

COLONIAL RATIONALITY AND THE OTHER: THE BRITISH IN NORTH BORNEO¹

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This paper describes the relationship between the British and the Natives in North Borneo in the days of the Chartered Company rule. The relationship is one based on power, where the colonialist by default being the more powerful define the Other and by doing so reinforce their rationality on the natives. The process of rationalisation in totality acted to place the native in a position of subordination. The types of rationality are: (i) the moral rationality - founded on the morality of Christianity used as a determinant of proper behaviour by underlining native action and beliefs which are considered non-Christian and by doing so justifying the need for the civilising hand of colonial rule. (ii) The economic rationality - is based on the view of the economic importance of North Borneo as a source of income to their London investors. As such, the introduction of capitalist economy coupled with efficient extraction of natural resources and the proliferation of plantation economy acted to marginalise the natives. The natives not only found their lives burdened with the imposition of the new economy but also their livelihood and survival threatened. (iii) The administrative rationality imposed on the natives of North Borneo was to curb practices such as head hunting, slavery and blood feuding and also to modernise the administration of North Borneo by developing infrastructure, collecting taxes and enforcing British law. The Natives responded to the imposition of colonial rationality by launching a series of rebellions with the hope of ending the encroaching British policies. However their efforts failed and colonial rationality taking hold in North Borneo and forever changing the lives of the natives.

INTRODUCTION

Conquest of new territories, expanding markets and the civilising of the Other very much colour colonial expansionist policies in the New World. To the colonials, the conquest of new territories was largely driven by profit motivation i.e. increasing their wealth as well as expanding their business into the newly acquired regions. To the conquered, it meant changes in every aspect of their social life. Colonial discourse came to mean many things but largely it was seen as the way the colonial thought of the Other, ruled the Other and created the Other. One need not look far as this argument is posed interestingly in Edward Said's *Orientalism*² where he saw the making or

construction of the Other - to an extent what the colonial thought was the Other in essence became the Other in practice, adhered too by them as their image. Michel Foucault³ saw the element of power factored into various relationships, which always favoured the one with power over the one with none or object of power. Perhaps, Bernard Cohn's⁴ brilliant discussion on colonial knowledge should be a standard text for any serious academic in understanding the power of colonial discourse (or colonial knowledge) in constructing the Other. The nature of colonial knowledge in influencing every aspect of the Other's life - from clothing to history and every element of the Other's social life are the object of investigation and redefinition. Cohn's idea of colonial intervention does not only include the invasion of physical space but also epistemological one. In the end, with pessimistic tone, the Other is and can be no more than what the colonial constructed or a colonial invention resembling a Christmas cookie, moulded, shaped and created to taste in the imagery of the "creator".

My paper to some extent draws on the important contributions of these authors. Said's discussion on the Orientals is central in seeing how one is constructed and this is further taken up by Cohn. Foucault reminds us that power is central in determining relationships and the conqueror is always the one who determines for the conquered. In the course of my discussion, many aspects discussed by these scholars will surface from time to time. However, I would like to take a step further and explore the colonial psyche. The very colonial discourse we so readily accept as the creator of the Other is in essence playing second fiddle to a greater power - colonial rationality.

A child of the Enlightenment, rationality was seen as a crucial factor in producing a western European society free from the constraints of the Christian Church and adapted to a blind faith towards a verifiable world ruled by reason and knowledge⁵. It marked the clash between the rational and the irrational, reason versus unreason. In the end reason with the aid of the invincible hand of power decided what the irrational should be or was in essence. What started as a European experience soon found its way to the New World via colonialism with the purging of irrationality being the cornerstone of the post-enlightenment relations between Europeans and non-Europeans. One must keep in mind that in order for the rational to rule, the irrational must be observable. By *difference*⁶ highlighted, the rational acts to imprison the irrational, changing, converting and forcing them into submission. The open-endedness of rationality is the totality of coverage with nothing excluded from its dominating clutches. In this paper, my discussion will focus on colonial rationality with reference to the British experience in North Borneo. It will

focus on three aspects of colonial rationality I have outlined i.e. moral rationality, economic rationality and the administrative rationality. Each one having a distinct effect on the Other and in every case a negative one and this will be discussed in the following sections.

COLONIAL KNOWLEDGE AND RATIONALITY

Before I proceed any further, I have outlined so far the types of colonial rationality at play. Rationality is in essence pitting one group's superior notions of righteousness - both ideas and practices against the Other. In this context, the representation of the Other is radically different from the Self i.e. the colonial. Put it differently, the Other is the opposite from the Self. Thus the Self representing the Euro-American man, white and most likely Christian in contrast to the Other comprising every nation coming into contact with the former. In these relations, power differentials come into play and difference must be done away with. Colonial rationality indefinitely places the Other in an inferior position in the evolutionary ladder and thus destined to be transformed in line with the view of the colonial masters. As such the knowledge of the Orientalist

... appears as rational, logical, scientific, realistic and objective. The knowledge of the Orientals by contrast, often seems irrational, illogical, unscientific, unrealistic and subjective. The knowledge of the Orientalist is, therefore, privileged in relation to that of the Oriental and it invariably places itself in a relationship of intellectual dominance over that of the easterners. It has appropriated the power to represent the Oriental, to translate and explain his (and her) thoughts and acts not only to Europeans and Americans but also to the Orientals themselves. But that is not all. Once his special knowledge enabled the Orientalist and his countrymen to gain concessions, conquer, colonise and punish in the East⁷.

Inden's statement is interesting on two accounts. First, by stating the knowledge of the Orientalist as privileged in relation to the Oriental and secondly, how this privileged knowledge acts to subjugate the Other. However, the gained knowledge, needs to be in the perspective of rationality for the simple reason that after the Other is comprehensible, the Other needs to be put in context, whereby they are seen as opposites to the Colonial Self. Rationality is used for two purposes; first to justify colonial actions with regards to the Other - with emphasis on benevolence, civilising and the bastion of morality for all the actions taken. This is reflected in Raffles' comments, Treacher,

Rutter and Pryer's works⁸. Secondly, rationality works in opposition to show why colonials need to bring civilisation to the natives on the accounts of their vile and crude practices and ideas.

Bauman gives a nice notion of Occidental rationality as a victorious struggle of reason against emotions and animal instinct, science against religion and magic, truth against prejudice, correct knowledge against superstition, reflection against uncritical existence, rationality against affectivity and the rule of customs and by doing so the modern age is defined as above all i.e. the kingdom of reason and rationality⁹.

Perhaps looking more closely, the rule of reason finds prominence by highlighting the irrational. Thus the irrational is created with a contrasting Dr. Jackal and Mr. Hyde comparison taking form where the Other represents the abominable of the two. In practice, the Other is everything the Occident isn't or the Other still wallowing in a lower stage of human civility. As such, the construction of the Other finds its form in the knowledge of the Occident where the Other is created, moulded and understood. Thus knowledge of the colonial is about power relations¹⁰ to make and describe the Other in the images of the Occident. In short, colonialism is not just about the invasion of the physical space but also the invasion of the epistemological space i.e. the realm where the Other is made and remade according to the views and constructs of the colonial. As Cohn pointed out, colonial knowledge is collected within a set of investigative modalities with the intention of putting the Other in perspective, among them, the historiography modality, the observational modality, the enumerative modality, the museological modality and the surveillance modality¹¹. This is evident in the context of North Borneo with various texts and reports by colonial officers and scholars, among them, Henry Roth Ling¹², Owen Rutter¹³, W.H. Treacher¹⁴, Ivor Evans¹⁵, E.P. Gueritz¹⁶, John Whiteheads¹⁷, Von Donop¹⁸ and W.B. Pryer¹⁹ to name a few. Each one of them contributing towards the history of North Borneo and the state of affairs before the British, the people and their social, economic and cultural practices, flora and fauna, the classification of natives etc., - the very knowledge gathered on the Other and their physical world.

A good example on the use of investigative modalities in gathering knowledge on the Other was the event when the colonial wanted to understand the issue of declining Murut population. Dr. J.O Shirecore and Mr. G. Wooley were commissioned by the colonial government to look into various facets of Murut life; among them: to obtain reliable information and statistics in regards to physical progress, to ascertain the diseases which occur among them, the habit

of men, women and children, to ascertain death, birth and infantile mortality rates, to consider how mortality is related to the native habit such as alcohol consumption, indifferent housing etc and to study ethnological, sociological and economic conditions which are related to health, morbidity and mortality²⁰. Every aspect of Murut life was placed under the colonial microscope and by doing so provided the colonial with the newfound knowledge on the Muruts.

Once the Other was known, be it by observation or information gathered on them from various sources, the colonials set out to rationalise their arrival in North Borneo. Their arrival was one of benevolence, to borrow Pryer's phrase "But men of other life, from colder lands, have brought religion, enterprise and law"²¹, bringing a civilising influence on a people devoid of it. The relationship between rationality and colonial knowledge is a close one. Rationality is the foundation of what makes the Occident different and is built on their knowledge. It is only in knowing the Other, by using the various modalities, the latter can be comprehended and put in context.

Rationality acts to differentiate the Occident from the Oriental/Other by imposing a dichotomy of superiority and civility by the former over the latter, built on the knowledge gathered/accumulated on the Other. As for the knowledge of the Oriental/Other becomes the subjugated knowledge, which is low down in the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition and scientificity²².

Rationality of the Self then becomes a tool to oppress and place the Other in a place of subordination by highlighting the irrationality. Thus colonial knowledge, superimposed with their rationality, providing the basis for a superior 'white man' in the form of moral rationality, economic rationality and administrative rationality - each of which superior to those known by the natives and central for the development of North Borneo.

CONQUEST OF NORTH BORNEO - A RETROSPECT

The contest for North Borneo began in the first half of the 19th century and took form in 1877-1878 with the control of much of North Borneo by Dent and Overbeck and began the administration under the North Borneo Chartered Company. However, I cannot but pay tribute to the articulator of British policies in the Malay Archipelago, Sir Stamford Raffles²³. His view on the role of the British in the region was one of a father over an undisciplined son. He first and foremost saw moral decadence as the root of all evil in the region -

observable by acts of piracy and slavery and coupled with chaotic political scenario in the states of the Malay world. To Raffles, the Malay World was crumbling and needed the British to bring rationality and introduce civility to the people of the region. I can outline three main ideas; first about morality or rather the lack of it evident by the level of corruption existent. The cure for this deplorable state is to be provided by the virtues of Christianity by default being the provider of morality to the Other they encountered. Anything immoral was in essence unChristian such as prevalent acts of piracy and slavery in the Malay World. For Raffles, it was their moral duty as Christians, perhaps sounding better than conquerors to bring the decaying Malay World into a sense of moral resurgence. The chaotic nature and warring factions in the Malay states was another crucial indicator of decadence²⁴. Again Raffles outlined a policy of British intervention to restore order and by doing so running the region in accordance with other colonies of the British Empire. The expansion of British administration also brought about the growth of the capitalist economy where the newly acquired territories provided more riches to Britain and simultaneously transformed these regions into centres of capitalism serving British interest. In tandem, the natives were forced to transform and be integrated into the mainstream of the capitalist economy by persuasion or force. In short, Raffles outlined a policy underlined by a British sense of rationality to totally transform the Other in accordance with the thinking and practice of the Occident.

Not surprising that Raffles' ideas took centre stage in colonial policy and became the model for British intervention and expansionist policies in North Borneo. In 1896, after over a decade of British control of North Borneo, W.B.Pryer had this poem to read to his British audience where he eloquently justified the arrival of the British to North Borneo:

"The constant sun
Had run its faithful round and duly sunk
Beneath the crystal wave of the calm sea;
With quiet morns and peaceful eventide's.
An unclad tawny race, age after age,
Had roved the woods and waters all unchanged:
But men of other life, from far off colder lands
Have brought religion, enterprise, and law"²⁵.

In 1889 and 1890, Governor Treacher's article was published in the Journal of Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society where he outlined the purpose of British rule in North Borneo. Treacher wrote:

The company has paved the way to the ultimate extinction of the practice of slavery, it has dealt the final blow to the piracy and kidnapping which still lingered on at its coast; it had substituted one strong and just government for numerous weak, cruel and unjust ones; it has opened courts of justice which knows no distinction between rich and poor, between master and slave; it is rapidly adjusting ancient blood feuds between tribes and putting a stop to the old custom of head hunting, it has broken down the barrier erected by the coast Malays to prevent the aborigines having access to the outer world and is thus enabling trade and accompanying civilisation to reach the interior races and it is attracting European and Chinese capital to the country and opening market for British traders²⁶.

The striking resemblance of Pryer's poem and Treacher's policy statement concerning British role in North Borneo can be divided again to three forms of rationality as outlined by Raffles policy for the Malay Archipelago in the early part of the 19th century. Pryer's poem describes an unchanging people trapped in a primitive state²⁷. It was the coming of the British that brought religion, enterprise and law to a people devoid of the civilised attributes. Religion here is Christianity as the bastion of morality in comparison to native practices such as headhunting, slavery or piracy. These practices by pagans or Muslims were viewed with suspicion and contempt. Thus Christian standards had to be enforced on the non-Christian Other by prohibiting all activities considered non-Christian. By enterprise, Pryer advocated the introduction of a capitalist economy among the natives of Borneo. In short, a sense of being modern is associated with a production economy be it by exploiting natural resources or the large-scale agriculture for export. Last but not least, the British were attributed as the givers of law, bringing order to a region in chaos. In principle, the arrival of the British was seen as civilising the natives of North Borneo. Treacher presents a similar view with a more detail account on their purpose in North Borneo. Again moral rationality takes centre stage with the abolishment of various lowly attributes such as kidnapping, piracy, headhunting, blood feuds and slavery. This is to ensure that practices not in line with the moral standards of the British be put an end too. This was seen as the moral obligation of the British to bring civilisation to the races of Borneo that is savage pagan and vile barbaric coastal Muslims. Interestingly, colonial view and impressions took centre stage with little attempt to understand the practices of the natives. The new government was also to have courts of justice so as to ensure justice for all. Again, native *adat* law was not considered courts of justice and it had to be British centred to be courts of Justice. They too had a role to play in encouraging trade to stimulate growth

and modernise the region be it by foreign capital or efficient exploitation of natural resources. To the British, prior to their arrival, Borneo was in chaos with little attempts by the Brunei and Sulu sultanates to govern the region. Little control was exerted over the coastal areas and the interior region was devoid of any direct control. Thus, North Borneo needed to be tamed, given order and become civilised. In short, to the British, colonialism was not in essence colonialism to them but the noble actions of a caring empire and profit necessary to carry out their noble deeds! After all, Raffles believed not all white men²⁸ were noble, the British were the best choice to govern the people's of the Malay Archipelago and to bring them back to a state of civility and glory as in the heyday of Malay empires.

MORAL RATIONALITY AND MAKING THE OTHER

Moral rationality acted to face off colonial sense of righteousness in every aspect of social life based on a Christian sense of morality against native practices viewed under moral colonial microscope. Thus, the actions of the Other was defined proper, savage, inhuman based on the impressions of the Occident -- in this case the British. As the power of the colonial to determine 'proper actions', gave them a powerful tool in justifying their actions against the natives as these natives were the very essence of barbaric and lacked any sense of civility. As a result, the colonial views on the Other provide the basis and rationalising of their actions.

Clifford, Governor of North Borneo had this to say on the Dusuns of the Tambunan plains:

The inhabitants of the plains are all Muruts [he wrote home], and their villages are few, squalid and scattered. A few clearings on the hillsides are inhabited by the Kujian tribes, who appear to merely Muruts addicted to life on the hills. These people, the Muruts are the lowest types of human beings whom I have yet encountered. They are clothed scantily, are physically filthy, love meat which has been kept in a bamboo until it is in a state of liquefaction, and live lives which are little removed from those of the beast.

So intemperate are they in their habits that they convert almost the whole of their rice crop annually into fermented liquor, so that they are constantly suffering a famine which is of their own creation. The rice finished they turn to the tapioca crop and drink that in like

manner, and thereafter grub in the jungle for roots, which in their turn are converted into infamous native liquor. Men, women and even little children share in the commons drunkenness, parents encouraging their children to drink to intoxication before they have learnt to walk.

Their houses are hovels in which the swine, for they keep a few lean pigs are as well accommodated as their masters. The door post are adorned by rows of human skulls decorated by faded leaves of the kind called daun silat, and the skulls of swine are hung facing them. In the house of the chief Keleban at Rempun I counted no less than 32 skulls, the majority of which, judging, from the size, appeared to be those of women and children.

In addition of his other qualities the Muruts are incurably lazy, and like most savages he forces his women to do almost all the heavy labour. However when forced to work, i.e. when the government calls him out as on the present occasion, he then carries a burden stoutly. In consequence of his depraved and filthy habits the Muruts are diseased and short-lived. In all the hundreds of men and women I saw in the course of my tour through the valley, I never encountered one with a grey head, and I am informed that few live to the age of fifty. They suffer greatly from afflictions of the eye, from skin disorders, and from dysentery, and from other afflictions consequent upon an unhealthy and unsanitary mode of life. They are dying people doomed to speedy extinction²⁹.

At least a few points can be drawn on the image provided by Clifford in comparison to 'proper' behaviour of civilised peoples from the west:

Attributes	Savage natives	Europeans/British
Location	living in hills (forest)	houses (cities/farmland)
Clothes	scantily clad (immoral)	properly dressed (moral dressing)
Food	fermented meat Roots from the forest (like animals)	Prepared food - cuisine farmed produce (sign of civility)
Habits	drunkards (children and women included) laziness (women do all the work)	sober (in line with Christian morality) hardworking (division of labour)
Practices	head hunting (savage practices and cowardly - taking head of children and women)	warfare (civil and bravery)

Another colonial officer, W.H.Treacher took a romanticist view of the Dusuns. He attributed them as simple-minded folks who never bothered anybody, extremely honest and hardworking and their areas were free from theft, a feature of Dusun life. He noted their simplicity and honesty, something not found in the civilised world³⁰. This romanticist view is little different from the view presented by Clifford as it still considers the natives as wallowing in lower state of civility in comparison to the Europeans.

Mr. Yesse, a British Officer summed up his view on the Murut;

With respect to the Idaan or the Muruts, as they are called here, I cannot give any account of their disposition, but from what I have heard from Borneians. They are a set of abandoned idolaters, one of their tenets, so strangely inhuman, I cannot pass unnoticed, which is, that their future interest depends upon the number of their fellow creatures they have killed in any engagement or common disputes, and count their degrees of happiness to depend on the number of human skulls in their possession, from which, and the wild, disorderly life they lead, unrestrained by any bond of civil society, we ought not to be surprised if they are cruel and vindictive disposition.³¹

Again the emphasis of the colonial impressions are focussed on the difference of the native practices in contrast to their own. As a result, they need to be civilised and colonial intervention necessary. The view of the colonial also extended into the Muslim coastal communities who were little different from the savage pagans. Treacher noted the Sulus as blood thirsty natives, always getting into fights and all the willing to their sell their own people into slavery whereas the Bajaus as thief and cattle lifters, with passion for gambling, smuggling gun powder and a murderous race³². In short, the peoples of North Borneo were in such a pathetic state under the earlier rule of the Brunei sultanate, and it was in the hands of the British to transform them in line with the vision of Raffles 70 odd years earlier - to bring a British sense of civilisation and proper government.

THE EXPANDING COLONIAL ECONOMY - CAPITALISM IMPOSED ON THE NATIVES

The driving force behind European colonialism was an imperialist capitalism that voraciously sought land, trade, primary goods and profits ... and when

charged with political elements, it became wide-ranging, more violent and oppressive to achieve its goal³³.

This above description very much explains the company's vigour in obtaining North Borneo via various concessions from the Brunei and Sulu sultanates. The prime intention was to make North Borneo a viable economic entity, which would provide profit for the Chartered Company and its London investors. North Borneo had many natural resources to offer and this was sufficient for the company to show interest in this region. The natural resources of North Borneo provided a stable income to the company with a variety of sea and land resources collected. Pryer describes the produces collected and its value in 1886.

Table 1: Natural Produce for half year in 1886³⁴

Natural Produce	Value (in dollars)
Beeswax	4,681
Bird's nest	25,683
Camphor	5,200
Dammar	3,841
Dried Fish	3,653
Gutta Percha	18,896
Indian Rubber	12,683
Rattans	24,856
Seed Pearls	5,100
Sesik Tingiling	793
Shark's fin	3,186
Shells	1,124
Timber	35,450
Tortoise shell	2,940
Trepang	4,219

Treacher further went on to show that these natural resources continued to gain in value and increased tremendously from \$145,445 in 1881 to a staggering \$525,879 in 1888 and becoming the main revenue contributor to the company. In fact these produce continued to be influential to the profitability of the company maintained at an average of around 30 percent up into 1920s³⁵. With the tremendous importance of natural resources in the likes of forest produce, more systematic collection needed to be enforced and encouraged. Increasing number of traders into the interior regions provided the colonial government with increasing extraction of forest produce. However, for the natives, traders

brought a new increase in exploitation by outsiders. The natives were forced to become collectors for they were beginning to be integrated into the colonial economy by the need to pay taxes, the debt incurred to traders and the use of money in exchanges. Not surprising than, that traders were always the first to be targeted and killed at the birth of a rebellion.

In line with colonial policy, there was an urgent need to develop North Borneo. The profitability of the plantation economy in Dutch Indonesia further provided the impetus for an aggressive policy towards commodity productions. In May 1887, the Acting Governor William Crocker arrived in North Borneo. His main agenda was to make North Borneo more economically viable, so as to pay for its own administration. He did this by the introduction of large-scale commercial agriculture, mainly tobacco. Within 18 months, 500,000 acres had been taken or applied for tobacco planting³⁶. The importance of tobacco is evident from Table 2. In 1887, tobacco merely contributed a \$18,879 to the exports of North Borneo. This was to increase rapidly with tobacco contributing about 60 percent of the total exports from 1892-1896. Permanent cultivation was favoured by the company administration for the long-term nature of these commodities in yielding revenue. By 1907, there was a proliferation of plantations in North Borneo with the biggest plantation being the Sapong Plantation, in Tenom - 20,000 acres in size, followed by British

Table 2: The Tobacco industry and its impact on North Borneo Finances³⁷

Year	Total Government Expenditure	Total Imports	Total Exports	Value of Tobacco Exports
1881	108,295	160,658	145,444	-
1882	189,223	269,597	133,655	-
1883	267,531	428,919	159,127	-
1884	196,240	481,414	262,759	-
1885	208,269	648,319	401,641	1,619
1886	195,804	849,116	524,724	39,775
1887	186,640	958,643	533,267	18,879
1888	195,511	1,261,998	525,876	20,842
1889	290,189	1,799,620	701,434	129,483
1890	373,140	2,018,089	901,290	396,314
1891	359,280	1,936,547	1,238,278	667,473
1892	349,399	1,335,864	1,762,246	1,040,674
1893	280,050	1,116,715	1,780,593	973,221
1894	288,188	1,329,067	1,698,544	875,083
1895	313,097	1,663,907	2,130,600	1,176,000
1896	313,807	1,882,189	2,473,753	1,372,277

Borneo Rubber in Beaufort (700 acres) and Beatrice Estate (767 acres). There were also dozens of average size estates around 200-300 acres and these estates were 37 mainly planted with tobacco and followed by rubber³⁸.

Table 3: Timber Industry in North Borneo, 1890-1913³⁹

Year	Quantity Exported (cubic metres)	Value Exported (\$)
1890	-	44,584
1902	-	374,911
1910	34,521	642,935
1913	49,634	862,155

The large forested areas of North Borneo too provided the potential for the expansion of the timber industry in North Borneo. With the improvement of the road and railway networks coupled with the expanding bridle paths in the interior regions made timber extraction became more feasible. In a span of two decades, timber contributions to the colonial economy ballooned from a \$44,584 in 1890 to \$862,155 in 1913. Little wonder that the introduction of the 1913 Ladang Ordinance was to protect the priceless timber that continued to enrich the company.

One crucial factor in the success of the North Borneo Chartered Company was the opening up of the region by railway and the extension of bridle paths. This modern infrastructure made the most inhospitable and distant regions assessable to traders, the expanding plantation economy and for the extraction of timber. To the natives, all these changes not only meant more strangers in their land but also meant that their role as provider of free labour to the colonial government. The construction of the bridle path is one such example. Since 1901, the British began constructing a network of rural paths connecting most of West North Borneo. By 1905, 85 miles of bridle path were successfully built, connecting interior places such as Tomani, Tenom, Melalap, Keningau and Tambunan. Later, the construction of these paths extended further into the interior 550 miles of bridle path covering the Rundum, Melalap and Sapulote country. By 1929, 550 miles of bridle path was constructed with moderate cost and was considered crucial to the development and pacification of the country⁴⁰. However, the moderate cost discussed by colonial officers is an understatement as it was extremely exploitative of the natives and caused many burdens on them. Each Murut man was expected to build and maintain 22 metres of bridle path a year with a width of 1.5 metres. Colonial figures of 6-8 days of free labour for the construction of the path is grossly under valued taking into consideration the task at hand. Muruts have

described working for as long as three months on the construction of the path resulting in them unable to carry out their planting activities⁴¹. Only in 1914, did the British began paying for government work, a meagre sum of 3 cents per day for a period of eight days a year was said to have been paid⁴².

In short, the introduction of a capitalist economy had but one motive, the maximum profit that could be harnessed from North Borneo and its people. With profit at heart, every step taken by the colonial had this agenda to fulfil.

THE AGE OF LAW AND ORDER - THE ADMINISTRATIVE RATIONALITY IMPOSED

To exploit the economic potential and to civilise the native, North Borneo needed an efficient bureaucracy and a state run by British standards. The company rightfully enforced two sets of laws in North Borneo which I have classified into Preventive Laws and Administrative Laws. The former aimed at curbing practices considered uncivilised, barbaric and unChristian among the native populace and the latter focussing on laws for better government.

The introduction of this preventive laws were done right from the onset of British rule mainly in curbing practices such as head hunting, slavery, blood feuding, murder, piracy and other criminal acts so deemed by the propagators of law. Preventive Law was also the first form of direct control exerted on the natives forcing them to accept British sense of law and morality. Perhaps more importantly, the introduction of colonial laws brought about a decline of native law or *undang-undang adat*. The unseen impact of the imposition of these laws led to the disintegration of native culture's as some of the practices played a crucial part in the ordering of their respective societies. For instance, head hunting, blood feuds and slavery are an integral part of Murut society. Inter-tribal warfare usually resulted in head hunting raids. This in turn resulted in blood feuds extending into a few generations. Head disequilibrium whereby one village has taken more heads than another perpetuates continued blood feuds. Contrary to common belief, head hunting and blood feuds can be settled via arbitration between the concerned parties⁴³. The following comments by Rutter:

... this was for the two parties involved meeting at an agreed spot and striking a balance of heads, whereupon the winner could be called upon to pay up blood money on as many heads as he was to the good. In the olden days, it was payment in slaves... normally

a man for a man's head, a woman for a woman's head and a child for a child's head⁴⁴.

In short, Murut culture is built on the interplay of these practices. Imbedded in these practices are concepts such as honour, bravery, respect and Justice. A kinsman is bound by honour to regain the honour lost when the head of his kinsmen was taken. To do this is to avenge the death of his kinsmen which was also a sign of respect and a mark of a proven warrior in the battlefield⁴⁵. These practices are complex and have its own dynamics at play. It is beyond the comprehension or acceptability of the natives to see their age-old practices to be brought to an abrupt end by the colonials. They acted to resist through various rebellions spanning nearly thirty years from 1888-1915⁴⁶. However, British law was seen as just and moral for it successfully put an end to savage practices - 'savage' because the colonial by virtue of being more powerful deemed it so. The enforcement of preventive laws, accompanied by various acts of aggression such as burning of long houses, executions, fines, and confiscation of goods forced the natives into submission and accepting colonial law⁴⁷.

The second set of laws, which I call the Administrative Laws was intended at the day to day running of North Borneo with a system of government, emulating the British experiences in the Malay states and Sarawak. Taxes were introduced as a source of revenue such as the introduction of the Poll tax right from the onset of colonial rule. Each adult native was charged a fixed rate of \$1 per annum. These taxes were seen as necessary and it was the duty of the native to pay the taxes due as loyal subjects of the company⁴⁸. Refusal to pay taxes had serious repercussions such as imprisonment and heavy fines. In 1913, two new taxes were introduced in North Borneo and this caused much dissatisfaction among the natives. The first being the Ladang Ordinance and the second was the Tax on Native Liquor. The introduction of the Ladang (Shifting cultivation) Ordinance of 1913 was seen as a necessary step to regulate the practice of widespread shifting cultivation practised among the natives of the interior region. It was aimed at reducing these forms of destructive agriculture in place of permanent forms of cultivation. The law also controlled the type of forest to be felled by limiting it to secondary forest only. More importantly, the natives were also required to obtain permits for the felling of forest at a rate of not less than 50 cents an acre. Any non-compliance of the law was dealt with a heavy fine of \$25 per acre of forest illegally felled⁴⁹. W.J. Worth, a British Officer noted the rationale of the law as "to protect for the state to that end to place efficient check upon the haphazard and often extensive felling of the spasmodic and temporary cultivation. While it is eminently desirable that even forest should be cleared for permanent

agriculture, it is felt that the time has come when forestry is a consideration of such importance that ladang cultivation must give way to it⁵⁰." To the colonials, the forest was a good source of revenue and needed to be protected as British interest was more important than native survival.

Another tax enforced in 1913 was the Native Liquor Tax imposed to curtail excessive drinking among the natives. The tax was imposed on the commodities used in the production of liquor. For instance, a coconut tree tapped for *bahr* was taxed 25 cents per annum or every *gantang* of rice was taxed 6 cents etc⁵¹. As for the natives of North Borneo, they viewed the tax as exploitative and infringed on their way of life, with the strong opposition to the taxes coming from the interior residency. Governor Parr, defended the enforcement of the taxes as a move to avoid the wastage of rice in making native liquor and to lessen drunkardness and the tax was not intended to increase revenue for the government. What the British failed to realise was the social significance of drinking, which was essential in all types of ceremonies such as birth, death, harvest festival, weddings, house building, settling feuds, honouring guest etc⁵². In short, new taxes were imposed as a necessary condition for establishing the civilising influence of colonial rule. The British believed that they were rational and their actions noble and done with the interest of the natives at heart as long as these actions also added to the increasing profit of the company.

CONTESTING COLONIAL RATIONALITY - A NATIVE RESPONSE

The extent of the establishment of colonial rationality on the natives of North Borneo had a totalizing effect. It acted to drastically transform various facets of native lifestyle. The social-cultural life of the native saw the banning of many aspects of their traditional practices such as head hunting, blood feuding, slavery, piracy to name a few. In one sense, these changes might be viewed as a sign of modernity among the natives but on the other, these policies had systematically displace and replace many native methods in dealing with these aspects in their culture. For instance, their complex methods of feud arbitration, the centrality of slavery in their social structure, settling their problems via the use of *adat* law disintegrated. Laws such as the Ladang Tax and the Native Liquor tax paid no attention to its impact on the native way of life. The establishment of colonial administration further eroded native political systems with Dayaks and appointed native leaders being replaced by colonial officers. Mat Salleh was one such displaced chief. He was treated badly by the company and ended up waging a 6-year rebellion from the east to

the west coast of North Borneo. The expanding colonial economy, effectively transformed natives of North Borneo into debt ridden individuals, exploited by traders, the Dayak police and to a larger extent by the British. The construction of bridle paths considered a catalyst for the opening up of the interior region effectively transformed warriors into labourers if not company slaves (for the duration of government work). The clearest sign of resistance towards colonial rule was the various rebellions that plagued North Borneo in a span of 30 years. Each rebellion and armed conflict in itself was a resistance towards the bureaucratisation of colonial knowledge in North Borneo. These rebellions resisted the forced changes imposed by the colonial rule; it resisted the infringement of native customs and practices and the disintegration of native lifestyle brought about by the company administration.

The first of these armed resistance was the Padas-Klias Affair of 1888 where the Muruts under the leadership of Dato Stia Bakti (a Muslim Murut) and Banessah, a local Chief, launched a full scale assault on the British in protest of the banning of their head hunting practices. The Murut forces were defeated, 57 warriors killed, the leaders executed and scores of participating warriors and their families banished to other residencies to work as labourers⁵³. In 1889, another rebellion called the Padas-Damit War broke out under the leadership of Pangeran Shahbandar, a Brunei nobleman with the aid of his Murut warriors. The company eventually subdued the rebels and later settled the case in the royal court of Brunei. The Pangeran had opposed the encroachment of the British on his territory and taking control of the region without first negotiating with him⁵⁴. In 1890, the bloody incident of Raffles Flint and the massacre of the Tengaras, where Raffles Flint, a colonial officer led an expedition of revenue and massacred 130 Tenggara men, women and children in retaliation to the murder of his brother, Charles Flint. Apparently, the Chief of the Tengaras owed his brother a sizeable loan and being heavily in debt killed the latter in retaliation⁵⁵. In 1891, the interior region was in uproar and turmoil yet again with the widespread religious-cult movement called the Malingkote. The Malingkote was started by a Murut warrior, Tahang who gained a large following in much of the west coast where the followers acted to burn their agricultural produce and killed their life stock. 21 traders too were killed in various villages in the region. The Malingkote was seen as a pseudo-religious response towards resisting the encroaching colonial economy⁵⁶.

In 1894, continued intrusion in North Borneo saw the rise of Mat Salleh, the Bajau-Suluk warrior challenging British hegemony for a duration of six years covering a large part of east and west coast of Sabah. He got support from various tribes and successfully forged a multi-racial force of warriors to combat the colonials. He not only defeated the British in a couple of occasions but also

burnt down a British outpost in Gaya Island, opposite Jesselton - demonstrations of native might. In 1900, he was killed and his multiracial force comprising over 1000 warriors from Suluk, Illanun, Bajau and Dusun were disbanded and forced to accept colonial rule⁵⁷. His rebellion marked a protest by traditional native leadership against the poor treatment and total disregard of their ways by the British. They felt suppressed and alienated and were further made to be fugitives with punitive military actions. As such, a brave warrior like Mat Salleh stood to challenge colonial rule and gained the support of other natives who had similar grievances. In 1915, the last of the great rebellions under the leadership of Onteros of the Silangit, Chief of the unified Murut nation was launched on the British. The objective was to free themselves from the various exploitative taxes forced on them, the slave-like government work, mainly in the construction of the bridle path with the ultimate intention of ridding Murut country of British intrusions⁵⁸.

In short, the British were resisted on numerous occasions. Their moral rationality on what were good practices was strongly challenged by the natives who thought otherwise. The administrative rationality challenged by the likes of Mat Salleh and the various taxes and government work for the company were resisted wholeheartedly by the Muruts in 1915. The resistance of the natives against the British was total and encompassed six rebellions and bloody incidences in a span of 30 years and with the death of thousands of natives warriors, women and children.

CONCLUSION

The power of colonial rationality in determining the relationship between the British and the natives of Borneo is one that favours the former over the latter. Colonial rationality acted to create oppositions of superior/inferior, good/bad, righteous/evil, moral/immoral and various other binary oppositions to differentiate themselves from the less civil natives. Moral rationality played a crucial role to differentiate 'proper' behaviour and practices in contrast to 'improper' behaviour and practices of the natives and by doing so rationalised their arrival in North Borneo as necessary to civilise the natives of Borneo. Greed and lust for power disguised itself under a moral umbrella. Likewise, economic rationality stressed the emphasis on the need to expand capitalist economy in place of the subsistence economy practised by the natives of North Borneo. The expanding colonial economy was deemed best because it was profitable to the Chartered Company and its London investors. As for the natives, they had no choice but to embrace the new economy. The colonials,

on the other hand, had no qualms in marginalising and impoverishing the natives. Whereas the Administrative rationality provided the bureaucratic machinery necessary for the enforcement of colonial knowledge and rationality on the populace of North Borneo by the various laws and policies enforced. Colonial knowledge by providing the basis for colonial rationality became a powerful tool in enforcing colonial viewpoints on the natives in every aspect of their social life. By being the more powerful of the two, the colonials further enforced their rationality on the natives by forcing them to change in line with the demands of the colonialist. The natives resisted colonial rationality by revolting and launching numerous rebellions in a span of 30 years. Eventually, the colonial victory sealed the dominance of their knowledge and their rationality on the defeated natives of North Borneo.

NOTES:

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- ² E. Said, *Orientalisni* (London: Penguin, 1978).
- ³ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of a Clinic. An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (New York: Vintage Press, 1975) and Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: An age of Insanity in the Age of reason* (London. Tavistock, 1975).
- ⁴ Cohn, *An Anthropologist among Historians and Other Essays* (New Delhi. OUP, 1987) and B. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Form of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).
- ⁵ T. Docherty, *Postmodernism: An Introduction* (Hempstead: Harvester and Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 6 and p. 12.
- ⁶ J. Culler, "Derrida", in John Sturrock, *Structuralism and Since* (Oxford: OUP, 1979).
- ⁷ R. Inden, "Orientalist Construction of India", *Modern Asian Studies*, 20, 3 (1986), p. 408

- ⁸ See Raffles, *The Memoirs of Sir Stamford Raffles*, W.H. Treacher, "British Borneo: Sketches of Brunei, Sarawak and Borneo", *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 21 (1890); O. Rutter, *The Pagans of North Borneo* (Kuala Lumpur: OUP, 1985 rep.) and W.B. Pryer, *British North Borneo and its Resources*, S.G.A File 1433 on the benevolence of the colonials.
- ⁹ B. Smart, *Modern Conditions, Postmodern Controversies* (London: Routledge, 1992) p. 149.
- ¹⁰ See Raffles, *The Memoirs of Sir Stamford Raffles*, W.H. Treacher, "British Borneo: Sketches of Brunei, Sarawak and Borneo", *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 21 (1890); O. Rutter, *The Pagans of North Borneo* (Kuala Lumpur: OUP, 1985 rep.) and W.B. Pryer, *British North Borneo and its Resources*, S.G.A File 1433 on the benevolence of the colonials.
- ¹¹ B. Cohn, *Colonialism and its form of Knowledge: The British in India*, p. 5.
- ¹² H. Roth Ling, *The Natives of Sarawak and British North Borneo*, Two Volumes (London: Truslove and Hanson, 1896). The most detailed ethnographic text on the natives of Sarawak and North Borneo covering many aspects of their social life up until 1895.
- ¹³ Owen Rutter, *The Pagans of North Borneo* (Kuala Lumpur: OUP, 1929, rep. 1985) a colonial officer, he experienced North Borneo first hand as an administrator. His book covers much of the native/pagan practices of the North Borneo communities, the first text to just feature the non-Muslim North Borneos. Incidentally, he thought of them as the real people of North Borneo. Interestingly, his book written in 1929 is the first to include the classification of the natives into Murut and Dusun categories based on the North Borneo census. A clear example of inventing the native, where colonial knowledge of the age came to dominate present day categories.
- ¹⁴ W.H. Treacher, "British Borneo: Sketches of Brunei, Sarawak and Borneo", *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 21 (1890). Treacher was the former governor of North Borneo. A good overview of British Borneo and the policies, laws and actions taken by the British and the importance of their role in civilising North Borneo.

- 15 Ivor Evans, *Among Primitive Peoples in Borneo* (Singapore: OUP, 1985). An excellent account on native customs and practices with emphasis on the Dusun of the Tuaran and Tempasuk districts.
- 16 E.P. Gueritz, "British North Borneo", *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1884). A general account of North Borneo.
- 17 John Whitehead, *The Exploration of Kina Balu, North Borneo* (London: Gurney and Jackson, 1983). A general account of North Borneo.
- 18 Von Donop, Papers on the Agricultural Prospects of North Borneo – 1882-1918, SGA File 1423. This report features the potential of agricultural development in North Borneo and a focus on the commodities and local produce of the time.
- 19 W.B. Pryer, British North Borneo and its resources, SGA File 1433. A colonial account on the profitability of North Borneo as far as exploitable resources go.
- 20 John Rooney, *Khabar Gembira: A History of the Catholic Church in East Malaysia and Brunei* (London: Mill Hill Missionaries, 1981), p. 17.
- 21 W.B. Pryer, British in North Borneo and its resources, SGA File 1433, p. 22.
- 22 Michael Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*, Collin Gordon (ed) (New York: Pantheon Book, 1980), p. 82
- 23 Sophia Raffles, *Memoirs of the life and service of Sir Stamford Raffles* (London: 1830). An excellent account on the application of Raffles policy in Borneo can be found in L. Wright, *The Origins of British Borneo* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1970).
- 24 The British nearly view non-European rule in a negative light. For instance, Talal Asad, Two European Images of Non-European rule, in Talal Asad (ed.), *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (London: Ithaca Press, 1973) provides an illuminating view on this matter. He noted two different images of non-European rule. Among the African kingdoms under colonial influence and dominance, the system of rule is one of consent whereas Islamic rule (Incidentally not under colonial

dominance) is one of severe repression. See pages 103-118. Basically each interpretation was based on western scholars who emphasised the rationality of African culture in contrast to the irrationality of Islamic history. Put it differently, only with colonial intervention and dominance will lead towards more civil forms of government - further legitimising the role of the colonial as a civilising influence.

- 25 W.B. Pryer, British North Borneo and its Resources, S.G.A File 1433, p.22
- 26 W.H.Treacher, "British Borneo: Sketches of Brunei, Sarawak and Borneo", *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 21 (1890), p. 1 12.
- 27 A brilliant analysis is found J.Fabian, *Time and the Other - How anthropology makes Its object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). He describes how the'denial of coevalness' whereby the Other is defined as not being in the same time period or as more primitive and thus needing intervention from the colonial. Borrowing Owen Rutter's term 'lower scale of civilization' as the determinant of intervention. See O. Rutter, *The Pagans of North Borneo* (London: OUP, 1985rep.)
- 28 Incidentally the Dutch were considered as one of the reasons for the degradation of the people's of the Malay Archipelago. See Sophia Raffles, *The Menioirs of Sir Stanifotd Raffles*.
- 29 K.G.Tregonning, The Mat Salleh Revolt, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol.29 Part 1 (1956), p.32-33
- 30 W.H. Treacher, "British Borneo".
- 31 W.H. Treacher, "British Borneo", p.94-95.
- 32 Ibid., p.97.
- 33 Raymond Lee, "Modernization, Postmodernism and The Third World", *Current Sociology* Vol.42 Number 2 (1994), p.43.
- 34 Adapted from W.B. Pryer, British North Borneo and Its Resources, p.9.

- 35 M.C. Cleary, "Indigenous Trade and European Economic intervention in North-West Borneo c. 1860-1930", *Modern Asian Studies*, 32, 2 (1996).
- 36 Black, "Native Administration", p. 183.
- 37 Planting in British North Borneo, SGA File 1423.
- 38 Adapted with some alterations from Amarjit Kaur, "Hantu and Highway: Transport in Sabah 1881-1963", *Modern Asian Studies*, 28, 1 (1994), p. 15.
- 39 Adapted with some alterations from Amarjit Kaur, "'Hantu' and Highway", p. 17.
- 40 Construction of the Bridle Path, SGA File 834.
- 41 C. Fernandez, The Rundum Rebellion of 1915 Reconsidered, *The Sarawak Museum Journal* (1998) in press. This is actually based on the narratives gathered from Murut elders in 1996.
- 42 Ibid. I have yet to come across the actual sum paid as wages in colonial records. The Murut elders have noted their wages in the past as 3 cents a day and the actual work on the bridle path likened slave labour rather than wage labour.
- 43 H.L.Roth, *The Natives of Sarawak and British North Borneo*, Vol. 1 (London, 1896, rep. 1968). Also see O. Rutter, *The Pagans of North Borneo*, mainly the chapter on headhunting.
- 44 O.Rutter, *The Pagans of North Borneo*, p.203.
- 45 O.Rutter, *The Pagans of North Borneo*, p.203. A similar view is presented in Ivor Evans, *Among Primitive Peoples in Borneo*, p. 188.
- 46 A good account on the rebellions can be found in C.Fernandez, "Contesting Colonial Discourse: Rewriting Murut History of Resistance in British North Borneo from 1881-1915", *Akadamika* (Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, UKM), January 1999 (in press).
- 47 Ibid.

- 48 See W.H. Treacher, "British Borneo", Owen Rutter, *The Pagans of North Borneo* on the issues pertaining to taxation and the rationale for imposing these taxes.
- 49 Shifting Cultivation (Ladang) Ordinance of 1913), SGA File 284.
- 50 W.J. Worth to Governor Pearson, 29 July 1915, C0874/835.
- 51 Native Liquor Taxation, SGA File 1178.
- 52 I. Black, "The Rundum Rebellion of 1915 in Sabah: Millenarianism and Social Protest", *Seminar Sejarah dan Masyarakat Sabah*, 12-16 August (Sabah Foundation, 1981, p. 38.
- 53 C.Fernandez, "Contesting Colonial Discourse. Rewriting Murut History of Resistance in British North Borneo from 1881-1915", *Akademika* (Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, UKM), January 1999, in press.
- 54 Ian Black, *A Gambling Style of Government* (Kuala Lumpur: OUP, 1983).
- 55 C.Fernandez, "Contesting Colonial Discourse".
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 K.G. Tregonning, "The Mat Salleh Revolt" and Ian Black, *A Gambling Style of Government*.
- 58 C.Fernandez, The Rundum Rebellion of 1915 Reconsidered, *The Sarawak Museum Journal* (1998), in press