

## Colonialist Narrative in a Post-Colonial Era Travel Writing, *Into the Heart of Borneo*

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### ABSTRACT

Travel writings have long served as important points of reference for Western academicians, travellers and those generally associated with the business of conquest and trade. More often than not, these sources of references had depicted the lands and people of the ‘new world,’ usually the East or Africa, as being wild, savage and in dire need of European intervention for the creation of civilized societies. Therefore, it would be of great interest to both scholars and travellers to find out if the colonialist representations still persist in a post-colonial era Western travel writing about the East. The current study examines the ways in which Redmond O’Hanlon, an English naturalist, constructs and represents the natives and the land of Sarawak in his travel writing, *Into the Heart of Borneo* (1984). The study aims to find out if O’Hanlon’s representation of Sarawak and its natives have progressed from the depictions found in the travel writings of his colonialist predecessors. The discussion of findings is preceded by a brief explanation of Edward Said’s notion of Orientalism, which provides the theoretical basis for the analysis of the travel novel. The paper highlights that there has been no real evolution in the travel narrative used by O’Hanlon to describe Sarawak and its natives from the colonial heyday of travel literature.

**Keywords:** Travel writing; *Into the Heart of Borneo*; Colonialist; Orientalism; Denigration

### INTRODUCTION

Early travellers, whether explorers or conquerors, often recorded accounts of their journeys into the ‘new worlds’ for various reasons, leaving behind a detailed set of instructions for the other travellers who might follow in their footsteps. Travel narratives in the form of official reports and travel journals often became important points of reference for Western academicians, administrators, travellers and those generally associated with the business of conquest and trade. Explorers and conquerors from the West were often possessed by curiosity, having been “stimulated by rumours of riches and marvel drawn from the fantastical tales of earlier travellers” (Boehmer, 2005, p. 16). Therefore, it was imperative for the early travel writers to make the travelogues ‘interesting’, ‘bizarre’ and ‘adventurous’ enough to appease the audience back home and sustain the market demand. More often than not, these sources of references depicted the lands and people of the ‘new world,’ as being wild, savage and in dire need of European intervention for the creation of civilized societies. Edward Said notes that “people, places, and experiences can always be described by a book, so much so that the book (or text) acquires a greater authority, and use, than the actuality it describes” (1995, p. 93).

A classic example of such narratives was the work of Paul Du Chaillu (1831 – 1903), a well-known early explorer of Africa. Paul Du Chaillu was a zoologist and an anthropologist

by training and became famous for being the first modern European to validate the existence of gorillas, and the Pygmy people of Central Africa. However, his travel narratives relating his travels in Africa, *Explorations and Adventures in Equatorial Africa* (1861) and *A Journey to Ashango-land* (1867) contained grossly exaggerated accounts of his experiences, and depicted the African natives as being wild, and almost beast-like in appearance. According to Vengadasamy and Mohd Ikram (2017, p. 33), “In current times, one would expect travel writings to have evolved far beyond the European supremacy agenda. However, it is not unusual to find even authors from the post-colonial era who pen travel narratives are still subscribing to the same supremacist notions expounded by past colonialist writers.” Even in a fairly recent travel writing entitled *African Son* (2012) that recorded the travels by William J. Hemminger, a Fulbright scholar, teacher, and traveller, who in his book recorded his many trips to Africa over thirty years, an African scholar, Manyaka Toko Djockoua, observes that Hemminger’s vision of Africa and Africans rationalizes inequities, racial discrimination and marginalization as it simultaneously asserts the superiority of the white self and the inferiority of the black other just like in most Western travelogues (Djockoua, 2014). Obviously, such travel accounts were aimed at readers who expected extraordinary accounts of travel exploits. Consequently, the credibility of both the writer and his or her travel accounts could be questioned and doubted.

For most readers, it may seem logical to read a travel narrative in the same manner of reading a work of fiction (Borm, 2007). This is because travel writings have been read as much for pleasure as for instruction, a remaining fact until today. Borm states that it is also a popular claim that whatever read in travel writing is not to be taken literally. This is because of the inevitable element of fiction in the recounting of conversations in the course of travel. Borm also asserts that the first-person narrative voice often found in travel narratives imply the extensive portrayal of personal implications of the author especially in the representation of the Other. Likewise, Hooper and Young (2004) assert that travel writing can be considered as open-ended and versatile, often confusing the readers with its complex style of form, content and intention. They state that one of the most persistent observations regarding travel writing is the manner in which travel narratives blend a great number of imaginative encounters.

Travel writing presents a multiplicity of avenues for exploring the dialectics of place and self. Contemporary travel writing approaches its subject material with (and through) the realization that the act of writing about a place is a simultaneous production of the self and its range of identifiable speaking positions. Most of them follow the postcolonial injunction to redirect the currents of imperialist discourse by problematizing the construction of Otherness through travel (Boddy, 1999). In addition to that, travel writings which are based on discovery and exploration often exhibit an ambivalent narrative. The traveller is often caught between an unpleasant feeling of discomfort, displacement and alienation, and a desire to experience the visual pleasure of the 'exotic' unknown land and its people.

This paper examines one such post-colonial era travel writing, *Into the Heart of Borneo* (1984) written by Redmond O’Hanlon. A naturalist and a former academic, O’Hanlon received his scientific and literary training at Oxford. O’Hanlon describes the book as an account of a journey made in 1983 to the mountains of Batu Tiban in the state of Sarawak, Malaysia with his poet friend, James Fenton. While the work is not exactly a contemporary one, having been published more than three decades ago, it is interesting to note that the book was published soon after Edward Said’s work *Orientalism* (1978) had received worldwide acclaim. Said’s seminal work on the European worldview and supremacy agenda paved the way for the emergence of other postcolonial theorists whose scholarly works have challenged the European worldview, one notable scholar being Homi Bhabha, who later published *The Location of Culture* (1994), another widely acclaimed work.

The blurbs found on the rear cover of O'Hanlon's book describe it as "the most hilarious travel book in many years" (by The Standard, a Hong Kong based news portal) and "perceptive, hilarious and at the same time a serious natural-history journey into one of the last remaining unspoilt paradises" (by The New Statesman, an American news portal). The fact that humour is such a significant element in the travel book affirms Borm's (2007) view that one should not perceive the details in a travel narrative in their literal forms as the reading experience is quite similar to that of a work of fiction.

From the beginning, it becomes evident to the reader that O'Hanlon embarks on this journey full of apprehension and some trepidation. He had been feeling some negative vibrations about the place and shares his unbearable discomfort from the very first page. Though he claims to be a nature lover and an explorer who is keen in identifying extraordinary flora and fauna, he is completely at unease and has ambivalent feelings about the expedition that could offer him all that a naturalist could yearn for. In fact, he is even haunted by nightmares during the nights that he spends in Sarawak. A little later into the book, his true motivation to go on this expedition is revealed. It is mentioned that often in his dreams, his tutor from Oxford, John Jones, would appear and question him "but what have you ever done in life?" (O'Hanlon 1984, p. 13).

O'Hanlon appears to be looking for the adventure of his life, and is driven to prove himself to the world. His mission then is to discover and explore the 'exotic' land of Borneo as described by his predecessors, such as Hose and McDougall who wrote the two-volume *The Pagan Tribes of Borneo* (1912), A.R Wallace, the author of *The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-Utan and the Bird of Paradise* (also in two volumes, 1869), and Robert Shelford who penned *A Naturalist in Borneo* (1916) and many more. O'Hanlon draws extensively from their travel narratives and incorporates them into his own travel account in an apparent attempt to maintain the 'exotic' and 'mysterious' appeal of the land and its people. O'Hanlon's travel writing effort is perhaps best explained by Patrick Crowley's comment on European travel writings about Algeria, 'The textual construction of the Orient by Europeans created a horizon of expectations for later travellers to the point where the experience of travel became jaded or had to be refreshed' (2017, p. 234).

It is therefore the aim of this paper to examine the ways in which O'Hanlon constructs and represents the natives and the land of Sarawak in his travelogue, *Into the Heart of Borneo* (1984). The underlying hypothesis for the study is that O'Hanlon's contemporary representation of the Sarawakian native and land has not really evolved from the depictions found in the travel writings of his predecessors during their colonial heyday. On the contrary, we contend that O'Hanlon's narrative in *Into the Heart of Borneo* (1984) perpetuates and sustains a colonial ideology. The following section will detail the theoretical basis for the analysis, largely drawn from Edward Said's notions of 'Orientalism' and 'Other.'

## EDWARD SAID'S ORIENTALISM

Edward Said (1995) in his book *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, states that the Western image of the Orient was far from the "real" Orient. Neither was Orientalism simply the work of the European imagination. In reality, it was all about power, domination, supremacy and authority. As such, Orientalism was not "simply" a collection of misrepresentations about the Orient in Europe, for it "created a body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment," (Said, 1995, p. 6). Material investment here means persistent negative representations of the Orient in academic discourse, art, literature and even political writing. In this way, Orientalism in the European culture became an instrument for maintaining "content" as it became a way for the colonisers to preserve misrepresentation of the colonised "Other" (natives, who were

depicted as the binary, and inferior, opposites of the colonisers).

For Said (1978, 1995), Orientalism means the accepted discourses, scholastic or otherwise, from the West about the Orient or the Other. The European colonialist discourse defined its Other by using contrasting images, ideas, personalities and experiences. In Said's words Orientalism is:

...the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice. But in addition I have been using the word to designate that collection of dreams, images and vocabularies available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line. These two aspects of Orientalism are not incongruent, since by use of them both, Europe could advance securely and unmetaphorically upon the Orient. (1995, p. 73)

Orientalism is mainly concerned with the colonial period and discourse and is influenced by the Foucauldian concepts of Knowledge and Power. Those in power, as in the case of colonizers, would control both the discourse and the means of communication. In the days of early European explorers who were also travel writers, Orientalist images that both denigrated and exoticized the native were produced and disseminated widely. In colonial times, the superior position of the Occident (the West), enabled them to play multiple roles like the missionary, the soldier and the trader, all positions that wielded power and authority over the Orient (the East). Such a relationship resulted in the construction of binary oppositions that placed the Occident as the epitome of knowledge, power and strength while the Orient was projected as ignorant, weak and naive (McLeod, 2000).

In travel narratives, natives of the Orient were often depicted as savage, wild and primitive. In this way, Orientalism justified the propriety of colonial rule in foreign lands. According to Zawiah (2003), "the most appalling effect of colonialist literature from the native point of view is the fact that the coloniser succeeded in convincing the colonised of their own inadequacies" (91). The 'new worlds' purportedly were in need of a savior to educate and civilize them, therefore legitimizing the whole notion of cultural and political domination by the Occident (Said, 2005). Bhabha (1994) argues that colonial discourse attempts to maintain the notion of the 'Other' through stereotyping, generalising and defining the natives in similar groups of people, disregarding their individuality. Stereotypes are generally rigid and unchangeable. In order to ensure that the construction of stereotypes of the 'Other' remain immediately and clearly identifiable, they are constantly repeated again and again, for they can neither be validated nor proven to be true.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### PORTRAYAL OF THE NATIVES AS SAVAGES

The colonialist point of view in O'Hanlon's travel narrative is very often not something implicit that the reader has to deduce. On the contrary, it is quite explicit on many occasions and in many parts of the text. For example, even in the opening paragraph on the very first page of *Into the Heart of Borneo*, O'Hanlon uses the words of C.D. Darlington from his work *The Evolution of Man and Society* (1969) who makes an observation of Sarawak by referring to another traveller before him, Haddon, who had made his journey to Sarawak in 1888.

The situation in Sarawak as seen by Haddon in 1888 is still much the same today. He found a series of racial strata moving downwards in society ad backwards in time as he moved inwards on the island. (p. 1)

The comment above implies that the Sarawak that O'Hanlon is a witness to has not

changed much from the days of the early colonialist travellers. By inserting this remark, O'Hanlon appears to be preparing readers for the fact that his assessment of Sarawak would not be very different from that of his colonialist predecessors.

Upon his first contact with the Sarawakian natives, when O'Hanlon and his companion meet the Iban trackers assigned to them, he makes the following observation:

Dana (the Head of all the Iban of Kapit), forceful, intelligent, full of natural authority, had ear-lobes distended into hanging loops and was tattooed on his throat and hands. He wore a tee-shirt and long trousers; so did Leon and Inghai, two young men who, I realized with secret disappointment, their ears the shape they were born with, their hands unmarked, would not have drawn a second glance on an Oxford street. (p. 22)

O'Hanlon expresses disappointment that the two younger Iban trackers were not similar in appearance to Dana, the elderly Iban chief, who seemed to fit O'Hanlon's perception of what a Sarawakian native should look like, the tee-shirt and long trousers notwithstanding, of course. In addition to that, on his journey to meet the Kayan natives (one of the many indigenous tribes of natives in Sarawak), O'Hanlon recounts an excerpt from Hose and McDougall's *The Pagan Tribes of Borneo* (1912):

I settled down for a peaceful bedtime read with Hose and McDougall. Discussing the wars of the Kayan, Hose tells us that: "...The warriors select their opponents and approach warily; they call upon one another by name, hurling taunts and swaggering boastfully in the heroic style. Each abuses the other's parents, and threatens to use his opponent's skin as a war-coat, or his scrotum as a tobacco-pouch, to take his head and to use his hair as an ornament for a parang-handle; or doubt as to the opponent's sex may be insinuated. While this exchange of compliments goes on, the warriors are maneuvering for favourable positions; each crouches, thrusting forward his left leg, covering himself as completely as possible with his long shield, and dodging to and fro continually. The stock of javelins and spears are first hurled, and skillfully parried with spear and shield. When a man has expended his stock of javelins and has hurled his spear, he closes in with his parang. His enemy seeks to receive the blow of the parang on his shield in such a way that the point, entering the wood, may be held fast by it. Feinting and dodging are practiced; one man thrusts out his left leg to tempt the other to strike as it and to expose his head in doing so. If one succeeds in catching his enemy's parang in his shield, he throws down the shield and dashes upon his now weaponless foe, who takes to his heels, throwing away his shield and relying merely on his swiftness of foot. When one of a pair of combatants is struck down, the other springs upon him and, seizing the long hair of the scalp and yelling in triumph, severs the neck with one or two blows of the parang." It was definitely time to sleep. (pp. 40-41)

O'Hanlon introduces the Kayan natives based on Hose and McDougall's *The Pagan Tribes of Borneo* (1912), in which they are portrayed as warriors who fight like savages. By including the excerpt above in his own travel narrative, O'Hanlon is not only perpetuating a stereotyped and brutal image of the natives in the readers' minds but also demonstrates how his own perceptions are reliant upon the early colonialist perceptions of the natives. In many of his observations, he includes a reference paragraph from the early travel works to assert the similarities between his observations and his predecessors.'

When O'Hanlon does meet the Kayan natives, he agrees that they are actually quite civilised and not leading the life that he had read about. However, his perception of them is not completely free from the images that he had planted in his mind from his readings of colonialist travel writings. Again, he includes a comment by Hose and McDougall when describing the Kayan natives:

"They are a warlike people, but less truculent than the Sea Dyaks, more staid and conservative and religious and less sociable. They do not wantonly enter into quarrels;

they respect and obey their chiefs. They are equally industrious with the Sea Dyaks, and though somewhat slow and heavy in both mind and body, they are more skilled in the handicrafts than any of the other peoples. ” (p. 161)

As O’Hanlon journeys further into Sarawak, he appears to be looking for more such details which he had read about in the early travel writings. When he arrives at the last Sea Dyak longhouse upstream on the Baleh river, which belonged to the village headman Pengulu-Jimbun, he notices that there were a great many skulls hanging in rattan nets from the cross-beams of the gallery roof:

"Very old" said Leon, our tracker and interpreter, who was good at guessing one's thoughts at such moments. "Maybe some belong Japanese"  
"Come on-surely just a little head-hunting still goes on?" I asked. "Every now and then when no one is looking?"  
"No, no-absolute no. But if," said Leon with one of his big brown grins, "if we find someone we don't like, not one bit, all alone in jungle, then that's called murder; and that's quite different. And then it would be a waste not to take his head; wouldn't it?"  
"But you took a lot of Japanese heads, didn't you?" I said, thinking of Tom Harrisson's ten-bob-a-nob campaign in the war."  
"Every one of them, all of them," said Leon with great seriousness. (p. 30)

In the above conversation, O’Hanlon suggestion about the possibility of the head-hunting practice still being in existence could have been in jest but it demonstrates his obsession with the image of the Sarawakian natives as head-hunters getting the better of him. His Iban tracker seems to mock O’Hanlon when he replies that they had taken all of the Japanese soldiers’ heads during the war, probably because he had grown weary of O’Hanlon’s continuous persistence on the matter. One could not help but sense that it is difficult for O’Hanlon to discard the old image of the natives as savages, which had been constructed by his predecessors.

#### ACCENTUATING THE LAND AS PRIMITIVE

Sarawak was not only primitive and backward according to O’Hanlon's point of view, but also it was not fit for living, being devoid of civilisation. He was filled with abhorrence towards the tropical climate. The heat is metaphorically depicted as a snake which squeezed the good air out of him leaving him in a bad state. He mocks the land and considered travelling in such a place with this type of climate as an absurd adventure:

We came into the little airport at Kuching over the slack muddy windings of Sarawak river, the mangrove swamps, the stretch of forest broken only by outcrops of ochre rock. On the tarmac, crossing to the airport sheds, the heat of the equator hit me for the first time. It squeezed round you like the rank coils of an unseen snake, pressing the good air out of your lungs, covering you in slimy sweat. Fifteen yards of this was enough; a mile would be impossible; five hundred miles an absurdity. (p. 11)

He considers the land to be a strange and absurd location for an Englishman, for the Occident to live in. Therefore, the ability of a native to live peacefully in such place is not seen as a credit but a humiliating fact, implying that only the uncivilized natives could survive in such a primitive place. He not only denies the land and its people their right to be correctly represented but further distorts their image for his readers. Much later in the book, he remarks:

The heat seemed insufferable, a very different heat from the dazzling sunlight of the river-side, an all-enclosing airless clamminess that radiated from the damp leaves, the slippery humus, the great boles of the tree. Three hills in, the sweat towel round my

forehead was saturated. My shirt was as wet as if I had worn it for a swim in the river. Dana, just ahead of me, however, appeared unaffected, his own shirt almost dry: and indeed the indigenous peoples of Borneo hardly sweat at all – with a humidity of 98 per cent there is nowhere for sweat to evaporate, no relief by cooling, just an added body-stocking of salt and slime and smell and moisture. I could feel a steady rivulet of sweat running down the centre of my chest, into my belly-button, and on into my pubic hairs, washing the precious crutch powder down my legs. (p. 115)

He depicts Dana, the Iban tracker, as being unaffected by the heat, concluding that the indigenous peoples of Borneo hardly sweat. Rather than admit his own weakness and ineptness in enduring the excursion into the jungles of Sarawak, he appears to mock the native's ability and endurance as if it is a flaw. This is in fact, a more subtle portrayal of the East as a strange land.

#### 'PECULIAR' CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS OF THE ORIENT

Edward Said (1995) asserts that the Occident takes tremendous efforts in highlighting the peculiarity of the Orient in their writings. The Orient's tradition, rituals and customs are often considered barbaric and irrational. Besides that, their culinary taste is considered exotic and weird. The native fruits are considered as 'unrecognizable' and therefore classified as unusual by O'Hanlon. It is not surprising therefore, when he exhibits a strong distaste towards *tuak*, a rice-brandy commonly drunk by the natives. According to O'Hanlon, this 'rice-brandy' was as lethal as it tasted. In addition to that, he also despises the longhouses' traditional dance by the natives. He is very sarcastic in his description of the whole ritual and feels embarrassed when he is urged to join the dance, instead of being appreciative of the good grace of the natives in welcoming him. He looks down on the singing and dancing, as something that is beneath him, indicating that the traditional entertainment of the natives could not be considered as real entertainment in his realm but perhaps suitable only for the primitive farmers whose life was isolated and backward. The perpetuation of colonialist ideology is very much evident here; as O'Hanlon establishes a superior position by making the natives' tastes and rituals inferior to his own. He states:

Because in the longhouses you will have to dance every night. It is simply impossible to refuse. Three or four girls will come and pull you up and then you have to do your things in front of the assembled tribe-just twenty minute or so. No problem really. And then you must sing, of course. Why not learn a duet? A duet would be splendid, absolutely splendid. The lives of the primitive farmers are pretty monotonous, after all, and isolated and lonely. (p. 8)

O'Hanlon also criticizes his fellow native travellers' diet. What seems to be a sensible diet in a tropical climate and suitable for the hard jungle trekking task is criticised because it comprises a large portion of rice. We can sense the ambivalence in O'Hanlon's observation; he claims the Iban men are fit but refuses to admit it wholeheartedly but gives the credit to the rice they consume. However, the exaggerated depiction and his sarcasm of the amount of rice a native could consume yet again reflect his own inability to keep up with the native's strength and endurance:

The Iban were as fit as men could be, but an extra source of energy fueled them, too; could it simply be the rice they ate, at each meal, some twelve times more than us, some twelve times more than one would have thought possible?. (p. 54)

Even the meals prepared by the Iban trackers, Dana, Leon and Inghai were not appreciated by O'Hanlon and his companion, James Fenton. Instead, they were subjected to more ridicule when O'Hanlon states "the serabau was tasteless, which did not matter, and full

of bones, which did. It was like a hair-brush caked in lard. James made the same discovery” (p. 39).

### RACIAL STEREOTYPES

In O’Hanlon’s description of the people of Sarawak, he makes extensive racial assumptions, therefore perpetuating the racial stereotypes created by his predecessors. On his first encounter with the land Dyaks, having been influenced by various preconceived notions about the natives based on his readings, he decides that they are lazy. He mocks them as being the least ambitious and too lazy to cause trouble:

We took two rooms in the lodging house which, in the absence of its Chinese owners, was staffed by very young, very sleepy, very friendly Land Dyaks. It was easy to see why the Rajahs Brooke considered them to be the least enterprising, the least troublesome of all the peoples in the territory. Our four attendants lay peacefully around the tiny reception desk, one on the floor, one on a sofa, and two in chairs. It made one yawn just to look at them. (p. 12)

Apart from the land Dyaks, O’Hanlon portrays more racial stereotypes of the Malays, Ibans and Chinese. Based on the textual evidence, O’Hanlon makes it clear that the Chinese were considered dishonest and therefore they were not allowed to deal with the Ibans directly, as the Ibans were considered to be naïve and lacking in worldly intelligence that they could be easily cheated. Malays were considered as a group of better people, good enough for the English to let them govern:

Brooke encouraged the Chinese to trade: that was their role; he helped them to set up shop (but no Chinaman was allowed to trade directly in a longhouse, where his measures could not be checked and the Iban might be cheated); he let them dominate the river traffic; he even blessed Foochow Christian immigration and granted them land for intensive farming, but he refused to give the Chinese any say whatever in politics (and members of secret societies were to be executed on discovery). Politics was the concern of the Muslim Malays – who were used to governing, Brooke thought, and proto-gentlemen in their own right. So they became a professional class of minor officialdom, but were forbidden to dirty their hands in trade. The Ibans, as long as they paid their “door tax” of one dollar per family per year, reported for war service on receipt of the Rajah’s spear. (pp. 19-20)

By emphasizing such notions of colonial ideology, O’Hanlon continues to perpetuate the racial stereotypes and the myth of the superior West established by colonialists.

### GENDERED STEREOTYPES

Orientalism also makes assumptions of gender roles. The exoticised Oriental female, often depicted nude or partially clothed, is often presented as an immodest person often engaged in activities related to sexual pleasure in many Western colonial travel writings. In O’Hanlon’s travel narrative too, there are some examples of the perception of the Oriental female as being sexually promiscuous and exotic. When he chanced upon a girl rather suddenly in a village he makes the following observation: “I found myself looking into the big brown eyes of a girl on the bank beside us. She was standing in a loose clump of bamboo, her fine black hair falling over her bare shoulders and breasts.” (p. 59) In another encounter with an old woman, he makes the following remark: “The oldest woman I had yet seen in Borneo, squatting on the floor, her wrinkled breasts, and her ear lobes, hanging forlornly, her attitude one of exaggerated distress, was alternately touching my legs and theatrically placing her hands over



her eyes" (p. 61).

O'Hanlon's observations indicate that the women's physical attributes seem to matter more than their character or individuality. The fact that not even one of the women presented in the text was given a name attests to O'Hanlon's preoccupation with the native women's sensuality. In fact, sexual innuendoes are quite apparent in O'Hanlon's descriptions of native women. The excerpt below depicts a young native girl who is described as a seductress:

However young, she danced with tremulous invitation, a slow yearning, graceful dance, the long fan feathers sweeping over her body in alternating curves, a dance that began from a crouching position and opened gradually upwards as she rose, inch by inch, a celestial bird, some as-yet-undiscovered hornbill of paradise, flying upwards towards the sun, towards the bright world where Bali Penyalong is Lord of the House. "This is really something," whispered James, holding his head in both hands, gazing at her. "She really, really knows what she's doing." (p. 72)

It is strikingly interesting to note that after describing the native men, land and customs with such abhorrence, that O'Hanlon should find the native women so appealing. Such a fanciful representation demonstrates the native women's perceived sexual deviancy and renders them as objects of enjoyment for European men, who could enjoy them without any moral qualms, as these women were already promiscuous. O'Hanlon could have represented the women in a more respectful manner if he had provided an original portrayal of them that highlights their unique beauty. However, like most of his other observations in his writing, he chooses to accentuate and sustain his predecessors' colonialist discourse that exoticizes the Sarawakian native women.

## CONCLUSION

Early European travel writings, especially the colonialist travel narratives, have long been known for their representation of nations in Africa and the Orient as being exotic, savage-like and generally in need of Western instruction to transform their societies into civilized ones. What the travel writers had conveniently left out in their narratives is that most of these nations had already flourished into progressive and culturally rich societies even when much of Europe was still in the dark ages. Of course, the early Western travel writings had a far greater agenda than simply serving as points of reference for other travellers and explorers. They provided conquerors and colonizers with the much-needed justification for their colonial exploits in the East. The current study, which analyzed a post-colonial era travel writing *Into the Heart of Borneo* (1984) by an Oxford trained academic, Redmond O'Hanlon, reveals that the old Western colonialist ideology is still very much in operation. O'Hanlon's narrative does little to allay the colonialist representations that denigrated and reduced the natives of Sarawak to strange, wild and exotic beings. In fact, O'Hanlon's narrative continues the colonialist tradition when the natives of Sarawak and their land are cast as the inferior 'Other' through various negative representations.

In complete irony to his position as a naturalist who claimed that he had come to study the flora and fauna of Sarawak, O'Hanlon continuously depicts Sarawak as a wild and primitive realm of untold and unknown dangers throughout his travelogue. He also constantly criticizes the hot and humid tropical climate and deems the land unsuitable for living. Similarly, the natives of Sarawak are also portrayed in a very negative light through various stereotypical images. His native companions, the Iban trackers, though exhibiting tremendous courage and resilience during the journey, are often depicted as wild and as possessing strange attributes. The female natives are overly sexualized and objectified to retain the Eurocentric notion that the females in the Orient are exotic. In addition, the rich and colourful

variety of native culture is also depicted as bizarre and strange. All these depictions prove that the discourse in O'Hanlon's travel narrative has neither progressed nor evolved from the early Western colonialist ideology and representations of the Orient. The study implies that Western travel writings published after the colonial era may contain neo-colonialist ideology and warrant a careful scrutiny before they can be accepted as mainstream travel literature.

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