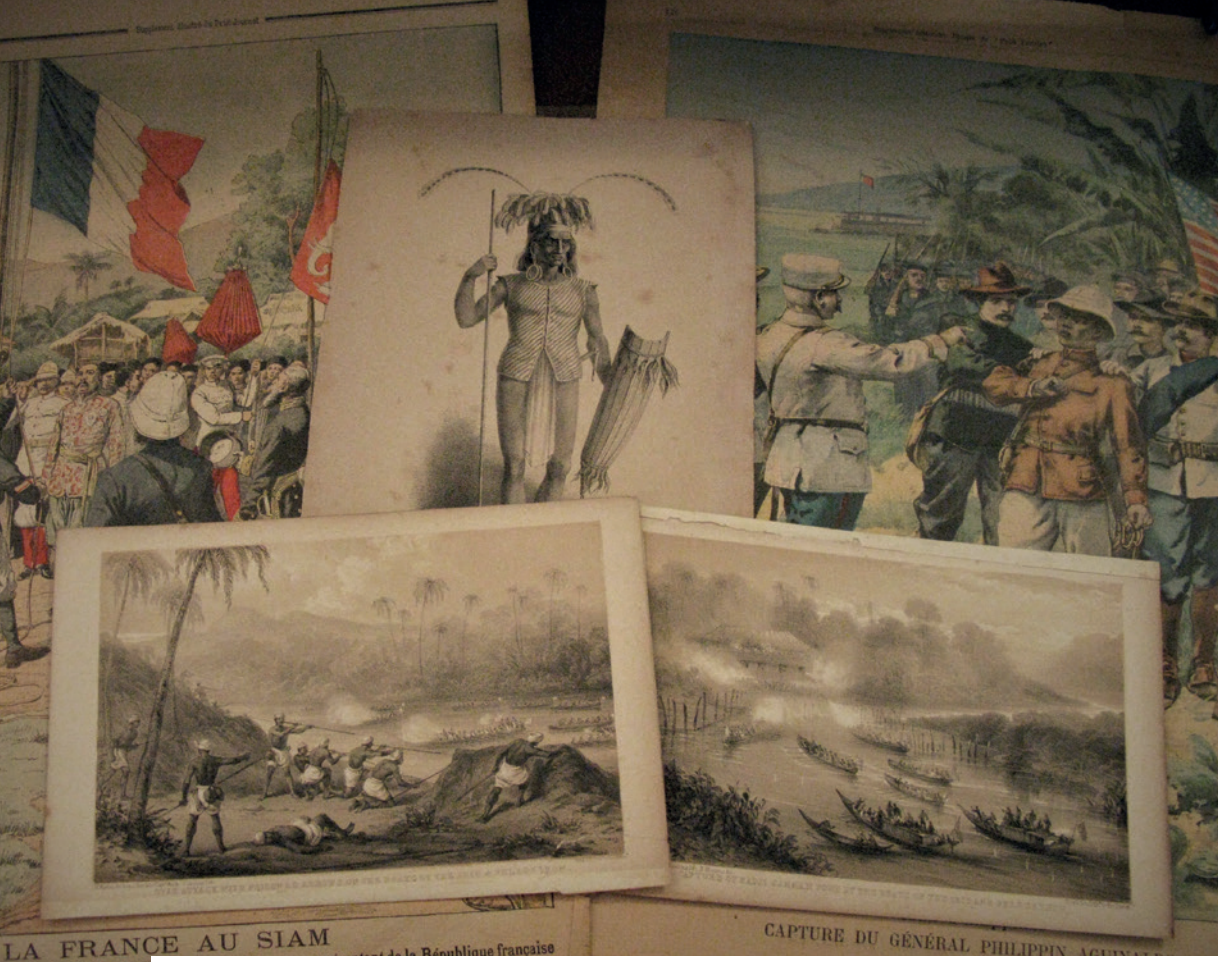

Edited by Farish A. Noor and Peter Carey

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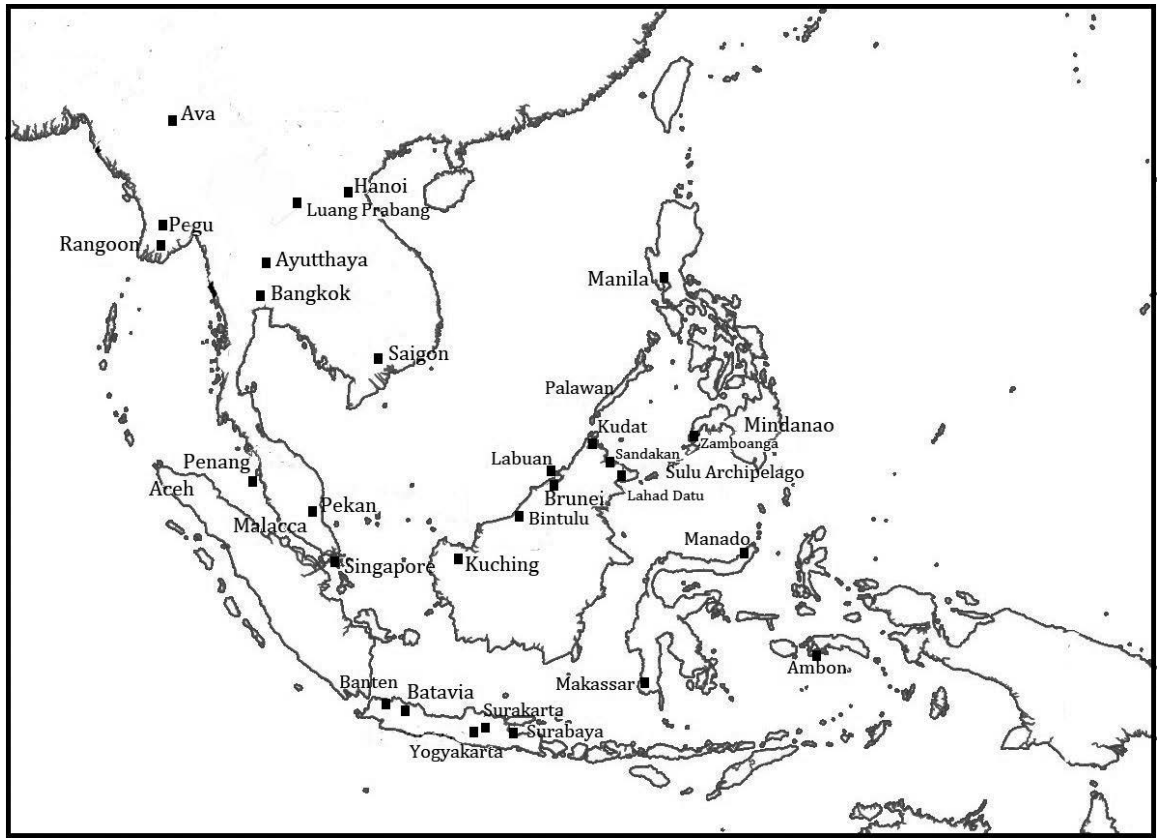

Introduction

Why Race Mattered: Racial Difference, Racialized Colonial Capitalism and the Racialized Wars of Nineteenth-Century Colonial Southeast Asia

Farish A. Noor and Peter Carey

Abstract
This collection of essays revisits the colonial wars that were fought across Southeast Asia throughout the nineteenth century and studies them through the lenses of racial difference as it was understood at the time. The authors have chosen to bring to the fore the manner in which understandings of racial identity and difference were instrumental in the way in which the colonial powers viewed their local adversaries, and argue that the wars that were fought during that century need to be understood as race wars as well. In the course of these conflicts – some small and some on a much larger scale – essentialised and reductive racial identities were also being constructed; and in some instances borrowed and internalised by the native Southeast Asian communities as well.

Keywords: racial difference, race war, colonialism, Southeast Asia

The image of hatred and of the other, the foreigner is neither the romantic victim of our clannish indolence nor the intruder responsible for all the ills of the polis. […] Strangely, the foreigner lives within us, he is the hidden face of our identity.[1]
– Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*

Like Ovid, *I'll have no last words*. This is what it means to die among barbarians. *Bar bar bar* was how the Greeks heard our speech – sheep, beasts – and so we became *barbarians*. We make them reveal the brutes they are, Aleph, by the things we make them name.
– Solmaz Sharif, *Persian Letters*

1 Kristeva 1991: 1.

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Blood *Is* Thicker: Racial Difference and the Colonial Wars of Nineteenth-Century Southeast Asia

Night is here but the barbarians have not come.
And some people arrived from the borders,
and said that there are no longer any barbarians.
And now what shall become of us without any barbarians?
Those people were some kind of solution.
– Constantine P. Cavafy, 'Waiting for the Barbarians'

Wars and invasions were nothing new to the region that is now known as Southeast Asia. As far back as the eleventh and twelfth centuries several kingdoms of Southeast Asia had come under attack by successive rulers of the South Indian Tamil Chola Empire – notably during the reigns of Rajendra Chola I (r. 1014-1044), Virarajendra Chola (r. 1063-1070) and Kulothunga Chola I (r. 1070-1122) – and as a consequence of these incursions the Sumatran kingdom of Srivijaya and the kingdom of Kadaram (present-day Kedah) in the Malay Peninsula were subsequently weakened. In 1293 Kublai Khan sent a large expedition against the Javanese kingdom of Singhasari, though the venture ended in failure and proved to be the last overseas expedition sent by the khan, while in its wake the thalassocratic kingdom of Mahapahit would emerge as the dominant power in Java. Southeast Asia's kingdoms would be at war with one another and on the defensive against external interventions by stronger powers from outside the region from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries; and when the Portuguese and Spanish arrived they would be among many other powers vying for dominance in the region – though the Portuguese would learn that the kingdoms of Southeast Asia were not so easily defeated, as in the case of the kingdom of Malacca, which put up a stiff fight when Alfonso de Albuquerque's force of 1,200 men tried to overwhelm the port city in 1511.[2]

Wars would continue in and across Southeast Asia even after the arrival of the first Europeans, for several Southeast Asian kingdoms were locked in

2 According to the records kept by the son of Alfonso de Albuquerque (1453-1515), Alfonso the Younger (Bras de Albuquerque, 1500-1580), the Malaccans had developed to become a formidable power by the early sixteenth century. He noted that after the bombardment of Malacca the Portuguese had captured 3,000 pieces of artillery, out of an estimated total of 8,000 which the Malaccans had. (Alfonso de Albuquerque the Younger 1995: 127). See Alfonso de Albuquerque the Younger, *Commentários do Grande Alfonso de Albuquerque* (1576), chaps 22-28 in Alfonso de Albuquerque the Younger 1995.

a prolonged struggle for supremacy over their rivals: The kingdom of Aceh during the time of Sultan Iskandar Muda (r. 1607-1636) fought not only the Portuguese, who were then installed in Malacca (1629), but also other native Southeast Asian powers including Deli (1612), Johor (1613), Pahang (1617) and Kedah (1619-1620). The contestation between the Burmese and the kingdom of Ayutthaya culminated in the invasion of the latter's territory in 1766-1767 and led to the ruinous destruction of Ayutthaya (in 1767), whose libraries and palaces were burned to the ground. The Burmese in turn were forced to repair to their own territory soon after their victory as a result of renewed conflict with China.

Just beyond the fluid borders of Southeast Asia British and French interests could be seen at work as the European powers struggled to gain a foothold in South and Southeast Asia. A decade before Ayutthaya was put to the torch by the Burmese, the British East India Company – through the workings of Robert Clive (1725-1774) – would score a decisive victory against the Nawab of Bengal Siraj-ud Daulah (1733-1757) and his French allies at the Battle of Palashi (1757). Britain's campaign in Bengal took place in the middle of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) in Europe, qualifying the continental war as perhaps the first world war. But it is also interesting to note that Britain and France – while trying hard to secure a presence in the Indian subcontinent – were also working closely with local Bengali leaders like Siraj-ud Daulah and Syed Mir Jafar Ali Khan Bahadur (1691-1765), who would later defect to the British side. Meanwhile in Java, the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, VOC) had capitalized on the Third Javanese War of Succession of 1746-1757 between the last Mataram ruler, Pakubuwono II (r. 1726-1749), and his teenage son, Pakubuwono III (r. 1749-1788), on one side, and the two rebellious princes, Raden Mas Said (later Mangkunegoro I, r. 1757-1795) and Mangkubumi (r. 1749-1792), on the other. This led to the division (on 13 February 1755) of the kingdom of Mataram into the two kingdoms of Surakarta and Jogjakarta (Yogyakarta), with the semi-autonomous Mangkunegaran principality in Surakarta being added on 17 March 1757 as a fief for Said/Mangkunegoro.

What is interesting about these conflicts that took place between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries is that they reveal several aspects of Southeast Asia's complexity to the modern reader. During the initial clashes between the first Europeans and Southeast Asians, the former did not enjoy the advantage of superior weaponry and technology that they would have later in the nineteenth century, as made clear in the writings of Alfonso de Albuquerque the Younger, who noted that the guns of Malacca were as

good as the guns of early-sixteenth-century Germany.[3] The British, French, Dutch and other Europeans were willing to form strategic alliances with their South and Southeast Asian counterparts, as the racial distinctions that would grow more pronounced in the nineteenth century were not as prevalent then. This relaxed attitude towards ethnic difference can also be seen in how the British, Dutch and Spanish in Asia were not disinclined to marry into local communities and create mestizo populations, such as the Anglo-Indians of Bengal, the Indo-Europeans of Java or the Spanish mestizos of the Philippines. Much of this was set to change in the nineteenth century as European attitudes towards Asians and Africans would alter with the rise of scientific racism and theories of racial-biological difference.

The nineteenth century witnessed the spread of Western influence over almost the whole of Southeast Asia. With very few exceptions like Siam and Sulu, most of the independent kingdoms and states of the region came under some form of colonial rule in this period. Though much has been written about the two World Wars of the subsequent century, many tend to overlook the fact that the nineteenth century was the most significant for the polities and nations of Southeast Asia. It was then that the region was eviscerated by a series of violent colonial wars – as can be seen in the chronology at the end of this book. These incurred not only a huge cost in life and property, but also led almost everywhere to the extinction of local sovereignties. A cursory overview of Southeast Asian history reveals a catalogue of conflicts involving European imperial powers in a sustained series of wars which stretched in a bloody arc from the first truly global conflict engendered by the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792-1815), when Java became a battleground, through the Java War (1825-1830) and the near contemporaneous First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826) to the 'War on Piracy' fought off the coast of Borneo in the 1840s, which reduced Brunei to a British protectorate in all but name. After the mid-century celebration of Britain's industrial nation status at the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition, the arc of conflict stretched through the Second and Third Anglo-Burmese Wars (1852-1853, 1885), the French invasion of Cochinchina (1858), the Franco-Siamese War of 1893, and the bloody coda of the Philippine-American War of 1899-1902.

The 'rush for empire', engendered by the energies unleashed by Europe's twin industrial and political revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, was a truly global phenomenon. It extended from Africa to Asia, and speed was its essence. As Darwin has noted, 'there was

3 Ibid.: 127.

almost no time for native peoples to reorganize politically, redeploy socially, form wider alliances or develop more effective military tactics. This is why the rushes were so important.[4] And this rush for empire was facilitated by Europe's growing economic and technological prowess. These in turn translated into huge capital surpluses and an increasingly powerful arsenal of weaponry which could be deployed throughout the globe. Targeted at the Asian 'Others', their combined firepower proved ineluctable. Within a brief century nearly all Asia would come under their control, as Darwin reminds us:

> Greater Europe's expansion into Afro-Asian lands too remote or resistant in earlier times seemed a tribute to its scientific and technological primacy. The 'knowledge gap' between Europeans and others looked wider, not narrower, by the end of the [nineteenth] century. Parts of Europe were entering the second industrial revolution of electricity and chemicals before the non-Western world had [even] exploited coal and steam.[5]

Caught by thunderclap surprise, the nations of Southeast Asia were outrun by the European Prometheus. Unable to modernize in time, they could not keep pace with the advances of Western science and technology. By the mid-nineteenth century some of the Southeast Asian powers were able to develop or acquire weapons, machinery and war matériel on a par with their European adversaries, but the loss of territories and trading networks essential for their economic survival undermined their capacity. Briefly put, they could not develop their own industrial power bases, and consequently lost the arms race against the West. By the time of the Second Anglo-Burmese War of 1852-1853, Burma possessed European-style vessels to defend itself against the might of the British Navy, but the loss of its coastline after Britain's initial 1826 annexations meant that it had lost its key ports. These losses in turn severely depleted the kingdom's commercial assets. But even if they had retained these coastal regions, there is a question as to whether the acquisition of naval assets alone would have tipped the scale in the Burmese favour. Much later, the far better resourced Qing government of China (1636-1912) would acquire state-of-the-art naval vessels to prepare for their military showdown with the Japanese. But they proved useless in the face of the professionally trained and modernized Japanese fleet during the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) when Qing naval commanders were found to

4 Darwin 2008: 256.
5 Ibid.: 298.

be wholly incompetent at engaging their ironclads in seaborne encounters with their British-trained adversary. The acquisition of technology alone without the mental capacity to understand and deploy this technology in battlefield situations was an exercise in delusion.

Meanwhile, in Southeast Asia proper the nineteenth century was the era when the region was gradually being colonized, mapped and defined for posterity with Southeast Asians playing little part in this process. The rulers of the region would eventually be deposed or bypassed altogether – as in the case of several rulers in the Malay kingdoms whose power was compromised by the colonial Resident system – and by the last quarter of the nineteenth century colonial intervention would extend all the way to places like Aceh at the northernmost tip of Sumatra. In due course those who came under colonial rule (both direct and indirect) like ancien régime (pre-1789) French taxpayers were treated as all but irrelevant – 'on parle de vous, chez vous, sans vous' ('we speak about you, in your house, without you'), as the witty French philosopher critical of monarchical despotism, Voltaire (1694-1778), would put it. Half a world away in Southeast Asia, the subjects of the new colonial states were deemed an irrelevance as the European colonial powers began dividing up their respective territories. How could it be otherwise? This was a century where the power and economic differentials between East and West would grow, an era when the communities of Southeast Asian were no longer able to match the military capabilities of the Western world. It was a century when rifled muskets, machine guns and Congreve rockets – first used in Southeast Asia during the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826) – would be deployed against blowpipes and *parangs*, and when *sampans* and *prahus* confronted armoured gunboats.

The essays contained in this book revisit the colonial wars of nineteenth-century Southeast Asia. But they do not simply describe those wars from a military history perspective. Accounts of the conquest and colonization of Southeast Asia are plentiful. They date back to the nineteenth century itself and gave rise to a specific European literary heritage which spawned the adventure novels of Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) and G.A. Henty (1832-1902). As Southeast Asia came under the sword those who wielded it were themselves engaged in the process of discursively re-presenting the history that they were themselves shaping. In the historian Bartlett's words, 'all conquest literature seeks to explain to the conquerors "why we are here"'.[6] Such works range from the dry-as-dust *History of the Indian Archipelago* (1820), penned by John Crawfurd (1783-1868), to grand compilations with nary a hint of

6 Bartlett 1993: 96.

violence, like Raffles's *History of Java* (1817), to the more sanguinary accounts of the battles of colonial conquest such as Major John James Snodgrass's (1796-1841) *Narrative of the Burmese War* (1827). Written as they were by men who were themselves at the vanguard of empire-building, the respective subject-positions of the authors themselves went unmentioned. That these books were written by Westerners to give a Western account of a Western conquest for the benefit of a Western readership often meant that the racial identity of the authors (and their intended readers) was taken for granted or left unmentioned. In this echo chamber, the question of race and racial difference was conspicuously omitted. This omission is the inspiration for the current work.

This book brings together a number of essays that place race and racial difference at the centre of individual studies of the nineteenth-century colonial wars in Southeast Asia. Together they look at how essentialized and reductive were the understandings of racial difference. Often couched in the pseudo-scientific theories in vogue in late-nineteenth-century Europe, they were used to explain, rationalize and justify the wars of conquest which took place in Southeast Asia. They were also used to excuse or at least gloss over the excessive use of violence and employment of deadly weaponry.

Our contention in the present volume is that no discussion of the colonial wars of nineteenth-century Southeast Asia can begin without due reference to the politics of race and racial difference. Theories of racial difference and white supremacy were at the very heart of the empire-building process in the nineteenth century. They guided perceptions and policies as well as tactics, and they also predicted outcomes. Certainly, wars were fought all over the world during the nineteenth century: European powers engaged in their own major conflicts on the continent of Europe, and two of these – the Revolutionary Wars (1792-1799) and the Napoleonic Wars (1799-1802, 1803-1814, 1815), as mentioned earlier, had major global ramifications not least in Java. Others such as the Crimean War (1853-1856) together with the Austro-Prussian (1866) and Franco-Prussian Wars (1870-1871) were more restricted in scope to continental Europe and Turkey. But what made the colonial wars of Southeast Asia different was not only their ferocity, but the underlying belief that these were 'wars of civilization'. The adversarial Other was not an equal to the Western colonizer but an inferior both racially and culturally. The colonial wars of nineteenth-century Southeast Asia were thus not simply wars between rival powers, but also *race* wars. They were conceived, rationalized, fought or justified at times on the basis of racial ideas and understandings.

Such racial differences were, in the view of most participants in the nineteenth-century colonial project, essentialist and irreconcilable. It was not so much racism which had changed but the uses to which it was put. Indeed, the institutionalization of racism was permitted and fostered by the new nation states of nineteenth-century Europe. Class and racial distinctions were now given legal sanction by dividing populations into active and passive citizens, namely those who had the right to vote, based on property rights, and those who did not. In addition, there was a separate category of 'non-citizens', which comprised Jews, non-whites and foreigners. The French Revolution played a role here, quickening debates about whether free men of colour (descendants of freeborn Africans and Europeans) – the *gens de couleur libres* – should have full French citizenship. Granted by the French National Assembly on 15 May 1791, this concession soon rebounded, sparking a reaction from the poor whites (*petits blancs*) in the West Indies with both parties appealing to the local slave communities to support their cause. In February 1794, the National Convention – the French Republic's legislature under the radical leadership of Maximilien Robespierre (1758-1794) and the Jacobins – even voted for the abolition of slavery in France and its colonies. But less than a decade later this legislation had been rescinded by Napoleon as First Consul (1799-1804). His attempt to retain the loyalty of the lucrative sugar-producing islands of the French West Indies (Guadeloupe, Martinique and Saint-Domingue) by restoring the institution of slavery, backfired when a successful slave rebellion in Saint-Domingue (Hispaniola) resulted in the establishment of the first independent slave Republic of Haiti (1 January 1804), only recognized by France in 1825.

While Europeans may have been at war with each other, they were also at war with the rest of the world. However, leaving aside various specific minority groups like the European Jews, intra-European wars – in the nineteenth century at least – were not understood and represented on the same terms as Europe's colonial wars abroad. Europeans may have competed against each other in the race for global dominance, and the different nations of Western Europe certainly cultivated the belief that each of them possessed a cultural-ethnic identity that was superior to their continental rivals, but whatever intra-European animosity they had would be relegated to the background when they encountered the non-European Other abroad. How and why the diverse peoples of Southeast Asian were seen and cast as *races apart* is one of the underlying themes of this book. The volume's individual chapters seek to account for how the different communities of Southeast Asian were perceived, understood and discursively framed through the linked processes of mapping, categorization and reduction to essentialized

tropes and stereotypes, which happened before, during and after the bloody colonial wars. This work is therefore not simply a recounting of the colonial conflicts within Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century. It is rather a study of how racial difference was introduced and later reproduced via the mechanisms and modalities of colonial war making and identity framing.

When Racism Became a Science: Scientific Racism and Racialized Colonial Capitalism in the Nineteenth Century

> The existence of the disabled native is required for
> the next lie and the next and the next.[7]
> – Homi Bhabha, *Articulating the Archaic: Cultural*
> *Difference and Colonial Nonsense*

That societies tend to develop their own collective understanding of other societies and cultures is obvious. It is not an exceptional phenomenon as any society is bound to have its own understandings of its constitutive Other. At the same time, that Other can be framed in a myriad of ways. What is unique to the nineteenth century, however, is that the growing power and economic differentials between East and West soon weighted the balance heavily in the West's favour. As the nineteenth century progressed so did the race for empire. The attendant technologies and disciplines which cleared the path to empire followed closely in its wake. Among the most salient was the pseudo-scientific discipline later known as 'scientific racism'. This so-called 'science of race' was propagated by a host of scholars throughout the Western world. It was also instrumentalized by policymakers, colonial capitalists and colony builders across much of Asia and Africa. Stakeholders and benefactors of the slave trade in antebellum America were amongst its strongest supporters.

Long before colonial gunboats sailed up the creeks and rivers of Southeast Asia, the framing of Southeast Asia as the dialectical constitutive Other to the Western world was already in place. Indeed, historians like Bartlett have argued that such praxes of exclusion and Othering can be dated back to medieval Europe.[8] In Bartlett's view, they were linked to the rise of the kingdoms and nations which dominated the western extremity of the Eurasian land mass in the late medieval period (1200-1500). Centuries before

7 Bhabha 1994: 183.
8 Bartlett 1993.

Southeast Asians were seen and cast as lazy, backward and violent such descriptions were already being used by Europeans against their own. In Bartlett's words:

> The images of exclusion and otherness available to those who formed and expressed opinions in twelfth-century western Europe included not only the dichotomy Christian/non-Christian but also that of civilized/barbarian, and the two polarities were often mutually reinforcing. The Welsh were [depicted as] 'rude and untamed', [...] the Ruthenians [...] were associated with other 'primitive Slavs' and 'wild peoples' of 'uncivilized barbarism'.[9]

The arrival of the Europeans in nineteenth-century Southeast Asia saw seasoned colonizers landing in new pastures. Tried and tested strategies of domination and exclusion were now deployed again, only this time against an Other that was strikingly different from the 'wild peoples' of the Western European periphery: 'The mental habits and institutions of [later] European racism and colonialism were born in the medieval world. [...] The European Christians who sailed to the coasts of the Americas, Asia and Africa came from a society that was already a colonizing society.'[10]

White has noted how such attitudes, when re-enacted in the context of Africa and Asia, contributed to a paradox: the impulse both to defeat and 'save' the non-Western Other. At the same time, it foregrounded as its foundational premise the idea that anything that the West did was justifiable and necessary. This was rooted in the belief that a specifically European 'type of humanity' was the only one that mattered:

> From the Renaissance to the end of the eighteenth century, Europeans tended to fetishize the native peoples with whom they came into contact by viewing them simultaneously as monstrous forms of humanity and as quintessential objects of desire. Whence the alternative impulse to exterminate and to redeem native peoples. But even more basic in the European consciousness of this time was the tendency to fetishize the European type of humanity as the sole form that humanity in general could take.[11]

9 Ibid.: 23.
10 Ibid.: 313-314.
11 White 1978: 194-195.

It was against this backdrop of exclusion and Othering that Europe's nineteenth-century encounters with Southeast Asians were framed. Here it has to be noted that Europeans had been in South, East and Southeast Asia since the sixteenth century, and during that earlier period of prolonged contact and commercial exchange had understood that they were but one community among many. As Chaudhuri has shown, the world of the Indian Ocean was, from the rise of Islam to the eighteenth century, a complex tapestry of ethnic, linguistic and religious groups/communities that straddled the expanse of a poly-centred Asian continent.[12] The various communities of Asia were already internally differentiated, and Europeans came to learn of the complicated modes of ethnic and subethnic classification employed by the Mughals, Manchus, Japanese and so on. The change that took place in the nineteenth century occurred when the earlier (and perhaps more respectful) understanding of difference was replaced by a more hierarchical worldview predicated on a very Western understanding of racial difference. The notion that the human race was not a singular one, but rather divided into separate races had a venerable pedigree. During the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, it was also supported by the theory of polygenesis backed by influential thinkers like Voltaire. But the polygenetic theory underwent a rapid evolution in the nineteenth century when European and American power was at its zenith. At this time the transition from slave-based economies to wage labour was in process and a form of hybridity developed as the new scientific racism in the nineteenth century came to be articulated by Western scholars, who not only supported the continued practice of slavery, but also encouraged the acquisition of foreign territories to serve the needs of colonial capitalism.

The militarized East India Companies of Western Europe were at the forefront of this colonial capitalist project. Led by Company men like John Crawfurd and Stamford Raffles, colony building and wealth accumulation went hand-in-hand. A firm believer in the theory of polygenesis, Crawfurd was convinced that Asians and Europeans were in fact separate 'races'. He also rejected outright Darwin's idea of evolution and castigated *The Origin of Species* as little more than a 'collection of facts'.[13] Close to the end of his life in the late 1860s, he reiterated his belief in racial hierarchies in his essay 'On the Physical and Mental Characteristics of the European and Asiatic Races of Man'.[14] Insisting that Asians could never develop to the same

12 Chaudhuri 1990.
13 Knapman 2017: 233.
14 Crawfurd 1867.

advanced and civilized level as Westerners, Crawfurd derided Asian art and music as 'miserable' and 'inferior'.[15] In his earlier writings on Southeast Asia, Burma, and Siam and Cochinchina,[16] Crawfurd had mapped the whole of Southeast Asia in racialized terms. Drawing a racial map of the region as a bioscape, he divided Southeast Asia into five distinct zones inhabited by Southeast Asians who were ranked from the 'almost civilized' to those who were thought to be downright 'savage and primitive'. Such ideas were echoed in Continental Europe by men like Georges Cuvier (1769-1832) and Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882), who likewise regarded the human race not as a singular species but rather as different races.

Across the Atlantic in the United States men like the Philadelphia-born physician, Samuel George Morton (1799-1851), and the slave-owning doctor, Josiah C. Nott (1804-1873), sought support in the Old Testament. They claimed that biblical accounts of Adam referred only to Caucasians. Samuel Morton's influence on the development of the American school of ethnography and scientific racism was considerable. His creationist account of human development rejected Darwinian evolution theory. This in turn lent support to the claims of men like Nott who argued that slavery could be justified on both religious and scientific grounds. 'Inferior' races, in Nott's view, would be better able to achieve their full potential in a condition of servitude.[17] In universities like Harvard, the Swiss-American biologist, Louis Agassiz (1807-1873), forwarded the theory of racial difference, which Agassiz and his fellow academicians had drawn from American scientific racism. This in turn could be traced back to Morton, who had argued that the African and Asiatic 'races' were distinct from the white race to which they belonged, an idea that had considerable support in the European colonies in Southeast Asia.[18]

Feeble though these arguments may seem to the contemporary reader today, scientific racism was deemed a respectable 'science' during its time, and a useful one as well. As an instrumental fiction that helped give a gloss of respectability to the colonial enterprise such 'scientific' theories of racial difference – and, in particular, how it ranked the various races of humankind according to a hierarchy that placed superior races at the top and inferior races at the bottom – helped justify the acquisition of territories abroad on the grounds of a mission to civilize humanity and suppress the

15 Siew 2018: 224-225, 226.
16 Crawfurd 1820, 1829, 1830.
17 Horsman 1987.
18 Fredrickson 1972.

primitive and primordial. If native communities in Asia and Africa were being mowed down by volleys of rifle fire and machine guns, blasted with rockets and gunboats, it was deemed necessary and expedient – as the same rules of civilized combat did not apply to those deemed uncivilized and who fought back in an unconventional, asymmetrical manner. (Though again it ought to be remembered that this distinction was rather late in coming, and that up to the Napoleonic wars in Europe guerilla tactics and attacks on non-military targets had also occurred, especially during the Peninsula campaign [1807-1814] and Napoleon's ill-fated ventures in Egypt [1798-1801] and Russia [1812].) Theories of racial difference were thus not merely academic and speculative accoutrements for the Western elite of the nineteenth century: it was at the heart of empire building and also a catalyst for further exploration, innovation and colonization. Race was never an afterthought.

Why Race Matters: The Racialized Conflicts of Nineteenth-Century Southeast Asia and Their Legacies, Then and Now

> To deny the importance of colonialism and imperialism is to ignore the history of the third world, and this is theoretically and politically unacceptable.[19]
> – Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method*

The wars waged in and across Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century were numerous and varied. At times they were also fought between the Southeast Asian polities themselves. The kingdoms of Siam and Burma, for example, were at war for much of this century. This was a time when Siam became diplomatically allied to Britain, thus strengthening the hand of the Chakri court as Britain completed its annexation of Burmese territory in the Second and Third Anglo-Burmese Wars (1852-1853, 1885). From all-out invasions to gunboat actions – sometimes referred to as 'policing actions/exercises' – the colonial wars also involved native levies and troops from other parts of Southeast Asia and beyond. This was the case with Britain's invasion and occupation of Java from 1811 to 1816, which relied on Bengal and Madras sepoys from the Indian subcontinent courtesy of the British East India Company. In the Dutch East Indies a similar mindset was at work as Dutch colonial administrators designated certain native 'races' – such as the Ambonese and Manadonese – as being more 'martial' and thus suited

19 Chen 2010: 22.

for military service, and were subsequently co-opted into the Dutch colonial army (it helped that many of these troops from the eastern archipelago were from Christian communities).

As a result of these conflicts Southeast Asian society was profoundly altered. This happened on many levels and in different ways and registers. The trope of the belligerent native Other, so commonly used as a means to justify colonial military actions, would later become part of the narrative of native identity and racial difference. Different modes of warfare – employed by Westerners and Southeast Asians alike – would eventually be compared and ranked. A new pecking order of 'martial races' came into being with native modes of military organization and resistance being studied in detail. They would later be classified and ranked according to a hierarchy in which 'superior' and 'inferior' societies and cultures were now differentiated. Native understandings of territoriality – in particular, the attachment to the sea and rivers as part of the landscape and the local understanding of homeland – would eventually be superseded by Eurocentric Westphalian understandings of land-space and 'national' political territory. But the colonial wars did not merely disrupt the political and economic life of Southeast Asians; they also changed the way in which Southeast Asians saw the world. This profoundly altered their own self-perceptions. This can perhaps be seen most clearly in Java, where a deeply militarized pre-colonial society and culture was transformed into a bureaucratic state (*beambtenstaat*) following the Dutch victory in the Java War (1825-1830). Just how these changes came about, and the consequences of the changes that followed, are the themes taken up by the authors of this book.

In the first chapter Peter Carey looks at the brutal shift from the Javanese 'old order' to the new 'high colonial' period (1816-1942) in the seventeen years from the coming of Marshal Herman Willem Daendels (1808-1811) to the Java War (1825-1830). In this brief period Javanese society was turned on its head. New concepts of honour, status, patriarchy and racial superiority were introduced from a Europe transformed by the twin industrial and political revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This led to the marginalization of hitherto empowered elite women and members of the local Islamic communities, both of whom would play a significant role in the Java War. One of the most salient manifestations of this shift was the introduction of military uniforms to demarcate rank and status. Henceforth, service to the colonial state would transcend nobility of birth and spiritual authority. Through outright plunder, despoliation and military violence the indigenous courts of south-central Java were eviscerated. At the same time, a new highway was opened for Western capital through

the lease of royal lands and territorial annexations, while racial tensions were fuelled by the use of Chinese as tollgate keepers (*bandar tol*) and tax farmers. This provoked an anti-Chinese pogrom at the start of the Java War vividly illustrated in the Java War diaries of two Belgians, the first of whom witnessed the outbreak of the war at first hand in Yogyakarta, and the second fought as a mobile column commander. This latter account gives a remarkable insight into the racialized world of the Netherlands East Indies and the ways in which colonial wars were conducted using native auxiliaries (*hulptroepen*) from the 'Outer Islands' (islands outside Java), in particular, Madura, Maluku and Sulawesi (Celebes), each of whom in the view of this Belgian commander had their own qualities as fighting men.

The second chapter shifts our attention from Java to Borneo as Farish A. Noor looks at the discursive construction of the colonial trope of the 'warlike' Dayak that was the result of the so-called 'war on piracy' along the north coast of Borneo. This campaign would eventually lead to the defeat of the kingdom of Brunei and the loss of Sarawak to the forces of James Brooke and the British Navy by 1846. Noor links the development of the trope of the 'primitive warlike Dayak' to the broader image-idea of the 'Bornean pirate', and how such instrumental fictions were used not only to justify Britain's acts of military intervention in that particular theatre of conflict, but to help frame the relationship between Westerners and native communities. Occurring at a time when pseudo-scientific theories of racial difference and racial hierarchies were beginning to gain currency among colonial administrators, such reductive notions of native identity proved to be useful in campaigns such as the 'war on piracy' and even after. Noor looks at how the image of the 'savage Dayak', once established and sedimented, would be put to use again and again not only in Britain's expansion across Borneo but would later be re-used out of context, in instances of lazy journalism or for entertainment value. He argues that the net result of this constant repetition of the reductive trope of the savage Dayak was the creation of a signifier that came to represent more than just an array of different ethnic groups, but also became a symbol of native violence itself. So strong would this association grow over time that the same reductive-Orientalist trope would continue to be repeated even after the end of empire, as the exoticized image of the Dayak as warring headhunter found itself reproduced in tourist advertising campaigns and the popular media.

Yvonne Tan's chapter looks at how the Mat Salleh Rebellion in North Borneo in 1894-1905, led by a *datu* with ties to the Sulu Sultanate, challenged both the British North Borneo Company and the way in which indigenous resistance was conceptualized. This became clear when the Company

established its jurisdiction over North Borneo in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Borrowing heavily from the British East India Company's racial categorization in the Malay Peninsula, the chapter argues that despite the involvement of diverse tribes and communities in the rebellion, there was a clear demarcation of those who were 'in the likeness of a Malay' or 'in the likeness of a Chinese', as well as Muslim or Pagan, coastal or inland, pirates or headhunters. Mat Salleh's followers, who were initially framed as outlawed Bajao and Suluk pirates, quickly defied these rigid labels. Despite the unreliability of the Company's racial logic, the chapter analyses how the Company continued to frame the rebellion through the narrow lens of racial categories. This in turn informed the Company's response to the rebellion, as exemplified by the Company's massacre of Bajaos towards the end of the revolt. Notwithstanding the efforts of Mat Salleh and the people he led, this binary took hold in the postcolonial national rhetoric of there being three dominant races – Malay, Chinese and Indian – while the capacity of the people of North Borneo and their distinctive cultures, customs, identities and histories continues to remain largely unrecognized.

Turning next to mainland Southeast Asia and the Franco-Siamese War of 1893, David M. Malitz's chapter first investigates the history of 'race' in Europe focusing on the development of the idea in France. It shows how despite claiming to be a scientific and thus an unambiguous term, 'race' acquired an increasing number of meanings over the centuries. In the late nineteenth century, 'race' could refer essentially to any group of people ranging from dynasties and small tribes via 'nations' to one of three assumed large global populations differentiated by their skin colour. What did not change was the political nature of the term, legitimizing unequal access to economic resources and power due to birth. The chapter then moves to the French colonial project in Southeast Asia. Here, French colonialists employed Orientalist stereotypes to delegitimize Siamese rule due to its 'Asian' nature while simultaneously differentiating between the Lao and Siamese races. Following the Franco-Siamese War of 1893, consular jurisdiction was extended to residents of the kingdom of Siam who had Lao or Khmer ethnicity in an attempt to undermine the Siamese state. This was problematic for the Siamese rulers as they had indeed traditionally claimed that the Lao of northern and north-eastern Siam were not Thai. They responded to this threat of indirect colonization by introducing a Thai racial and national identity that included the Laos of Siam but excluded the Laos of French Indochina. Embracing racial ideology also meant having to adopt the idea that the Thai belonged to the yellow-skinned Asian or Mongol race. In response to early criticism by an emergent middle class in

the kingdom, the Orientalist stereotypes leveraged in the colonial states against self-rule were also employed in early-twentieth-century Siam to reject demands for political participation. Following the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), however, this line of argument became increasingly weak. Critics embraced an Asian racial identity and pointed to Japan arguing that the status of the empire recognized as an equal by the colonial powers was due to its constitutional regime.

Netusha Naidu's chapter argues that much of the existing literature on the Pahang Civil War between 1891 and 1895 seeks to explain the events from the perspective of the British colonial administration and their fixed conceptions of what constitutes as traditional Malay politics and characteristics. Her chapter looks at the news reports of the time that showcase recurrent themes such as downplaying the situation in Pahang as a 'little' or 'petty' war, the debasement of Malay rebels and the inevitability of a colonial victory. In the chapter she argues that control of print discourse was insufficient to conceal the failures of the colonial administration in Pahang and thus nonviolent strategies that struck at the heart of traditional Malay political values were utilized in an effort to compromise the dignity of the rebels. The chapter also looks at the role of colonial fiction in the remaking of memories of the Pahang Civil War. Through a close reading of Hugh Clifford's *A Prince of Malaya* (1926), Naidu shows how the novel perpetuates myths based upon subjective documentation of events that took place during the rebellion. She argues that despite the British colonial administration's attempt to develop a consistent narrative to protect its growing interests in Pahang, there are arguments for the 'incalculability' and 'hybridity' of Malay figures like Sultan Ahmad and Dato' Bahaman during the Pahang Civil War, which in turn disrupt the attempts to construct and reproduce the colonial trope of the 'lazy native'.

In the next chapter, historian Brian Shott begins with a puzzle long known to scholars of the Philippine-American War (1899-1902), namely, the letters and diaries written by US troops in the conflict. These often show a dramatic change in outlook towards Filipinos in the space of just a few months in 1898-1899. When the United States declared war on Spain and all its territories in 1898 in a jingoistic fury over Spanish atrocities in Cuba, across the world Filipino patriots allied briefly with US troops and together fought Spanish forces around Manila. American soldiers during this time described Filipinos positively, but their diary entries quickly flipped to virulent, race-based abhorrence after the United States annexed the Philippines on 10 December 1898 and the rebels fought their new occupiers in a guerilla war for national self-determination in 1899-1902. Shott asks, how can racial constructions be so powerful and yet so ephemeral? Focusing

on new scholarship on the American West, he emphasizes the multiplicity of racial conceptions that American soldiers, politicians and entrepreneurs carried with them abroad. At the close of the American Civil War (1861-1865), debates about US citizenship for ex-slaves brought into complex interplay the imagined racial characteristics of Caucasians, African Americans, Chinese and Native Americans, along with beliefs about Protestantism, Catholicism and paganism. The multiracial nature of US troops – nearly 6,000 black troops fought in the war – and the resulting potential for African American and Filipino solidarity troubled US imperialists, while a fiery Irish Catholic press saw in attempts to 'Christianize' the already-Catholic Filipino populace a reflection of Irish Americans' own unstable status in America. Shott argues that fault lines in American identity – including white supremacist notions that could both embolden or inhibit US expansion – consistently determined the shape of the American empire. Race in this complicated landscape was an ever-present but constantly changing frame of reference used by multiple actors to further their goals.

Remaining in the Philippines, the concluding chapter by Mesrob Vartavarian examines Muslim interactions with colonial and postcolonial Philippine states during a protracted series of armed conflicts. Spanish, American and Christian Philippine state agents attempted to place Muslim peoples into racial frameworks that fit their respective colonial imaginaries. National officials tended to view Muslim peoples as savages in need of exogenously imposed sociopolitical systems ostensibly geared towards advancing them along civilizational scales. Such ideals foundered in practice. On encountering armed resistance, colonial imaginaries were set in motion and modified in ways that allowed Muslim elites, and occasionally subalterns, to obtain the resources necessary to entrench or advance their particular socioeconomic concerns. Rather than viewing colonial wars in the Muslim zones of the Southern Philippines as perennial processes of conquest and resistance, Vartavarian contends that different Muslim groups attempted to manoeuvre onto the right side of colonial violence. Those on the receiving end of this violence experienced acute dispossession, while Muslims who managed to direct it against rival polities and factions derived substantial benefits. The Philippine Muslim historical experience is thus best understood through disaggregation. This chapter also places Muslim war bands in a comparative global context, drawing analogies with nineteenth-century raider polities in the American Southwest, the 'martial races' of British India, Palestinian resistance to Zionist settlement and warlord politics in contemporary Afghanistan.

The common theme uniting these chapters is the concept of racial difference and how that idea – born in the crucible of pseudo-sciences and

nurtured by the praxis of racialized colonial capitalism and slavery – came to inform and guide the Southeast Asian conflicts in the nineteenth century. Kramer's assertion that the Philippine-American War was fundamentally a race war fought along racial lines holds true for the conflicts which took place across the region in the earlier decades of the nineteenth century.[20] The foregrounding of race and racial difference – as nominal discursive constructs that were instrumentalized and weaponized – has been the main concern of the contributors to this volume. What the chapters in this book do is connect the colonial wars of Southeast Asia to the wider global conflicts of the nineteenth century, and the race for empire that almost all the Western powers were engaged in at the time. They show how Southeast Asia was not simply colonized through force of arms and the use of superior military technology, but also how Southeast Asians were discursively constructed as the constitutive Other to the West, and in the course of doing so were drawn into the wider current of global political, economic and intellectual history, too. Through ideas that were formulated in the West, the East was epistemically arrested and brought into the Eurocentric order of power-knowledge, where knowing the Other meant having enormous power to frame the Other as well. At the heart of this process of knowing-and-colonizing the Other were the concepts of race and racial difference that would eventually become the lasting legacies of empire in the non-Western world.

What we offer here is not simply another account of the colonization of Southeast Asia to add to the detailed studies already accomplished by Tarling, Steinberg, Taylor, Gopinath, Taylor, Tracol-Huynh, Blanchard, Sysling, and Boshier,[21] but a different view of the colonial wars of Southeast Asia which highlights how these wars were influenced by racial theory, and how Southeast Asian identities were constructed as the process of colonial conquest unfolded. Coming at a time when ethno-nationalist populism is on the rise the world over and when Southeast Asian politics have visibly shifted to the register of identity-based populism, a reminder of the genesis of race politics and the way in which racialized identity building was intrinsic to the colonial enterprise seems both timely and important. It is our hope that by bringing together these two spheres of political praxis – racial identity formation and the violent process of empire-building – we have shown how identity politics in Southeast Asia today has a long and bloody history dating back at least to the nineteenth century and the wars of empire.

20 Kramer 2006.

21 Tarling 1969; Steinberg 1985; Taylor 1987; Gopinath 1996; Taylor 2003; Tracol-Huynh 2010; Blanchard 2017; Sysling 2016; and Boshier 2018.

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About the Authors

Dr Farish A. Noor is Associate Professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies and the School of History, College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU). His recent works include *Data Gathering in Colonial Southeast Asia 1800-1900: Framing the Other* (Amsterdam University Press, 2020), *Before the Pivot: America's Encounters with Southeast Asia 1800-1900* (Amsterdam University Press, 2018) and *The Discursive Construction of Southeast Asia in 19th Century Colonial-Capitalist Discourse* (Amsterdam University Press, 2016).

Dr Peter Carey is Fellow Emeritus of Trinity College, Oxford, and Visiting Professor at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Indonesia in Jakarta. His latest book is *Percakapan dengan Diponegoro* [Conversations with Diponegoro] (KPG, 2021). His other works include *Babad Dipanagara: An Account of the Outbreak of the Java War (1825-30): The Surakarta Court Version of the Babad Dipanagara* (Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1981; 2nd rev. ed. 2020); *The Power of Prophecy: Prince Dipanagara and the End of an Old Order in Java, 1785-1855* (KITLV Press, 2007); and *The British in Java, 1811-1816: A Javanese Account* (Oxford University Press, 1992).