*. Geographical and Mapping Bureau of the Japanese Army, Tokyo, 1896. YG827- 427/428/429/430. Four maps of Indochina, with Katakana phonetic script and Chinese script. Map room, Diet Library, Tokyo, Japan.

responsible for the 'rural bias' that would come to dominate the British colonial education system.<sup>49</sup> Herbert Noone in turn was the anthropologist whose work on the aboriginal communities in interior Malaya led him to the conclusion that the aborigines of the colony should not be converted to Christianity, but rather allowed to assimilate with other native communities in order to survive.<sup>50</sup> While Oliver Wolters would eventually become the director of the British colonial psychological warfare unit in the colony,<sup>51</sup> British Malaya – like Britain's other colonies in Asia, as well as the other Western colonies across the region – had by then been thoroughly mapped and studied, and the groundwork for this decidedly modern mode of colonial micro-management had been laid

49 Richard Olaf Winstedt (1878-1966) was appointed the Assistant Director of Colonial Education in the British Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States. He wrote a report which compared the style and standards of colonial education in British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies and the Philippines that was published in 1917. He concluded that the system of education employed by the Dutch was of a more practical level because it concentrated on teaching them agricultural skills instead of subjects such as history and science, which he regarded as useless for Malays. In *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (1967) William Roff noted that Winstedt felt it was much more important to develop the vernacular schooling system within its prescribed limits and by doing so laid the 'rural bias' that was to dominate in colonial policies in the area of native education in British Malaya. Winstedt regarded the chronicles and histories of the Malay peoples as being of no value whatsoever. In his report on vernacular education, he described such works as mere 'fairy-tales that stand for history', the teaching of which he regarded as futile. [R.O. Winstedt. *The Malays: A Cultural History*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1947.]

50 Herbert Deane Noone (1907-1943) was an anthropologist who also worked for the Perak Museum of Taiping. Noone was the first scholar to carry out a survey of the Senoi people living along the Perak-Kelantan border, and his *Report on the Settlement and Welfare of the Ple-Temiar Senoi of the Perak-Kelantan watershed* (1936) suggested that the British authorities in Perak ought to intervene directly in the re-settlement of the Temiar people who he believed were in need of colonial protection. Later this report by Noone became the framework for the Perak *Aboriginal Tribes Enactment* of 1939. Despite the pastoral attitude he took towards the natives of the interior, Noone was a controversial figure. He was said to be married to a Temiar woman and during the long periods of field research in the Temiar forests compiled some of the first Temiar dictionaries. He later felt that the Temiar were under threat due to the encroachment of both Europeans and Malays; though he felt that the Temiar would be better served if they were allowed to 'become Malay' rather than converted to Christianity. [See: Holman, Dennis, *Noone of the Ulu*. London: Heinemann. 1958; Toshihiro, Nobuta. *Living on the Periphery: Development and Islamisation among the Orang Asli of Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: Centre for Orang Asli Concerns. 2009.]

51 Oliver William Wolters (1915-2000) was an officer in the British Malayan colonial service. He entered the Malayan colonial civil service in 1937 and up to the Second World War was posted in various parts of British Malaya, where he learned the local languages and also studied the various communities and ethnic groups in the colony. During the period of Japanese military occupation throughout World War Two, he was captured and later detained in Changi, Singapore. After the end of World War Two he was brought back into the British colonial civil service, and rose up the ranks. In 1955 he was selected to be the Director of the British Psychological Warfare Unit that was based in Kuala Lumpur, on account of his knowledge of the peoples and languages of Malaya.

decades earlier by the likes of Raffles, Crawfurd, St. John, Low, Daly and Clifford. To their data was added even more data, and the realm of the unknown shrank accordingly. And the fact that so many of these later researcher-administrators were involved in the gathering of military intelligence is an indicator of how blurred the line between knowledge-building and colonial policing had become.

In time however this race for information and data would give rise to a new crisis that was of its own making. As British, Dutch, French, Spanish, Portuguese and later American data-collectors and knowledge-builders went about their task mapping and studying every part of Southeast Asia that came under their control, the question arose as to how all this data and information was to be stored, managed and made sense of. This led to the crisis of entropy that Richards (1993) has written about, and it occasioned the belief that human mastery over information might not, after all, be possible in the long run:

The concept of entropy came into being precisely because the possibility of positive knowledge was beginning to be eclipsed by an explosion of too much positive knowledge. Information was the name given to this knowledge that came from everywhere and ended up nowhere. Information was archival without belonging to an archive, vast but not total, extensive but not complete. Information was positive knowledge that refused to become comprehensive. Information meant knowledge without the central structuring agency of an archive, or a totalizing metastable structure for knowledge. The Victorian information explosion threatened the sense that human understanding could ever achieve mastery over knowledge.<sup>52</sup>

The problem of having too much data and not knowing how to organize it was one of the inevitable results of imperial overreach, and it reminds us of the memorandum sent out by the Marques de Sonora in 1786 which we mentioned at the beginning of this book. In British Burma and British Malaya, French Indochina, the Dutch East Indies and the Spanish (and later American) Philippines, the various colonial governments had erected impressive structures of colonial control and knowledge. Yet the 'empire of information' – to borrow Bayly's (1996) term – that the British had tried to build in India and Southeast Asia would eventually fall apart as it rested on shaky foundations in the first place.<sup>53</sup> This data-collecting project suffered from its own Eurocentric bias from the start, for it took off from the premise that the non-Western world could and had to be understood and rendered

52 Richards, 1993: 76.

53 Bayly, 1996: 365-366, 375, 376

knowable by Europeans while at the same time maintaining the hierarchies of racial difference and notions of Western racial supremacy upon which racialized colonial-capitalism worked.

Colonial-administrative disconnect – which was the result of the racial hierarchies that the colonisers had themselves introduced – meant that Empire's organs of knowledge and data-collecting would invariably end up in the 'zone of ignorance' where the colonisers were less and less inclined and able to interact with the people who knew what was going on, namely the natives themselves. (Bayly, 1996) Prejudice, ignorance and a false sense of intellectual superiority among those who led the project meant that the Southeast Asians they encountered and wrote about would always be framed in terms of tropes and caricatures that were self-serving to themselves while being further from the truth. It was in the stuffy antechambers of colonial knowledge and power that the colonizers met and interacted with the like-minded (as in the manner that Crawford had chosen to interview mostly Westerners in his data-collecting for his report and his *Embassy to the Court of Ava*, and how Spencer St. John had called upon other Westerners, namely the Reverend Walter Chambers, the Reverend William Chalmers, the Reverend William Gomez and Charles Johnson Esq. to verify his findings about the natives of Borneo) that 'the stereotypes of thugs, criminal guilds, religious fanatics and well-poisoners were hatched' by the Europeans themselves.<sup>54</sup>

What men like Raffles, Daly and Clifford connived to do in Java, Borneo and the Malay Peninsula was not all that different from what had been put into practice earlier in India, where military-strategic information was collected and analysed alongside information about the cultures, histories and literature of Asians, as Bayly (1996) has demonstrated.<sup>55</sup> But as Empire's vast and lumbering body of data began to fragment and the knowledge collected grew too big to manage, the fissures within this columbarium of knowledge grew ever more apparent; and the cracks were widened further by the agency of those Asian subordinates who had been brought into Empire's data-collecting machine and who were later among the first to critique the workings of Empire, in what Scott (1990) has described as the 'public declaration of the hidden transcript'.<sup>56</sup> Be it in the instances of intellectual resistance among Indian colonial subjects<sup>57</sup> or the Western-educated intelligentsia in British Burma (Taylor, 1987; Boshier, 2018) and British Malaya (Roff, 1967;

54 Bayly, 1996: 143.

55 Bayly, 1996: 7.

56 Scott, 1990: 202.

57 Bayly, 1996: 180-211, 314, 315-336.

Milner, 1982, 2002), the results were the same. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Enlightenment-inspired project of total data-collection was falling apart. Bayly (1996) notes that despite the mountains of data that had been collected the British authorities in India had failed to see the rebellion of 1857 coming, and were 'fighting blind'; while Roff (1967) has shown that attempts at colonial education in British Malaya did not achieve the results that were intended. In the case of Malaya the creation of colonial schools led to the development of a new class of vernacular Malay intelligentsia who would be among the first to criticise the workings of racialized colonial-capitalism from within.

From South to Southeast Asia, resistance to colonial rule emerged from within the very communities that were the intended targets of colonial education and pastoral care, and in many cases these native anti-colonial movements employed the very same tools and instruments that were introduced by the colonial powers themselves: the printing press, the postal system, the modern company and the modern school. Resistance to colonial rule was often nuanced and complex, with anti-colonial activists employing the tools of modern Western technology while rejecting an epistemology which they regarded as Occidental and alien. In India, Hindu activism began with the formation of the *Arya Samaj* (est. 1875) up to the *Rashtriya Swayansevak Sangh* (est. 1925). In 1891 Anagarika Dharmapala created the Maha Bodhi Society along with its own journal, with the aim of reviving Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia while resisting the work of Christian missionaries there. In 1896 Andres Bonifacio formed and led the anti-colonial *Katipunan* movement in the Philippines, which gathered momentum and continued even after the arrival of the Americans as the latest colonial power in Southeast Asia. In British Burma, Burman-Buddhist activism grew as it was led by Buddhist intellectuals who were among the recipients of colonial education in the colony. Even after the French colonial authorities replaced the Buddhist cosmological maps used in Cambodia (in 1919) with Western topographical maps, native anti-colonial resistance grew stronger in the very institutions they had introduced to control the natives: the school, the press and the market. Like the Roman Empire whose roads were used to project Roman power to the edges of the empire but which were later used by Rome's enemies to invade her, it seemed that the architecture of Empire in Southeast Asia was being turned against itself.

The crisis of colonial governance, that began to show itself at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and which grew increasingly evident during the inter-war decades, was both a crisis of maladministration and data overload. In the sense that the colonial authorities no longer knew what to do – for they believed that they already knew all that could be known – it was a crisis of undecidability, as defined by Sayyid (1997):



Crisis describes the situation in which sedimented relations and practices become unsettled; when the unity of a certain field of discursivity is disarticulated. This leads to the disruption of routinization. As the space of sedimented social relations shrinks, the terrain of undecidability expands. That is, in terrain in which the dislocation of structure introduces a radical ambiguity of identity, the resolution of crisis cannot be deduced from the terms of the crisis, since the expansion of undecidability precludes the possibility of deriving outcomes from that crisis. By definition, one cannot predict the undecidable.<sup>58</sup>

Notwithstanding the thousands of maps, reports, censuses, development plans and racial-typological studies that had been carried out for more than a century, the colonial administrators were unable to answer the simple question of why the colonised natives did not want to live under their rule. Blinkered as they were by their own cognitive bias and sheltered in the bubble they created for themselves, Western scholars and analysts of Southeast Asian society and politics often fell back on the same repertoire of Orientalist tropes of the Other, and this bias was shared by right-wing conservatives and left-leaning progressives alike.<sup>59</sup>

When data failed to explain the causes of native unrest, it was the machine gun that became the tool of last resort. Bayly (1996) has highlighted the human failings of the colonial enterprise – *all too human*, as Nietzsche might say. The racism that underscored colonial policing and surveillance would later account for the paranoia that came with the eventual collapse of Empire, where the colonisers' 'assessments of native crime, religion and native lethargy were more often reflections of the weakness and ignorance of the colonisers than a gauge of hegemony'.<sup>60</sup> Having fed themselves on a staple diet of Orientalist tropes of native savages, pirates and head-hunters for so long, it was hardly a surprise that as the sun of Empire began to set the framed native Other would return to spook them all. The rest, as the saying goes, is history. Decolonisation and the end of Empire was a

58 Sayyid, 1997: 24.

59 As late as in 1960, the British socialist thinker John Lowe, while writing about newly-independent Malaya in the journal of the Fabian Society of London, opined that 'the Malays are an unsophisticated, technically underdeveloped rural people; the Malayan Chinese are technically resourceful and economically energetic' (p. 1) and that 'the mass of the Malay peasantry are traditionalist, suspicious and often superstitious, offering formidable resistance to change' (p. 22). [See: Lowe, John. 'The Malayan Experiment', in: Fabian International and Commonwealth Bureau, Fabian Society, London. Research Series 213. 1960.]

60 Bayly, 1996: 143; 142-179.

hurried, graceless and often bloody process in the post-war years, and with Empire's demise came the end of the language-game of 19<sup>th</sup> century data-based racialized colonial-capitalism. But it has to be noted that the postcolonial states of Southeast Asia today were built on the same foundations of the colonies of old, and that in some instances continuities persist – particularly in the manner in which the postcolonial states of Asia today have retained the belief that data and knowledge can be put to work by the postcolonial state. It is to that subject that I shall turn to next, by way of conclusion.

#### IV. The Panopticon Today: Data-Gathering and Governance in Present-day Postcolonial Southeast Asia

We must bear in mind that some twentieth century converts to the colonial ideology are present among the indigenous people. An ideology is never confined to its originating group. It is also shared by those dominated by the system of which the ideology is the rationalisation.

Syed Hussein Alatas,  
*The Myth of the Lazy Native*

The Panopticon, once built, was never really disassembled. As Hirshman (1986, 1987) has pointed out, it has been impossible to entirely erase the legacy of colonial rule in Southeast Asia for the simple reason that the epistemology of Empire remains in use in so many ways, not least in the manner in which concepts such as 'race' remain in circulation in postcolonial Southeast Asia until today. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Southeast Asia's multicultural societies had been redefined as *multiracial* societies, and here the concepts of race and racial difference were undoubtedly pivotal. But as Darwin (2008) has argued, the scientific understanding of racial difference – a concept so foreign to Southeast Asia that there are no words for the same in any of the native languages of the region – was an idea that would later be adapted and adopted by the colonised subjects themselves, for:

[...] the idea of race did not remain a European (or Euro-American) monopoly. It was highly exportable. If being a 'race' was the secret of European power, then its attractions were obvious. By the end of the (nineteenth) century, the new Chinese nationalism of Sun Yat Sen was

deploying the notion of a distinctive Han race, the true Chinese nation. In colonial Bengal, where the Hindu *bhadralok* ('respectable people') resented exclusion from government and the disparaging language of their colonial masters, nationalist rhetoric turned the racial tables. The 'Hindu race' was much the most civilized.<sup>61</sup>

When Hadji Samanhudi (1868-1956) and Hadji Oemar Said Tjokroaminoto (1882-1934) created the *Sarekat Dagang Islam* (Muslim Merchants' Cooperative) in Surakarta, Central Java, in 1911 it was their intention to bring together Javanese batik producers in an effort to pool their wealth and expand their business network. But by then the native merchants of Java had already developed a clear idea of who their racial adversaries were, and it was the Dutch and Chinese who were framed as the threats to Javanese economic development. Likewise in Burma the development of Burmese nationalism eventually manifested itself in the form of *Burman* nationalism, where Burman racial identity was framed against other 'races' that shared the country.

But the concept of race was not the only thing that was inherited by the postcolonial states of Southeast Asia. A cursory look at the map of the region today will show that the political boundaries of Southeast Asia are basically the same colonial boundaries that were set during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and agreed upon by the various Western colonial powers that ruled the roost then, through agreements such as the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1871 – though today those borders are patrolled and policed with the latest forms of drone surveillance technology.<sup>62</sup>

With colonial-era borders came the understanding of the nation-state that was largely built upon the Westphalian model, and with that also came the technocratic-bureaucratic mindset that views society as a thing that ought to be rendered knowable in order for it to be governed well. Notwithstanding the fact that present-day scholars have begun to raise serious questions about the Western-centric bias that can be seen in disciplines such as International Relations (Waeber, 1998), and the fact that historians have long alluded to the existence of precolonial understandings of power and politics in Asia (Gullick, 1965; Coedes, 1968; Geertz, 1980; Milner, 1982,

61 Darwin, 2008: 348.

62 See: 'ASEAN Summit: Police Coast Guard beef up border security with coastal surveillance cameras'. Channel News Asia, Singapore. 11 November 2018. <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/asean-summit-police-coast-guard-beef-up-border-security-with-314-10918448>. Accessed 26 June 2019.

2002, 2015; Chaudhuri, 1990; Asmah, 2003; Acharya and Buzan, 2010; Chong, 2012; Salmah, 2014), the modern nation-state is still seen as a given and remains the dominant paradigm in governance and international relations across Southeast Asia. With the acceptance of the nation-state model as the operative norm across the region has come the acceptance of the global status quo as well. In the domains of research and academic writing Southeast Asians are still inclined to study themselves – in the manner that they were once studied by colonial scholars and researchers – and the region is still seen as fertile ground for foreign-funded research too. When lamenting this state of affairs and commenting on the phenomenon of ‘helicopter research’, Minasny and Fiantis (2018) have observed that ‘researchers from wealthier countries fly to a developing country like Indonesia, take samples, fly out, analyze the samples elsewhere, and publish the results with little involvement of local scientists’ and where ‘at best, local scientists are used to provide logistics’.<sup>63</sup> *Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose.*

The global arena in turn is one where the grand narratives of old are still being rehashed in new forms, and where as Furedi (1994) and Neocleous (2011) have shown, ideas of ‘civilization’ and ‘civilizing missions’ remain with us and find expression in campaigns to promote democracy in the developing world to the so-called ‘War on Terror’ which is seen by some Neo-Cons as a civilizing offensive.<sup>64</sup> Postcolonial Southeast Asia is part of this new world order, and despite the occasional lapse into nostalgia and unreconstructed imaginings of a distant glorious past, has never ever made a real leap back to the precolonial world visualized in the work of Chaudhuri (1990). Southeast Asia has embraced globalization with relish, and from the 1980s the region has experienced a boom in capital-led development which has brought with it all the tools and toys of social management and control.

Living as we do today in a world where almost everything we do, write and like on the internet is constantly monitored – and where our life-choices are recorded by unseen corporations and sold as big data (Norris, 1999; Lyon, 2001, 2009) – it would not be a surprise if the luddites among us lament the bygone days of invisibility and freedom from constant connectivity. Yet as Weiner et al. (2003) have shown, the twentieth century was truly a century of human management where technology was put to use by the state – from Revolutionary Russia to Fascist Italy to Nazi Germany

63 Budiman Minasny and Dian Fiantis, ‘Helicopter Research: Who Benefits from International Studies in Indonesia?’ 29 August 2018.

64 Neocleous, 2011: 147, 149-150.

up to present-day corporate America – in a sustained effort to landscape the garden of humanity.<sup>65</sup> Landscaping the human garden can, however, also take on more brutal forms and in the political context can come to mean the weeding out of those who are deemed a threat to the state and the powers that be, as Melvin (2018) has shown in her harrowing study of how the extermination of Leftists in Indonesia in 1965 – which was made possible thanks to the existence of comprehensive databases on left-leaning intellectuals, activists and members of the Indonesian Communist Party. The genocide that took place then, like the mass killings in Cambodia during the days of the Khmer Rouge, were facilitated and expedited thanks to the availability of data: lists of names and addresses, photo albums of suspects, maps of their whereabouts. And as Lyon (2010) has argued, so pervasive are these technologies of liquid surveillance today that even parents can now spy on their children's whereabouts and listen in on their conversations with their friends.<sup>66</sup> In the postmodern age of late industrial capitalism where surveillance has become accepted as a normal part of daily life in East and West, by (former) coloniser and (former) colonised alike, we do not even seem to see the irony that a reality TV show where the audience is invited to observe the most intimate interactions between strangers can be entitled *Big Brother*. (Obviously not everyone has read Orwell.) Everyone can build their own panopticon these days, and that includes the governments of Southeast Asia too.

The point that I have tried to make in this book however is that this proclivity for data-collecting and surveillance is not new and therefore should not surprise us; and that in the case of Southeast Asia it can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the colonial states that were built by the Western powers were founded upon carefully sifted data and curated knowledge. The books we have looked at here are all examples of the kind of writing on Southeast Asia that was produced at the height of Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the manner in which Southeast Asians were framed by the authors of these books reflects the prejudicial attitudes that were part of the discursive landscape of racialized colonial-capitalism. Now that the guns have fallen silent and the gunboats have sailed away, there is the tendency to see such works as 'classics' in their own right, and appraise them as some of the earliest examples of serious scholarship in the domain of Southeast Asian studies. There is some truth to this claim, for these works were indeed pioneering in their time; and it could also be argued that these

65 Weiner, Amir. (Ed.) *Landscaping the Human Garden*. 2003.

66 Lyon, David. 'Liquid Surveillance'. 2010: 331.

works on Southeast Asia can and should still be read despite the evident biases and agendas of their authors, on the grounds that we 'can learn from mistakes, even and especially in the masterpieces'. (Jackson, 2017:19) I am inclined to agree with the position taken by the likes of Jackson and Myers (2017), but *only* if in the course of recognising those mistakes we also identify the subject-positions of these authors and locate them in the structures of power and authority that they occupied – that is as colony-builders who wrote about Southeast Asia with the intention of reducing these places and peoples to objects of knowledge that would later be put to use for the sake of Empire.<sup>67</sup>

What I have done in this book is to offer a re-reading of these 19<sup>th</sup> century texts – by focusing on the minutiae and combing through their appendices. In this process of excavation my intention was to uncover the agendas and plans of the authors themselves, to demonstrate that their works were not simply histories of Southeast Asia but also databanks of information that would later be put to work in the process of empire-building. Some may question such an approach, on the grounds that such an endeavour may restate the primacy of these works, valorise their worth, and affirm their status as 'classics'. In response to that I can only concur with the argument of Jackson earlier, and note that even classics can be re-read critically and in the course of doing so re-evaluated as well. In the context of today's debates about the decolonisation of knowledge and disciplines I personally feel that it is more important than ever that such works are read critically by postcolonial scholars who are in a better informed position to identify the subject-position of the authors we have looked at. It can also be pointed out that none of the authors I have looked at – from Raffles to Crawfurd to Low, or St. John or Clifford – could have imagined that a century after their passing a Southeast Asian scholar such as myself, having penetrated the linoleum-lined corridors of academia, would be re-reading their works in a critical manner; in the same way that 19<sup>th</sup> century defenders and proponents of scientific Patriarchy could not have imagined that their pseudo-scientific theories of gender difference would one day be critically dissected by a future generation of feminist scholars and scientists and exposed for the bunkum that it truly was.

The books we have looked at here contained an astounding amount of data; and that data was, as I have tried to show, collected and framed by their authors in such a way as to lead their readers to the same conclusions

67 See: Myers, Fred. 'Rant or Reason: Old Wine and New Bottles in Anthropology', 2017; Jackson, John L. 'Bewitched By Boas', 2017.

as their own – namely that Empire was justifiable, inevitable and desirable. *Data-collecting was thus never a cosmetic accessory to Empire; it was the bedrock upon which its architecture rested and upon which its modalities of social management and policing were based.* If present-day romantics imagine that the past was a time where one could live quietly and anonymously, they should think again: from Raffles' ambition to build a policing system that encompassed the whole of Java to Clifford's maps of the Malay Peninsula that revealed everything there was to know, the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period of intense probing, unearthing and revealing, where at the end of it all almost all of Southeast Asia had been mapped and all Southeast Asians had been accounted for, discursively framed, and slotted into typologies that were arresting. The final result was a vast body of knowledge as they had never seen, but also one that denuded Southeast Asia and its people like Phryne before the Areopagus. Southeast Asia had come to be known, and in the process so was it colonised via these modalities of knowledge-building and information-gathering.