Examining Colonial Ideology in Anthony Burgess’s novel *Bed in the East*

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Abstract
This paper tackles the impact of colonization on the Malay colonized society pre-independence period. It exposes British colonialism, a totalizing ideology of control, and the negative representation strategy accomplished by the colonial writer Anthony Burgess’s Novel *Beds in the East* (1959). This novel was published along with two other stories as a single narrative text entitled *The Malayan trilogy* (1972). This study aims at examining Malay discourses concerning colonial rule and how European writings (Anthony Burgess) on the Malays could be read in a more nuanced approach and from a non-Eurocentric perspective. The examined text reinforced the differences between the rulers and ruled people to perpetuate the colonial ideology of colonialism and pave the way for the presence of colonial authority. This article concludes that the representation of Malaysia(ns) is set in the colonial texts in which colonialism didn’t only play a vital role in post-colonial literature, but it was behind its existence.

Keywords: beds in the east, British empire, burgess, colonial ideology, representation

1.1 Introduction
The British first became formally involved in Malay politics in 1771, and the British colonial system expanded its control over the entire peninsula (Malaysia). The British Empire had exploited it for centuries before it gained its crucial independence in the twentieth century (1957). Great Britain had a significant role in the colonization of Malaysia as a famous colony. Burgess was an officer in the Colonial Service and a teacher for the Colonial Service in Malaya” (Roughley, 2008, p. 59), and; he shared his perception and representations of colonized people with other colonial writers. The trilogy concentrates on the experiences of a British character, Victor Crabbe, a history teacher who faces complications in his private and professional life.

Within parameters of postcolonial studies and the reading of colonial discourse, representations in discourse are done typically to make sense of the social world and the Western place in it. The growth of the occidental-oriental binary is rooted in the power hierarchy established by the West. The people or events represented by Western perception are usually carried out through sweeping generalizations using stereotypes that cross many cultural and national boundaries. Such mechanisms not only influence the way the writers perceive themselves and others but also dictate consciously or unconsciously the roles they play in the world around them.

According to Alatas, (1977), a generally negative image of people subjugated by Western colonial powers, which dominated the colonial ideology, is drawn bases on cursory observations, or misunderstanding and faulty methodologies. Terms like violent savages, ignorant laborer, and sexual deviant are common stereotypes of Malay natives (p. 112). The research questions this paper addresses are as follows: to what extent is the colonial ideology reflected and perpetuated in the colonial texts? How has Burgess’s world of imagination perceived the colonizers and colonized people? How Burgess access an agent of Western ideology? How does a literary book in the Western norm reinforce the colonialist ideology through its representation of inappropriate silence about colonized peoples?

Furthermore, Yahya, (2003) reveals that ideology is a system of values of a definite group or class, an asset of shared assumptions, or a collective representation of ideas and experience. It is a concept related to the notion of subject formation negative (p. 27-28). She adds, Colonial ideology has a clandestine and overt goal. While the covert purpose of colonialism is to exploit the colonized country’s natural resources thoroughly and ruthlessly, the definite aim, as articulated by colonialist discourse, is to “civilize” the savage, and introduce him to all the benefits of western cultures. This definite aim, embedded in all colonialist literature, is accompanied in colonialist texts through the concentration upon the savagery and evilness of the native, which only serves to justify colonial occupation and exploitation (p. 29).

1.2 Previous studies
A study by Ahmad (2014) examines the images in British fiction through the framework of archetypal literary criticism and theories of colonial representations in the works of colonialist writers: Joseph Conrad, W. Somerset Maugham, and Anthony Burgess. The study establishes
how the garden archetype has been deployed by the British creative imagination in the past and the present. The article concludes that the depiction of Malaysia in various forms of the archetypal garden negates the indigenous worldview regarding space; instead, it produces “knowledge” about Malaysia embedded in the Westerners’ perception.

A remarkable study focused on The Malayan trilogy by Yahya, (2003) Resisting colonial discourse that describes Burgess’s works asset “in the twilight of colonial rule” (p. 79). Despite showing differences in classifying Burgess’ three novels, Yahya has reached an opinion in describing Burgess’s work; The Malayan trilogy is a chiefly significant sample of English literature on Malaya pre-independence state. She adds that Burgess views the Malay society and practices from a European perspective, and; he criticizes their practice of Islam which he represents as wayward where he could see the inconsistency of mixing animistic and Islamic practices; therefore, this leads to his failure of realizing that animalistic beliefs have already become a part of their lives (p. 168).

Similarly, Zinnatullina, and Pobb (2017) study on Burgess’s novel the Long Day Wanes centers on the Occident and Orient relationships. The paper reveals that Burgess departs from the conventional ways the East-common English literature portrays in the first half of the 20th century (p. 623). In the trilogy, the East is depicted mainly as “slowwitted”; and “silly.” Besides, the authors concluded that burgess does not go beyond the Western system of thinking and estimation.

1.3 Discussion and analysis
The modes of representation of the colonized people based on the colonial ideology are to highlight and exaggerate their weakness, oddities, and shortcoming to propose their inferiority. Most often, it is a fabricated construct as attested by Said’s Orientalism (1978). Colonial Ideology posits the notion that the colonized peoples (Orientals) are to be civilized and made to conform to the perceived higher moral standards upheld in the West. It comes as no surprise that Burgess’s Beds in the East has similar negative representations of Malaysians in all their “Savagery” and “Evilness” to justify continued colonial occupation for the need to “civilize the savages” who are unsuitable, unworthy misfits for self-rule.

Burgess’s negative stereotypical representations of a multi-racial society are very apparent. There is a deliberate denigration of identities with a focus on oddities in physical features, color, speech, mannerisms, lifestyle, and values. The manners of representation in Beds in the East incorporate all aspects of the novel’s structure. It includes people or the characters featuring in the narrative, relationships, issues and concerns, setting/tone, style of writing gaps, omissions, silences, binary divisions, and subtle suggestions of new-colonialism. Burgess’s character negative depiction of Syed Omar serves as a typical example of how he epitomizes the Malays, the future rulers after independence; he seems to suggest the ineligibility and unpreparedness of the Malays undertake leadership after independence. The first chapter opens with a cynical reference to Syed Omar lying between his two wives “lay walled in by brown female flesh” (p. 379). This suggests the legality of bigamy in Islam and the easy-going life-
style indolence of Malay people, “Syed Omar did little more than sleep (p. 379). Moreover, the narrators of Syed Omar depicted him in such a way to be possessed of savage, violent nature, given to violent fits of anger, vindictive, belligerent, one who incites race hatred using abusive language. His quarrel with Maniam, whom he feels has wronged, is blown out of proportion into a racial issue where he is made to appear as an unappeased aggressor. His unexpected speech of retaliation at Maniam’s farewell party smacks of racism:

“I know his race, and I know him. I know his methods, and I know his method, and I know the methods of his race. I warn you, especially you Malays, that you have enemies in your midst, and this Maniam is one of them. The Jaffna Tamils will try to grind you in the dirt…. they have no love for Malaya but only for themselves. They are a lot of bastards” (p. 382).

The unforgiven nature of Syed Omar is presented in the manner he hounds Maniam despite Crabbe’s advice and in his persistence to wreak vengeance on him. “Where is the bastard? The Tamil bastard, Maniam the one who has tried to have me kicked out … I promise you I’ll get him (p. 394-395). In the concluding chapter 10, he is shown to be belligerent and violent streak where he physically assaults Maniam, “dived at him, bowled him over. He knelt on Maniam and hit various parts of his face” (p. 359). He is also portrayed as a person who is accustomed to excessive drinking of alcohol, something very unbecoming of a Muslim “Syed Omar loudly ordered a brandy and gin … Syed Omar sat with the four boys and sipped his brandy and ginger ale” (p. 439).

Contrary to the undesirable representation of Syed Omar (Other), it becomes more pronounced when compared to the positive portrayal of Crabbe (Self), the narrator’s clever use of the device of binary opposites to propose the inferiority of the natives and the superiority of the Westerners especially the colonial administrators. Syed Omar’s repetitive use of the word “bastard” about Maniam and Jaffna Tamils in his conversation with Crabbe’s suggests the refinement and coarseness of his speech as contrasted with Crabbe’s improvement. In Crabbe’s persuasive advice to Syed Omar when the latter is bristled up to hound and attack Maniam, Crabbe comes across as a mediator and peacemaker among warring natives. Syed Omar, with his belligerent attitude and violent streak, appears to be a “savage” in contrast. “Oh, look here Omar,” said Crabbe. “Don’t start anything, not today … forget it. Have another drink” (p. 456). Seemingly, the subtle message behind such portrayal is the need for the continued operation of colonialism and colonial administrators like Crabbe, for a country in a state of turmoil just before independence. The Malays as epitomized by Syed Omar, an extremist, or Nik Hassan and Lokman bin Daud, western mimics and moderates, or the young inexperienced chief Education officer, a successor to Crabbe, are all unsuitable and unprepared for self-rule.

The narrator’s representation of the multi-culture races that people relationships that prevail in racial conflict, the hostility between Syed Omar and Maniam, and how it has been exaggerated into a racial conflict. Apparently, from chapter one, it has been carried through to the end of chapter ten, where Maniam gets his final bashing from Syed Omar. A personal feud
is made to escalate into a racial conflict for the apparent reason of showing the country in a state of turmoil, just before the independence.

Other than the Syed Omar-Maniam conflict, representations of different issues and concerns suggest chaos and unrest in the country. The White are depicted as a savior, for example, the strike at the Anglo Chinese School where Crabbe is summoned to intervene, the Malay uprising as a result of Syed Hassan’s foolish escapade, another case, the Communist insurgency the murder of the head Master at Durian Estate School where again Crabbe is assigned to intervene. The portrayal of all these disturbing incidents is to project an image of turmoil in the country just before independence and the need for White Crabbe as a savior to justify continual colonial administration. Moreover, Crabbe is shown to take on the role of a transmitter of “values,” making a conscious effort to promote inter-racial solidarity through the neutral ground of culture and music.

Burgess, as a colonial writer, depicted the colonial style of writing, with gaps, omissions, and silences, which are other ways of perpetuating colonial ideology. Non-Whites are noticeable in their absence or, when present as marginalized, ridiculed; for instance, the rise of nationalism before Merdeka has been downplayed. There is a little sign in the analyzed text Bed in the East of any large scale organized Malay movement expressing anti-British sentiments or any systematic agenda to pose any serious threat to the British administration. Burgess has intentionally disregarded the facts in the history of Malay nationalists as a potent force. Also, there is a superficial glossing over of significant events like Merdeka, which is only briefly reported “In a shower of rain the tape to a shining-new free land was cut, the key of authority handed over. And the full-throated cries of Merdeka” (p. 565). Even the Malay word for independence (Merdeka) loses its meaning in its association with Marxism, synonymous with communism. Such a reductionist portrayal of a significant event like Merdeka, which signifies the ousting of the colonialists, it employed in colonial ideology. Burgess has also severely dealt with the colonial policy of divide and rule as the real cause of racial friction. Though there are shreds of evidence of such a plan in the text, it is not been treated as a weakness in the administration. The system isolated the Malays and confined them to rural areas. This is the genesis of the general resentment felt by the Malays against the British. The divide-and-rule policy is represented as being endorsed by the other races “If only people would get on with their work… the Malays in the kampongs… the Indians in their profession and the Chinese in trade…. I think all the people would be quite happy together” (p. 408). But the result is the complicated relationships between the white administrators and the indigenous population. Administrators and residents at local outposts usually represented the executive branch of the colonial government. Unfortunately, they were often appointed to the office without any deep consideration of their skills or abilities.

Such gaps, omissions, silences, and justification serve well in the perpetuation of colonial ideology. Even after independence, there are representations of neocolonialism with suggestions of the need for Western expertise for a long time to come. We get intimations of this when Haynes mentions a list of international organizations that are and will be actively involved in
Malaya. In Crabbe’s conversation with Costard, the latter speaks delightedly about his involvement in the estate:

> It’s only in the estates now that the old ideas can be presented. I’m the father of these people. They can look up to me, bring me their troubles, and let me participate in their joys (p. 558).

The above quotation reveals how the white hero perpetuates the colonial ideology of power and superiority.

Said, (1978) viewed this contrast between the West and the East (the Orient) as the result of 19th-century Western cultural hegemony:

> The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences. […] The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other (p. 329).

On the contrary, Burgess did not try to portray the “White Man” as an oppressor standing above the native population, or as an absolute ruler, who believed that the actual color of his skin predestined him for the task. For comparison, Said, (1978) describes Rudyard Kipling’s portrayal of the White man as:

> As he appears in several poems, in novels like Kim, and in too many catchphrases to be an ironic fiction, Kipling’s White Man, as an idea, a persona, a style of being, seems to have served many Britishers while they were abroad. The actual colour of their skin set them off dramatically and reassuringly from the sea of natives, but for the Britisher who circulated amongst Indians, Africans, or Arabs there was also the certain knowledge that he belonged to, and could draw upon the empirical and spiritual reserves of, a long tradition of execute responsibility towards the coloured races. […] Behind the White Man’s mask of admirable leadership there is always the express willingness to use force, to kill and to be killed (p. 336).

These stereotypical representations continued and can still be seen today and present an incomplete, subjective, and, in certain instances, the unrealistic or fabricated notion of reality.

Burgess’s portrayal of the white colonizers is not any kind of a generalizing view, which places them into a specific, fixed role. Even though it is possible to find numerous examples of selfish, crude, or arrogant behavior, these examples are associated with individual characters; and they do not have any global implications. Intimately, the same strategy applies to the native population as well. Burgess did not attempt to describe them only as universal sufferers of the
European colonial power or as defenseless dolls in the hands of colonizers. Nor did he try to idealize them in any way, contributing to the 18th-century notion of the Noble savage.

1.4 Conclusion
It is being concluded that colonial experience is the central subject of the Beds in the East, which is written from the colonialist’s perspective as the author reinforces the dominant positions of Western cultures and attitudes. The narrator creates the colonizers’ positive images were part of an extremely sophisticated process of validating the imperial role, which was justified by theories of racial and cultural White supremacy. Burgess applauded the White heroes’ characters, on the other hand, providing an inaccurate portrayal of the native people and lands. Thus, whites determined how colonized Natives are represented.

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