

**THE APPENDICES OF EMPIRE:  
WHY WRITINGS FROM THE COLONIAL ERA NEED  
TO BE READ IN THEIR ENTIRETY**

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**Abstract**

Among the many outcomes of the critique of Orientalism and the writings that emerged from the colonial era is the view that most, if not all, works that were published during the era of Empire are tainted by racial prejudice and Orientalist tropes and stereotypes of the non-Western Other. While this may be the case, this paper argues that there are still many reasons for postcolonial scholars to read such works today, from an informed and critical postcolonial perspective. This paper is using qualitative method-looking at three works by three colonial-era writers – Thomas Stamford Raffles’ *The History of Java* (1817); John Crawfurd’s *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Court of Ava* (1829); and Henry Keppel’s *The Expedition to Borneo of the HMS Dido for the Suppression of Piracy* (1846). The findings show how, through a deep and critical reading of the texts, we can see the contradictions, ironies and uncertainties of the imperial project; and by so doing debunk the notion that Western colonialism in Southeast Asia was a linear, organised and systematic process entirely determined by the colonial powers themselves.

**Keywords:** Orientalism, Colonial Writing, Colonial Stereotypes, Confirmation Bias, Colonial Propaganda

**Introduction: Why the *Entire* Text Matters – Delving into the Appendices of Empire.**

“A text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination”.<sup>1</sup>

**Roland Barthes,**  
*The Death of the Author*

“What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse”.<sup>2</sup>

**Michel Foucault,**  
*The History of Sexuality*

We live in an age where the book is thought to have become redundant. In the age of social media the material reality of books – as things that are themselves bound, portable, even combustible – has been lost to a generation brought up on video games and virtual reality; for whom the complex process of book-making may seem as arcane as the magical spells they learn about in the fantasy role-playing games that they play online. Compounding matters further is the tendency today – again, exacerbated by the ravaging effects of social media – for

youngsters to read only the gist or summary of books that can be found online in the various platforms that can be found on the internet. Academics the world over have lamented the fact that the mechanical production of knowledge through the modern (capital-driven and market-oriented) university has led us to a situation where grades matter more than erudition, and where students in particular are wont to seek faster, easier ways to ‘hack’ the system where the books that have been assigned to them can be summarized in passing, served in nugget-sized portions for easy consumption, reproduction and quotation later.

For historians whose field of research is the long-drawn era of Empire, the demise of the tradition of deep, sustained reading has dealt a double blow in some respects. This is true for books that were written during the colonial era in particular, by authors who were themselves part of the enterprise of Empire, and who were embedded in the internal workings of racialised colonial-capitalism in parts of Asia and Africa. And yet notwithstanding the popular view that the era of Empire was distinguished by the excessive use of force and violence, it can be argued that the foundations of Empire were laid not by bayonets and howitzers, but rather by the bedrock of ideas that formed the basis of the colonial-imperial enterprise as shown in the work of Cohn (1996). In the sustained critique of Western imperialism and racialised colonial-capitalism that we find in the works of Alatas (1971, 1977) and Said (1978, 1993), we see how the vast system of capital-driven Western colonialism was built upon a myriad of ideas – some factual, some pseudo-scientific, some patently false – that were the crucial narrative devices and discursive tools through which the entire project of Empire was justified and rationalised. Anderson (1983) in turn has shown how these ideas were later reproduced and normalised as part of the quotidian realities of life in the colonial world through institutions such as the colonial archive and the colonial museum. But all these ideas were contained in, and disseminated through, one of the most powerful tools of Empire at the time: *the book*.

One of the ironic outcomes of the critique by Alatas, Said and others is the view that *all* colonial-era writings have been permanently and irreversibly tainted by Orientalist bias, and that almost all of these works contain a host of instrumental fictions, biased stereotypes and negative representations of the non-Western Other to the point that they are not even worth reading anymore. This view has been compounded by the effects of time, for the temporal gap between the colonial era of the past and the postcolonial present grows wider by the day, rendering the colonial past as something that is seen as distant and possibly even irrelevant to the needs of today. In a world confounded by pressing challenges of the immediate present – from global warming to extremist violence to populism and hyper-nationalism – one might ask: Do these colonial-era books deserve attention today?

This paper will argue that postcolonial scholars today have every reason to revisit the writings that were produced by the architects of Empire from the 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. My contention is that the postcolonial scholar today stands at a certain vantage point in history, being the inheritor of not only the legacy of colonialism itself but also the legacy of the trends of critical thinking that has swept the humanities worldwide since the 1960s. This is simply because the postcolonial scholar today is not only aware of the lingering effects of the long 19<sup>th</sup> century, but is also familiar with the new waves of critical theory that emanated from the domains of philosophy and literature, but later spilled over into the domains of history, sociology, anthropology and others. In the same way that we now live in a post-Newtonian world where our fundamental understanding of physics has been irreversibly altered thanks to the advances in quantum physics, we also happen to live in a world where the humanities has

been marked by the advances made by the likes of Alatas, Said, and also critical theorists like Derrida, Foucault, Barthes and philosophers such as Wittgenstein and Heidegger.

These advances have changed the way we look at, and understand, the power of the book and the role of the authorial voice that was once deemed sacrosanct. The critical theorist and philosopher of language Roland Barthes (1977) has argued that *any text – of any genre – is not simply ‘a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning, but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash’*<sup>3</sup>; leading him to conclude that the unity of a body of writing lies not in the intentionality of the author, but rather at the moment of reading by the (*intended or unintended*) reader instead. The upshot of Barthes’ argument is that there has never been, and can never be, a final, definitive reading/interpretation of any text, for every generation – shaped as it is by the variables and vicissitudes of the time – *will read the text anew*. This does not necessarily entail the total absence of the author’s voice or authorial intention, but it does mean that every generation can (and does) come to have its own interpretation and appreciation of any/all texts, for every reading – at any point in time – can only be a *contemporary* reading, shaped by the circumstances of the immediate present.

The point above is an observation readily made by historians in general, and by historians who have focused on historically dated writings in particular. The historian who reads the writings of colonial functionaries and the advocates of Empire in the past often sees the enormous historical gap or distance between the time that these works were written and the realities of the present that he or she inhabits at the moment. In tone and tenor, vocabulary and the range of literary tropes and narrative devices that we encounter in such works, we can see how dated they were/are, being works that were written when slavery was deemed normal and respectable, and when pseudo-scientific theories of racial and gender differences were regarded as modern and progressive.

In this paper I will be looking at three works that were written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by men who were themselves located squarely at the centre of Britain’s colonial project in Southeast Asia: Thomas Stamford Raffles’ *The History of Java* (1817); John Crawfurd’s *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Court of Ava* (1829); and Henry Keppel’s *The Expedition to Borneo of the HMS Dido for the Suppression of Piracy* (1846). It is evident from the outset that all three men were themselves committed empire-builders, who served their imperial government in the capacity of being members of the East India Company and the Royal Navy. That their works are littered with all manner of racial bias, Orientalist clichés, and ethnic stereotypes is something that anyone familiar with the history of British imperialism should not be surprised by.

What I intend to do in this paper is to go deeper into these texts, and to show how – through a deep and thorough reading of the works in their entirety – we can see the many blind spots and contradictions that were also present in the form and praxis of colonial rule and imperial expansionism then. We will begin our analysis by looking closely at one of the most famous works on Southeast Asia that was written at the height of colonial power in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: Stamford Raffles’ *The History of Java* (1817).

## Colonialism and the Surveillance State: Stamford Raffles' Dream of Limitless Data Collection in Java.

“I believe there is no one possessed of more information respecting Java than myself”.<sup>4</sup>

**Thomas Stamford Raffles,**  
*Letter to Elton Hammond*

We shall begin by looking at the writings of the East India Company-man Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781-1826), who was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Governor of Java by Lord Minto in 1811. The British occupation of Java that began in 1811 and lasted until 1816 has been written about and discussed at length by several scholars, including Alatas (1971, 1977), Carey (1992); Hannigan (2012); and Noor (2016, 2019, 2020), among others; and we need not dwell at length about the convoluted geopolitical circumstances that led to Britain's invasion of the island. Carey (1992) and Noor (2016) have written about the outcome of this brief period of military occupation of Holland's former colony, and how in the wake of the British occupation of Java men like Raffles were inclined to re-present themselves as the self-appointed curators and custodians of Javanese cultural patrimony and the protector of Java's antiquities (some of which were stolen from Java and brought back to Europe by men like Raffles himself).

It was during this period of occupation by the forces of the British East India Company that Raffles was able to reinvent himself as a coloniser-scholar-curator, and collect for himself an enormous number of Javanese antiquities, manuscripts and statuary that would later help him re-present himself as a learned man of culture upon his return to Europe. Another outcome of this occupation was the writing and subsequent publication of Raffles' monumental two-volume work entitled *The History of Java*, that was published in 1817; and which promoted his image as a man of scholarship and discerning taste.<sup>5</sup> Crammed full with detailed images of temples, statuary, figure studies and portraits, the book was also accompanied by an impressive and detailed map of Java that was done by one of the foremost mapmakers of the time, John Walker.

Elsewhere I have noted an outstanding feature of Raffles' work, which is how in his recounting of Britain's forceful and violence attack and occupation of Java Raffles deliberately and systematically omits *all* references to the violence that took place during Britain's invasion of the island, notably during the attack on the Dutch at Batavia and then during the attack on the Javanese kingdom of Jogjakarta in Central Java.<sup>6</sup> So thorough was Raffles in his erasure of the violence that took place during this period that the reader may be forgiven to think the Java was literally handed over to the British by the Dutch on a plate, and that no acts of theft or violence ever took place during the occupation. That seems to have been the intention of Raffles himself, in the manner in which he presents the reader with a view of a passive, peaceful and domesticated Java where the Javanese have been discursively reconstructed as a race of docile agrarian peasants, ruled by their equally pacifist feudal lords and leaders.

The not-so-subtle boast that can be read off the pages of Raffles *History of Java* is the claim that he had managed to bring peace and progress to this sedated land and its people, and that he knew more about Java and the Javanese than anyone else- including the Javanese themselves. Yet the question remains as to *how* all this information was collected, and what were the modalities of data-gathering and knowledge-production that were used by the British

then? The answer can be found at the very end of the work, tucked in the appendices of the *History of Java*; and it comes in the form of Raffles' *11 February 1814 Regulations for the More Effectual Administration of Justice in the Provincial Courts of Java*, that was reproduced in full.

Stamford Raffles' *Regulations for the More Effectual Administration of Justice in the Provincial Courts of Java* (1814) has received relatively little attention from scholars of colonial history in Southeast Asia, though it is a document that is worth reading in its entirety. The *Regulations* were passed by Raffles on 11 February 1814, and they numbered one hundred and seventy three regulations and rules in total. In his preamble Raffles had laid down his intentions and ambitions: He wished to craft a new set of regulations that were more local and organic, and which could be seen and accepted by the Javanese as something familiar to them. The aim of these regulations was to build a comprehensive system of data-collection and data-management where every single bit of information about Java and the Javanese could be compiled by the British, through the help and cooperation of the Javanese themselves. What the *Regulations* of 1814 really were was nothing less than the blueprint for a surveillance state to be built across the colony.

Raffles held a pessimistic view of Javanese political leadership, and had demonstrated his willingness to use force when dealing with Javanese rulers who tried to resist the advance of the East India Company across Java – as was amply demonstrated during the bloody attack on the royal court of Jogjakarta in 1812. Even before he issued the *Regulations* of 1814 Raffles had already made it clear that the native rulers of Java were staring at their impending demise and that their powers were about to be curtailed for good, as he had stated in the very first article of his *Proclamation* of 1813:

“The undue influence and authority of the native chiefs have been restricted: but government will avail themselves to their services in the important department of the native police, which will be arranged upon fixed principles, adapted to the habits and original institutions of the people”.<sup>7</sup> (Emphasis mine.)

After removing much of their power and taking from them their status as independent sovereigns Raffles regarded the native rulers and chiefs of Java as native leaders in name only. Having removed real power from the hands of the rulers of Java, Raffles' *Regulations* made it clear that throughout the island it would be the colonial Residents who would have the final say in matters pertaining to political governance, economic management and civil law.<sup>8</sup>

The most dominant themes of Raffles' *Regulations of 1814* were the policing of the native communities, the maximization of profit for the East India Company, and the use for force to maintain peace while sustaining the workings of colonial-capitalism in the colony. In order for Java to become a profit-making colony, the entire island and its population had to be policed; and ideally it ought to be policed with the help of the natives themselves. In order for this grand plan to succeed there had to be a definition of who the natives (and who the foreigners) were, and who among them could be called upon to help the colonial company govern their newfound territory. *Colonial law* was the basis of this government, but it was a system of law that was geared towards the running of a colony, and certainly not a democracy in any sense of the word. Raffles had presented his readers with an account of a new colonial regulatory system that was meant to make their lives better, easier and more peaceful, but it

was also evidently clear that this was a new system of law that sought to serve the needs and interests of the colonial company first and foremost.

Raffles' *Regulations* were, in effect, a system of data-gathering that relied on local Javanese elites to collect information about their own people, and then pass this data back to their British colonial masters. Notwithstanding that Raffles had tried to co-opt and bring the Javanese into the administrative system that he was trying to build, it was also a system that was patently hierarchical and unequal, where the Javanese would be made to spy on their own people, and transmit the data they collected to their colonial masters who ruled over them. Colonial law and data thus moved in opposite directions, albeit along tracks that were fixed: As the Lieutenant-Governor, Raffles and his council made the law and passed it down to their colonial subjects, while the natives collected data about themselves and their land and passed it up to their colonial masters. The two streams of rules and data passed each other, though they never met; and as Java's data was mined the colonial administration grew more powerful.

Thus upon a close reading of Raffles' *History of Java* (1817) and the *Regulations of 1814* that are found in its appendices, the modern reader today can see that Britain's invasion and occupation of Java was hardly a peaceful process guided by peaceful intentions: Violence marked the beginning of Britain's entry into Java, and the threat of violence (sanctioned by colonial law that was determined by the British, and not the Javanese) was the stick that was used to keep the colony and its people in check. Raffles' book *The History of Java* may give us the mistaken impression that Britain's stay on the island was a tranquil and benign one, but a closer reading of the appendices of Raffles' book shows us how racialised colonial-capitalism was founded on violence, regulated by racial hierarchies and kept working through the exploitation of native labour who had been turned into colonial data-collectors by their new colonial overlords.

### **Empire's Echo Chamber: Selective Data-Collecting in the Writing of John Crawfurd**

“The (Western) traveller begins his journey with the strength of an empire sustaining him – albeit from a distance – militarily, economically, intellectually; he feels compelled to note down his observations in the awareness of a particular audience: his fellow country-men”.<sup>9</sup>

**Rana Kabbani,**  
*Imperial Fictions*

From Stamford Raffles' project of collecting data about Java by and through the natives themselves we turn to the writings of John Crawfurd (1783-1868) whose writing on the people and rulers of Burma was based on the testimonies of other Westerners he met during his trip to the kingdom of Ava.

Like his contemporary Raffles, Crawfurd was also a functionary of the East India Company, and he had played a significant role in the invasion and subsequent occupation of Java between 1811 to 1816. Crawfurd was an old India hand, and a prolific writer too. Among the books that he wrote were *A History of the Indian Archipelago, Containing an Account of the Manners, Arts, Languages, Religions, Institutions and Commerce of its Inhabitants* (1820);

*A Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Court of Ava* (1829); *A Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin-China* (1830); and he also contributed to the four-authored work *A Historical and Descriptive Account of China* (1843). Here we will focus our attention on one of his works, namely the *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Court of Ava*, that was published after his diplomatic mission to the kingdom in the wake of the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826).

Crawfurd's visit to the court of Ava was certainly not a pleasure trip by any stretch of the imagination. Following the defeat of the Burmese at the end of the Anglo-Burmese War, Britain and the East India Company were keen to secure the gains that they had made during the conflict: The regions of Arakkan and Tenasserim had been lost to the Burmans, depriving the kingdom of much of its coastline and vital ports while ruining its economy.<sup>10</sup> The British were also keen to secure some kind of presence in Rangoon, and Crawfurd was sent to the court of Ava to compel the Burmese ruler King Bagyidaw (1784-1846, r. 1819-1837) to respect the demands of the British that were outlined in the Treaty of Yandabo (24 February 1826) earlier.

It should be noted from the outset that John Crawfurd was hardly a liberal individual, even by the standards of his time. In his earlier work *A History of the Indian Archipelago* (1820) he had demonstrated his belief in pseudo-scientific theories of racial difference and racial hierarchies, and in the book he summarily divided the different communities of Southeast Asia into five general racial groups, ranked on the basis of their political-economic development (Noor, 2016). Long before he began his journey to Ava, Crawfurd had already entertained a dismissive view of all Asians in general, who he regarded as being inferior to Western Europeans. It was with such prejudices in mind that he began his journey to Burma to secure the aims and objectives of the East India Company that he served.

Crawfurd's writing on Burma was a work crammed with information, and it cannot be denied that he had produced a piece of writing that was of considerable value to the British government and the East India Company. The book was filled with information about Burma's resources, markets, modes of production, form of government, political alliances with other Asian powers, and even matters more esoteric such as prehistoric fossils. But it was also a piece of writing that was jaundiced from start to end. As I have shown elsewhere (Noor, 2016; 2020), Crawfurd's prose was laced with unfiltered prejudice and racial bias: At no point in his narrative does Crawfurd have anything nice to say about the Burmans whose manners, mode of governance, cultural praxes, religious beliefs and moral norms he presented as lax, backward and corrupt; and Burma was seen by him as little more than a 'half-civilisation'.<sup>11</sup>

The most outstanding feature of Crawfurd's work on Burma was the trope of the violent and aggressive Burmese, and the reader is left with the impression that notwithstanding Burma's recent defeat the country was still a bellicose power than had every intention of threatening British interests in neighboring Bengal, India. Crawfurd repeatedly asserted that the Burmese posed a military threat to Britain and the East India Company, for 'the vain pretensions and arrogant spirit which have so long characterised the Burmese Court, are [...] little abated'.<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere he would claim that Burma's King Bagyidaw had assembled a standing army of fifty thousand troops, and was in the process of adding another thirty-five thousand fighting men to his army in preparation for war with Britain.<sup>13</sup>

It should therefore not come as a surprise to the reader that Crawford's work delves deeply into the military capabilities of the Burmese kingdom, and the state of its defences. (The work comes with a map of the city of Rangoon, where Crawford indicates to the reader the strongest and weakest parts of the city's defences.) Thus, though Crawford's work was ostensibly a report about his diplomatic mission to the court of Ava, in terms of its tone and tenor the book reads as a clarion call for war and a warning that conflict with Burma was imminent and unavoidable.

The question arises as to how Crawford was able to get all the information that he poured into his book, and how was his narrative formed? Once again, the answer lies not in the main text of Crawford's *Embassy to the Court of Ava*, but in the appendices that are found at the very back of the book.

Tucked at the back of Crawford's immense volume is *Appendix X*, which may well be one of the most interesting parts of the book as a whole. In the long appendix Crawford reproduces the contents of the interviews that he had conducted during his stay in Ava. Crawford had repeatedly questioned the sincerity and truthfulness of the Burmans whom he met, and was of the opinion that the Burmans would never offer him any genuine assistance during his stay in their kingdom. Instead Crawford took the opportunity to interview a number of Europeans – some of whom had been taken captive by the Burmese during the Anglo-Burmese War – and it was they who provided him with the information he required to shape his narrative about Burma as a violent kingdom on the lookout for war with Britain.

Among the Europeans Crawford interviewed were John Laird, who hailed from Forfar, Country Angus, Northern Britain<sup>14</sup>; the British commercial agent Henry Gouger from London<sup>15</sup>; the American missionary Reverend Adoniram Judson, native of Massachusetts<sup>16</sup>; the Portuguese mariner Jeronimo de Cruz; the Dutch-Siamese Eurasian John Barretto; and the somewhat mysterious Mr. \*\*\* \*\*\*\*\* who was a native of \*\*\*\*\*. (Crawford noted that the identity of the mysterious Mr \*\*\*\*\* was kept secret as the man was still living in Ava, and was thus residing under Burmese rule.<sup>17</sup>)

Reading the interviews that were reproduced in full in *Appendix X* of Crawford's work, the reader will gain a better understanding of precisely how he was able to develop the story of Burma being a state that was hostile to Britain. Crawford's mode of interrogation was purpose-driven, with leading questions that led his interviewees to give him the answers he wanted. Again and again, in his interviews with Laird, Gouger, Judson, de Cruz and others, he would prompt his interviewees with questions that would lead them to give him (and his fellow British readers) the impression that the Burmans were a race that could not be trusted, were corrupt to the core, and were keen to avenge their defeat in the earlier war. Crawford would ask his interviewees about the state of Burma's army, its defences, its allies and diplomatic alliances, and how eager the Burman rulers were to start yet another clash of arms with Britain and the East India Company. The manner in which Crawford conducted his interviews was precise – starting from the foundational premise that the *only* testimonies that mattered were those of *Westerners and British subjects* – and led him to the conclusion that Burma was a state that had to be controlled by an external power. Though his interviewees were diverse, their conclusions proved to be all the same. It was thus that the imperial echo chamber was built in Crawford's book on Burma, and from the consensual answers he received from his interviewees, Crawford would later write an account of Burma that could only lead the reader to the conclusion that he wanted: that Burma was a hostile nation that would inevitably threaten British interests.



Here we can pause for a moment and compare the modalities of data-gathering and knowledge-production found in the writings of Raffles and Crawfurd. Though Raffles was equally dismissive of the Javanese and regarded them as a race that was ‘childlike’ and historically ‘degenerate’, he did see them as being potentially useful as data-collectors, and in his *Regulations of 1814* he envisaged a system of data-collection where the Javanese would be used by the British to spy on their own people, to further enhance and entrench British power in colonised Java. Crawfurd, on the other hand, was in a Burma that was yet to be totally defeated, long before the Second and Third Anglo-Burmese Wars of 1852-1853 and 1885. As such, Crawfurd did not have the luxury of ample resources that Raffles had at his command, and was aware of the fact that the Burmans around him viewed him with distrust. To make up for the knowledge deficit that he suffered, Crawfurd turned instead to other British, American and European citizens with whom he shared a sense of cultural-racial-religious affinity, and in the course of his interviews was able to build an echo chamber that echoed his own biases and prejudice towards the Burmese as a whole.

In both these cases we can see how data-collecting was critical to the enterprise of Empire. But the contemporary reader today will only come to realise this fact through a deeper and closer reading of both works by Raffles (1817) and Crawfurd (1829), rummaging through the lengthy appendices found at the very end of their books. It is in these appendices that we see how their grand narratives were actually crafted, and in some ways they also reveal the blind spots, contradictions and double-standards that were at work in the course of empire-building. From Raffles and Crawfurd we now turn to the work of Henry Keppel, whose role in the so-called ‘War on Piracy’ in Bornean waters was based upon a concept that was never truly defined.

### **A War Without Justification? The Elusive Concept of ‘Piracy’ in Henry Keppel’s Account of the ‘War on Piracy’.**

“All conquest literature seeks to explain to the conquerors ‘why we are here’”.<sup>18</sup>

**Robert Bartlett,**  
*The Making of Europe*

From the praxis of colonial data-collecting and knowledge-production we now move to the issue of semantics and the absence of fixed definitions in the colonial military campaigns that were conducted in 19<sup>th</sup> century Southeast Asia.

The third book that we will look at is Henry Keppel’s (1809-1904) *The Expedition to Borneo of the HMS Dido for the Suppression of Piracy* that was published in two volumes in the year 1846. Unlike Stamford Raffles and John Crawfurd who were both East India Company-men, Keppel had served in the British navy since his youth. After his graduation from the Royal Naval College he was promoted to Lieutenant in 1829. In 1831 he performed his first tour of the East Indies on the HMS *Magicienne*, and in 1837 he was made Commander of the HMS *Dido* – that would be sent to the northern coast of Borneo to play its part in the so-called ‘War on Piracy’. Keppel would later take part in both the First and Second Opium Wars against China, and during the Crimean War he was posted to the Black Sea. In 1867 he was made Admiral and Commander of operations in China.

Keppel's work *The Expedition to Borneo* was written by drawing extensively from the writings of James Brooke (1803-1868, r.1842-1868), who was the person responsible for bringing the British Navy into the conflict that would eventually culminate in the attack and defeat of the Kingdom of Brunei. That Keppel was personally committed to furthering the cause of James Brooke becomes clear to the reader of his work, where he had stated that he wished that Brooke's 'extraordinary career in that part of the world' to be made known to his fellow Englishmen.<sup>19</sup>

Keppel himself was wholly supportive of the 'war on piracy' at the time, and his enthusiasm is evident in his work as when he writes that 'piracy must be put down, slavery must be effaced, industry must be cherished and protected; and these objectives we shall see, from the model afforded by our truly illustrious countryman, may be accomplished'.<sup>20</sup> Yet despite his admiration for Brooke and the dynasty of the 'White Rajahs' that he would later establish, there is a curious and glaring omission in Keppel's own work. Though he (as commander of the British warship the HMS *Dido*) had been sent to Borneo to do battle with the 'pirates' of Borneo, Keppel could not tell his readers *what* piracy really was, and *who* were the pirates he had to deal with. Here it becomes clear to the reader that the entire 'war on piracy' was being waged on the flimsiest of grounds, and that the entire naval campaign was being directed, financed and sustained on the basis of suspicions that could not be based on any legal vocabulary that was clear or consistent.

Keppel himself admitted that he was not able to give his readers a clear definition of what constituted piracy, and left it to Brooke (whose journals he quoted extensively in his work) to supply the reader with some semblance of a working definition. While quoting Brooke, Keppel conceded the difficulty he faced when trying to fix the meaning of piracy, for: "A question may arise as to what constitutes piracy; and whether, in our efforts to suppress it, we may not be interfering with the right of native states".<sup>21</sup>

Yet Keppel was prepared to entertain the whims of Brooke on the grounds that:

"...if we limit our construction of piracy, we shall, in most cases, be in want of sufficient evidence to convict; and the whole native trade of the archipelago will be left at the mercy of the pirates, much to the injury of our own commerce and our settlement in Singapore". (Emphasis mine)<sup>22</sup>

It has to be noted that at *no* point in Keppel's narrative did he offer a precise definition of what piracy was, or what kind of activity could be construed as piratical. The apparent cloudiness of the concept accounted for the misunderstandings that occurred during the *Dido*'s time in Bornean waters, and one of these instances involved the violent encounter between the armed boats of the *Dido* and the ships of the Raja of Riao.

In volume II of his work Keppel recounts the incident when the long-boat and pinnace of the HMS *Dido* gave chase to some native boats off the coast of the Natunas Islands.<sup>23</sup> The armed British boats chased after the Malay vessels, and then opened fire on the Malays on the assumption that they were pirates. In the midst of the shooting the men on the native boats declared that they were sent by their Raja of Riao to collect tribute from villages that had sworn allegiance to the kingdom. Keppel noted that at the time the kingdom of Riao was allied to Britain, and as a result concluded that the boats from Riao could *not* have posed a threat to British interests. The shooting ceased immediately, though by then several of the men of Riao

had been killed or badly wounded by British fire<sup>24</sup> – and this may well be one of the first accounts of ‘friendly fire’ during the so-called War on Piracy that was being waged then.

This haphazard and ill-fated encounter remains instructive in many ways, for it sheds some light on the murkiness of relations between the British (and other Europeans), the native rulers who were recognised as sovereigns (such as the Raja of Riao and Raja Muda Hassim of Sarawak) and other native rulers who were summarily lumped together under the generic label of ‘pirate’. Keppel’s junior officers admitted their error, for they had clearly failed to discern the fine line between seafaring warriors out to collect *tribute* and seafaring warriors out to collect *loot* or *booty*. What saved the men of Riao was the fact that their ruler was then allied to the Crown of England, and as such were summarily placed in the (positive) category of *allies* rather than piratical enemies. Here, and elsewhere in Keppel’s work, we can also see that though there was never a clear and fixed definition of piracy, the term did have a (literally) loaded meaning: For to be labelled a pirate then was tantamount to a death sentence, and the signifier ‘pirate’ offered the British the license to kill anyone labelled such.

A close reading of Henry Keppel’s *The Expedition to Borneo of the HMS Dido for the Suppression of Piracy* shows us how and why this prolonged episode of violence that was waged along the northern coast of Borneo was, in fact, a blurred and murky ‘pseudo-war’ that was fought without clear justification. Though the concept/term ‘pirate’ was central to the entire episode, none of the protagonists involved in the conflict were able to agree on a definition that would stick. The absence of a precise and meaningful definition of ‘piracy’ has left scores of historians with the complex problem of trying to label and categorise this conflict properly, and debate over the legal status of this ‘pseudo-war’ continues until today. But this also points us to the fact that Empire was not always built upon solid legal foundations; and the fact that empire-building was sometimes an ad hoc, even accidental and clumsy, process.

An awareness of the messy realities of Empire is important for us today, as postcolonial historians reassess and reinterpret the workings of the imperial war machine in the past; and it also reminds us that in the recounting of the history of Empire we need to be wary of attempts to write histories that are neat and linear. The so-called ‘war on piracy’ that was waged along the coast of Sarawak and against the kingdom of Brunei was anything but neat and linear, though in the end it succeeded largely thanks to the enormous gap of military technology and know-how that Britain used to its obvious advantage, to the detriment of the native communities of Borneo.

### **Conclusion: Why We Need To Dig Up The Appendices of Empire.**

“There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations”.<sup>25</sup>

**Michel Foucault**  
*Discipline and Punishment*

By way of concluding, I would like to return to the point that was raised at the beginning: I have tried to argue and show how the works of many Western writers who were based in colonial Southeast Asia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century can, and should, be read in closer detail today, for

in these voluminous works we occasionally encounter the blind-spots, inconsistencies, and instances of discursive slippage that reveal the extent to which the entire enterprise of racialised colonial-capitalism was riddled with internal contradictions of its own.

Guided and motivated as they were by the values and norms of the time they lived in, many of these men – such as Henry Keppel, Stamford Raffles, John Crawfurd – saw (and presented) themselves as the inheritors of a cultural-intellectual tradition that dated back to the era of the European project of Enlightenment; and as such were inclined to engage in modes of data-collecting and factual recording that was encyclopaedic in scope and ambition. These authors devoured data and produced copious amounts of writing that was impressive by the standards of the day. Though the most outstanding aspect of their literary output was the apparent desire to know all that could be known, and to collect more data than ever, adding to Empire’s vast columbarium of knowledge and power while reinforcing both.

Men such as Raffles and Crawfurd were not merely active functionaries working in the service of militarised capitalist entities such as the British East India Company, but were themselves active participants in the process of colony-building and imperial expansion. They, along with men like Henry Keppel, Rodney Mundy and Frank Marryat, were nationalist-imperialists who offered no apologies for the tactics they employed, the violence they committed and the exploitation that was carried out in the name of their respective colonial-company and nation-state. But in the course of their labours, and in their effort to record and document all that could be known at the time, the works that they produced were often bulky, (literally) heavy, and unwieldy. (It is not an accident that Raffles’ work on Java (1817) came in two volumes, like Keppel’s work on Borneo; while Crawfurd’s work on Southeast Asia (1820) came in three. Crawfurd would later contribute to another massive three-volume work on China.) This was a time when the accumulation and possession of knowledge was *performative* and *demonstrative*, and when producing multi-volume works was all the rage. (For it was evidently not enough to know, but one had to *show* that one knew.)

The modern reader of today, however, may be less impressed by the length and size of these works, but more interested in the manner in which such a vast amount of information was processed, filtered, framed and presented by the authors themselves. Being works that were written by colonial-capitalists or military men, the modern reader today will undoubtedly be aware of, and sensitive to, the subject-positions of the authors themselves; cognisant of the fact that men such as Raffles, Crawfurd and Keppel were certainly not innocent travellers in Southeast Asia at the time, but rather pivotal role-players in the violent drama of imperial conquest and colonial expansion.

Reading these works today in the shadow of Foucault (1977), we are acutely aware of his argument that there can never be any ‘power relation(s) without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations’.<sup>26</sup> A contemporary reader of these works today would know that such works were never purely ‘academic’ or ‘scholarly’, and were certainly far from ‘innocent’. Despite the academic pretensions of the likes of Raffles, the subject-positions of the authors we have touched on in this paper is clear for all to see: They were men who were firmly embedded in the heart of Empire, which entails that their works can only be read as imperial writings.

The mere awareness of the fact that these were imperial writings produced by imperialist actors does not, however, offer us a critique of Empire on that basis alone. What I

have attempted to do in this paper is dig deeper into their monumental yet cumbersome works, to highlight the blind-spots and contradictions that can be found in their structure and composition. For in their race to out-write, out-research and out-document one another, these colonial authors had crammed into their works an abundant supply of information, documentation, maps, statistics, interviews and reports; thus exposing themselves to deeper sustained scrutiny later.

It can also be added that these authors were certainly unable to conceive of the possibility that the empire they were so evidently dedicated to would one day meet its end. Here is where the postcolonial scholar of today can and should play her/his role as historian-investigator, and where the postcolonial scholar-reader brings to the discussion a range of contemporary concerns – many of which have been shaped by the wave of decolonisation and decolonising strategies we see around us today – that men such as Raffles, Crawfurd and Keppel were not prepared for. Raffles, Crawfurd, Keppel, et al. were writing at a time when the only mode of knowledge-production deemed scientific and respectable was a Western/Occidental one; and a time when native epistemologies, vocabularies, value-systems and belief-systems were regarded as quaint objects for Western study. *None* of these men believed that their empire would ever end, and *none* of them entertained the possibility that their Eurocentric imaginings and discursive constructions of Southeast Asia might ever be critically analysed by postcolonial Southeast Asian scholars in the future, however distant.

The postcolonial scholar of today however, need not be beholden to the literary-scholarly norms and narrow cultural perspectivism of the colonial past. Historians like Carey (1981, 1992) have dedicated their careers to uncovering the silenced and/or marginalised accounts of Empire that emanated from those who were colonised, and in the course of doing so have demonstrated in the clearest terms that the Western account of the world was but one among many. In my own work (Noor, 2016, 2018, 2020) I have chosen to critically analyse the modalities of empire-building as they were made manifest in the literary works that accompanied the train of Empire. In this paper I have tried to show how the claims of men like Raffles (1817), Crawfurd (1820, 1829, 1830), and Keppel (1846) were – even at the time of their writing – riddled with omissions, contradictions and blind-spots that render hollow the claim that empire-building was a neat, linear and unproblematic process. With every instance of exposure, postcolonial scholars today effectively chip away at the edifice of Empire, and lay bare its internal contradictions, inequalities and injustices for all to see.

In order to do this, however, we all need to do one simple thing: *Read these colonial-era works again, and read them thoroughly.* For it is in that process of deep and informed reading that the weak spots of the imperial enterprise present themselves to us, and in the course of such a thorough interrogation of the discursive economy of Empire the postcolonial scholar today can offer a critique of Empire in the past. The appendices of Empire that we have looked at here were not merely literary appendages or narrative devices designed to impress the readers of the time. Read critically and thoroughly, they reveal the soft underbelly of the Imperial war-capitalist machine, and open up new vistas for both research and critique.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in *Image, Music, Text*. London: Fontana Press, 1977, p. 148.
- <sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality : The Will to Knowledge. (Histoire de la Sexualite: La Volonte de Savoir)*, vol. 1, Paris: Editions Gallimard and London: Allen Lane, 1979, p. 93.
- <sup>3</sup> R. Barthes, "The Death of the Author", p. 146.
- <sup>4</sup> Quoted in: Sophia Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*, London, 1830, p. 195.
- <sup>5</sup> Stamford Raffles, *The History of Java*, London: Black, Parbury and Allen, publishers for the Honorable East India Company, Leadenhall Street; and John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1817.
- <sup>6</sup> Farish A. Noor, *Don't Mention the Corpses: The Erasure of Violence in Colonial Writings on Southeast Asia*. In: Biblioasia, National Library of Singapore NLB, Singapore, vol. 15. 2019, Issue 2, pp. 30-35.
- <sup>7</sup> Stamford Raffles, *The History of Java*, vol. 2, p. lxii.
- <sup>8</sup> See: *Regulations*, articles 91 to 119; articles 126-128; and article 129.
- <sup>9</sup> Rana Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions : Europe's Myths of the Orient*, London: Pandora Press, 1986, p. xi.
- <sup>10</sup> These territorial losses were rendered permanent according to the terms of the Treaty of Yandabo that was signed between the British and the ruler of Ava on 24 February 1826. Article 5 of the treaty stated that 'In proof of the sincere disposition of the Burmese government to retain the relation of peace and amity between the two nations, and as part indemnification to the British government, for the expenses of the war, his Majesty the King of Ava agrees to pay the sum of one crore rupees', which led Burma down the path of economic ruin soon after. (John Crawfurd, *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Court of Ava*, London: Henry Colburn, 1829, Appendix I, p. 21.)
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix II: p.17.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix II: pp. 17-18.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix X, pp. 37-47.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix X, pp. 38-39.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix X, p. 48.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix X, p. 65.
- <sup>18</sup> Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe. : Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950-1350*, London: Allen Lane, 1993, p. 96.
- <sup>19</sup> Keppel, *The Expedition to Borneo of the HMS Dido for the Suppression of Piracy*, 1846, vol. I, p. v.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 192.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, p.153.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 153.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 8-11.
- <sup>24</sup> More than a dozen of the men of Riao were killed in this encounter, and around twenty left badly wounded.
- <sup>25</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment, : The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1977, p. 27.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

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