

# Representing the Other: Marquis Ludovic de Beauvoir's Account of Nineteenth-Century Java

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## ABSTRACT

This article analyzes *Voyage Autour du Monde: Java, Siam, Canton* [Journey Around the World: Java, Siam, Canton] (1870), a travel report written by Marquis Ludovic de Beauvoir. The significance of de Beauvoir's travel report lies in its more nuanced and appreciative representation of the Javanese, even as it perpetuates the dominant, Orientalist narrative of indigenous peoples as primitive and barbarian. While believing that the indigenous peoples required European colonial rule to prosper, he nonetheless criticized Dutch imperialism, appreciated Javanese culture and society, and, unlike writers who homogenized the Orient, recognized the nuances therein, including the complex interactions between and among various social groups. His writing came at the cusp of a transition in French writing on the Other, which embodied what a scholar has called "Critical Orientalism," and was part of a then-ongoing shift to a more "objective" stance of modern anthropology and social sciences.

Keywords: colonialism, representation, French, Javanese, travel report

## Introduction

The rise of Napoleon Bonaparte in the nineteenth century had political repercussions in Southeast Asia, where French troops occupied Java, Indonesia from 1809 to 1811 (Dorléans 2014). This brief colonial encounter would leave its presence in French cultural history, establishing a connection between France and Java throughout the nineteenth century, if not beyond. In this article, I examine Marquis Ludovic de Beauvoir's travel report, *A Voyage Round the World: Java, Siam, Canton*, which records his thoughts on and engagement with Dutch colonialism, and the people and culture of Java. It was written between 1865–1867 and was published in 1870. Specifically, I situate and contrast de Beauvoir's writings with the earlier dichotomizations of Europeans as “modern” and non-Europeans as “primitive,” which has been critiqued in postcolonial literature (Bhabha 1994; Said 1978). I then show that, unlike other writers, de Beauvoir displayed and admired the Other, and describes, in quite detailed terms, the complex Javanese social structure. This led him to a partial condemnation of Dutch imperialism, and to a criticism of Javanese subordination to Europeans. The paper then situates (but does not establish direct causality between) Beauvoir's writing alongside French interest in Javanese culture, the rise of what may be called “Critical Orientalism” in realist fiction (Yee 2016), and the development of modern anthropology, and the other social sciences in late nineteenth-century France (Young 2008).

## The Orient as Other

In the nineteenth century, unprecedented travel opportunities opened a new horizon in Europeans' perceptions of non-Europeans. Influenced by modernity, they showed a particular recognition and self-awareness of their difference, believing that Europe was “modern” while other societies were “primitive” or “traditional” (Said 1978). This perception dates back to earlier than the Industrial Revolution. During the Renaissance, Europeans had the tendency to perceive those from other lands as evil—demons—simply because they were not Christians (McGrane

1989). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, non-Europeans were seen as the exotic others (Bhabha 1994). Europe symbolised enlightenment and rationalism while non-Europeans represented darkness and ignorance.

Darwin's theory of human evolution reinforced the idea of the inferiority of the "primitive" peoples outside Europe. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin identified "savages"<sup>1</sup> as persons upon whom natural selection still applied—as with "animals" (1871, 168). These "savages" were opposed to "civilised men" who, through their social systems, did the "utmost to check the process of elimination," and thereby mitigated natural selection. Darwin predicted a near future in which "the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace throughout the world the savage races" and, by doing so, will ensure a greater gap between humanity and apes (Darwin 1871, 201). Numerous thinkers, including Darwin's half-cousin Francis Galton, built on these and similar ideas. Clémence Royer, the translator of the first French-language edition of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, argued that Darwin's theory scientifically proved that races were "sharply differentiated" and that "superior races" would ultimately "supplant inferior ones" (Quoted in Firmin 2000, 271). At any rate, this discourse of the demonic Other—produced, consumed, and reproduced for several centuries—led to a continued distinction between insiders and outsiders, reflecting the relation between the West and the East (Said 1978), and between colonies and their colonizers (Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin 2001).

### **Writing the Other: Travel narratives by Europeans**

The superiority of Europeans and the inferiority of the Javanese, and of many other indigenous groups in the Dutch East Indies, are evident in several European travel reports. In *The Description of a Voyage Made by Certain Ships of Holland into the East Indies*, Cornelis de Houtman (1745), "one of the first Dutch explorers to travel to the East Indies," (Explorers and Exploration Volume 5, 2005), describes a trip undertaken between 1593 and 1595. He notes, in a disapproving tone, "primitive" indigenous habitants, who are

“.....of small stature, well-jointed and boned. They go naked, covering their members with foxes’ and other beasts’ tails. They seem cruel, yet with us they used all kind of friendship; but are very beastly and stinking, in such sort, that you may smell them in the wind at the least a fathom from you. They are apparelled with beast skins made fall about their necks. Some of them, being of the better sort, had their mantles cut and raised chequer wife, which is a great ornament with them. They eat raw flesh as it is new killed, and the entrails of beasts without washing or making clean, gnawing it like dogs; and men-eaters, where they have the advantage. (Houtman 1745, 399)

Although they describe the natives’ physical attributes positively, (“well-jointed” and “[well]-boned”), the accounts denigrates their cultural and behavioural practices. Houtman, implicitly using European standards, describes the indigenous people as naked, despite their wearing some clothing. This clothing, made from dead beasts’ skin and tails, is judged as insufficient and lacking craftsmanship, with most of the clothing simply hanging on wearers’ bodies. Their cleanliness is inadequate too. “You may smell them in the wind at the least a fathom from you” (399). Their eating patterns are unhygienic; they consume meat raw, and are depicted as opportunistic cannibals (Houtman 1745).

Another text, *A Most Execrable and Barbarous Murder Done by an East-Indian Devil, or a Native of Java-Major, in the Road of Bantam, Aboard an English Ship Called The Coster, on the 22nd of October Last, 1641* (1642) attributes barbarianism to indigenous inhabitants of the East Indies. The subtitle alone identifies the East Indian murderer as a wicked, barbarous villain, who meets a “just” conclusion at the hands of the legal system.

Wherein is showed how the wicked villain came to the said ship and hid himself till it was very dark, and then he murdered [sic] all the men that were a board, except the cooke, and three boyes. And lastly, how the murderer himself was justly requited. Captain William Minor being an eye-witness of this bloody massacre... (Banks 1642)

Similarly, the Dutch captain, John Splinter Stavorinus (1798), described the people of Ambon (in Indonesia) to

...inhabit the wild mountains and interior parts of Ceram. They are large, strong, and savage people, in general taller than the inhabitants of the sea-shores; they go mostly naked, both men and women, and only wear a thick bandage round their waist, which is called *chiaaca*, and is made of the milky bark of a tree. ... An ancient, but most detestable and criminal custom prevails among them, agreeable to which, no one is allowed to take a wife, before he can shew a head of an enemy which he has cut off. In order to obtain this qualification for matrimony, six, eight, or ten of them go together to a strange part, where they stay till they have an opportunity of surprising someone, which they do with great dexterity, springing upon the unwary passenger like tigers: they generally cover themselves with branches of trees and bushes, so that they are rather taken for brakes and thickets than for men; in this posture they lie in wait for their prey, and take the first opportunity that presents itself of darting their *toran* or *sagoe* (a sort of missile lance) into the back of a passenger, or spring upon him at once, and cut off his head, with which they instantly decamp, and fly with speed from the scene of their wanton barbarity. (357–58)

Johannes van den Bosch (1780–1844), governor-general of the East Indies from 1830 to 1833, saw the Javanese as inferior. van den Bosch generalized their lack of capacity to construct their society, and questioned their intellectual abilities. He ultimately argued that they could be developed only with the patriarchal system of the Dutch colonial regime.

The intellectual development of the average Javanese does not reach beyond that of our children from twelve to fourteen years, while in general knowledge he is left far behind by them... To give such people institutions suitable for a fully grown society is just as absurd as to give children the rights of adults and to expect that they will put them to good use... only a patriarchal government suits the Javanese.

The government must take care of them and must not allow them to do things for themselves, because of their limited capabilities (Quoted in Hannigan 2015, 137)

van den Bosch created a *cultuurstelsel* (cultivation system) that forced the Javanese to work in Dutch plantations.

### **de Beauvoir's Orientalism**

Born in 1846 to a noble family in Orléans, France, Marquis Ludovic de Beauvoir embarked on a “world tour” with his childhood friend, Prince Pierre, the Duke of Penthièvre and grandson of the French king, Louis Philippe I, who lived a nomadic life since being exiled from France after the Revolution of 1848. Between 1865 and 1867, de Beauvoir, Pierre, and Albert-Auguste Fauvel, the Prince's friend, travelled to Australia, the East Indies (now Indonesia), Singapore, Siam (now Thailand), China, Japan, and the United States. They visited Sultan Hamengkubuwono VI in Java and toured the then-Dutch colony (Dorléans 2014). They met important figures and leaders—including the Javanese sultans in Yogyakarta and Surakarta and the heads of regents in many different regions (Dorléans 2014).

de Beauvoir returned to France in 1867, and later published, among two other books, *Voyage Autour du Monde: Java, Siam, Canton* (Journey Around the World: Java, Siam, Canton). French and English editions of the book have been published. In the book, he presented a perspective of the East Indies that embodied, yet differed from, the Orientalist writings of previous European travellers. He saw Java primarily through a racist, Eurocentric lens, but also broke away from the homogenizing, derogatory Orientalist texts. He wrote of the more complex relations between the Dutch colonizers and the colonized peoples, and of the structural and social hierarchies in Java, which was inhabited by different ethnic groups and social classes.

Like many writings of fellow Europeans, de Beauvoir's wrote from the perspective of a French traveller, whose superiority as a European defines and demeans the Other. "...The Oriental races differ more widely from the European than do the climates of the Equator and the Pole" (163). Racism is evident in de Beauvoir's views and descriptions of the people of Java. He belittles Javanese beliefs as "nothing" and writes that "they worship fetishes from some old superstition, but no more think of following the precepts of their creed than of becoming Christians" (103). Elsewhere, he describes "a good many natives suffering from mental disease" owing to drug use "run[ning] through the body the first man they fall in with, in honour of the Koran. This is called running amuck [i.e. amok]" (10). In his trip through Batavia (modern Jakarta), he implied that the indigenous cavalry played, but failed, at becoming European. In his descriptions, these men "dress up" rather than "dress as" European soldiers. They also incorrectly wear boot spurs on their bare feet. Their attempt at mimicry falls flat.

These Malays, with their gingerbread complexions and hanging lips, are dressed up as European soldiers, and their bare feet decorated with magnificent spurs intended for jack-boots. (3)

Even when de Beauvoir considers indigenous peoples in a positive light, Europe remains his point of reference. Among other things, he contrasts the lack of confinement enjoyed by the "dazzling and exquisitely perfumed plants" (29) in the botanical gardens in Buitenzorg (modern-day Bogor) with similar gardens in Paris. Speaking of a Javanese wedding, he "followed idly after the procession, exactly as the little street boys in Paris follow the drums and fifes" (29). His positive statements are tarnished by negative prejudices. Of an excursion, he wrote,

You need not fear that we are running the least danger in this beautiful island of Java, amongst a people who are so kind and courteous to the white men. An ordinary cane would be a sufficient weapon to disperse all the criminals on these shores. The escort is only a graceful

attention on the part of M. Boutmy, who thus protects us from under the shadow of his official umbrella, and honours us in this way whenever we gallop over the fertile country which abounds under his government. (78–9)

A paradox is apparent. de Beauvoir portrays Java as beautiful and fertile, and its people kind and courteous—at least, to the Europeans who occupied the highest social positions. Nonetheless, there were still numerous criminals who would do them harm. A similar observation is found in de Beauvoir’s assumptions about Prince Mangkunegara. He described the prince, who took only one wife to imitate European customs, as a patron of European sciences (85). However, de Beauvoir was also surprised by Mangkunegara’s broad knowledge of Europe, which challenged his initial assumption that the Javanese were ignorant or at least less knowledgeable.

...we were soon struck by the knowledge the Prince displayed of the Europeans affairs. He touched upon the occupation of Rome, photography, the opera and Seven Days’ War. He was enthusiastic about military tactics and new weapons. (86)

de Beauvoir was likewise paradoxical in describing the Malay crew of a ship. They were wonderful, agile, patient, and kind, but he compared them to “monkeys.”

Our crew is Malay and they work wonderfully, climbing the rigging like monkeys, and I begin to have feeling of liking for this agile, patient kindly race. (143)

### **Appreciating the Javanese**

Despite these biases, de Beauvoir still departed in some ways from what Said (1978) calls the European perception of non-Europeans as the Other. He developed his own perspective, which contrasts from those of

most previous travellers. For one thing, de Beauvoir appreciated the culture and character of the Javanese, and criticized their Dutch rulers. Initially, before arriving, he was afraid of the barbarians. His fear abated after arriving in Batavia on 10 November 1866 and meeting the people. As he rode through the colonial capital, he observed,

It is the most bewildering, the most picturesque, the liveliest crowd I ever saw. It would take me hours to describe its thousand colours, the inconceivable specimens of humanity that compose it, its noisy pantomimic animation. But soon we cross a bridge, and enter the new town. Oh, what a garden of fairyland, what a verdant paradise this is! (3)

As he travelled, de Beauvoir became increasingly positive in his appraisal of Javanese society. Though he came from a noble family, he had—as will be shown below—a degree of understanding and empathy for the Other, a curiosity of the local people's heritage and views. "I wanted to talk to these Malays, examine into their hearts and minds, learn their history, study their religion, and find out their wants" (101–02). de Beauvoir could not do so at first, as he did not speak Malay ("here, I can do nothing but use my eyes") [102]. But he soon gained an understanding of the indigenous peoples. His work discusses, for instance, the different registers of politeness found in the native languages (103); the musical traditions of the Javanese court (104); peasant rice collecting practices (108); the burials for the nobility (111); and the incredible detail of the carvings in Borobudur Temple (119–22). He comments on the people he met. He was struck, for example, by the "extremely natural and sociable" nature of Yogyakarta's sultan, Hamengkubuwana VI (113), and by the nobility of Paku Alam IV (114). He was also saddened that the "great and magnificent" Pakubuwana IX lacks the freedom of the sultans of the Middle East (100).

de Beauvoir was greatly surprised by the kindness of the Javanese, especially those of the lower classes. His group travelled "with more

kindnesses shown us every moment” (133), and often reflected on the good treatment he received. de Beauvoir also empathized with local officials and Javanese men whom he considers loyal and committed to serving their colony and its rulers, Dutch or otherwise. According to de Beauvoir, the Malay people were positioned as slaves in their own land, but did their best to serve the system. He admired them, while at the same time,

I am above all things anxious to tell you what kindly feelings and sincere respect I feel for the men in Java. I wish I were fifty years old, that my words might carry weight when I say that there does not exist in the world a body of colonial officials who unite in so great a degree talents, high education, capacity, and amiability. They are educated in the polytechnic college of Delft and Leyden, which are consecrated to the formation of Indian officials, and can speak both French and the Malay and Sunda dialects, as well as their own languages. They work ten hours a day, and bring a remarkable intelligence to bear on the widely different matters which come under their despotic administration. In short, these Javanese officials have won my warm admiration. (144–45)

By the end of his stay in Java, de Beauvoir had adapted to life on the island and took up several local practices (he enjoyed *gamelan* music), while maintaining a European cultural identity.

I have gradually become so accustomed to the languid softness, so monotonous, but so soothing, of these bayaderes that I know the rapid music and the movement and excitement of our ballets would seem to me now like the madness of a carnival, and not the art of dancing. (105)

He was proud that he spoke the local language, regularly wore traditional clothes—“cabaya and Moorish trousers” (172)—and enjoyed “the spices and curry which are so wholesome in the tropics” (172).

### Social hierarchies in Java

de Beauvoir's appreciation of the indigenous peoples of Java extended to his understanding of their society. Particularly poignant is his description of social hierarchies, which were well-established by the time he wrote. He did not only see an "us and them," between colonizer and colonized, but also recognized complex interrelationships.

Java is divided into twenty-two provinces or residences, containing an average of from six to eight hundred thousand inhabitants. At the head of each is the Resident (a European official), a kind of omnipotent magistrate, who holds in his hands all the reins of government, law, military authority, public work, agricultural monopolies—in a word, he is everything but he does nothing directly. In the same town with him, the Regent, a native official holds his court in Asiatic splendor. The Dutch officials always treat him with the greatest deference, and live in perfect amity with him, a union the more encouraged in petto by the Javanese prince, that a word of blame from the next magistrate might at any moment produce a decree from the Governor-General declaring that Raden-Adipatie Pangheran...is replaced in the Regency of...by his nephew, Raden Kousoumo...; and as the later is equally a prince, and of "divine origine", the people will bow with equal servility before their new sovereign. (150–51)

de Beauvoir attempts to explain that different power dynamics govern the relationship between and among the many different people who lived in Java, including colonial rulers, royal families, government employees (Residents, Wedana), ethnic Chinese, and the *wong cilik* (the common people in Javanese social hierarchy).

At the highest level were the Dutch rulers, who had sufficient power to influence even kings. The ruler of Bandung, for instance, "is absolutely under the orders of the Resident (the Dutch magistrate established here)" (38). These European rulers were of such high stature that it was "essential to the dignity of a European never to go on foot" (8). Ironically, de Beauvoir

also notes that they were ill-suited to life in the Indies, “enfeebled and worn out by the heat, look[ing] pale and ghastly, and inspir[ing] one with the most profound pity” (9).

Under the Dutch rulers were members of the native royal family, before “whom all [natives] prostrate themselves” (38) and through whom the Dutch ruled by proxy.

The essence and theory of this colonial government seems to be to conceal the European rule, which is never exercised directly, but always through a native intermediate official, over a gentle but proud people, who thus keep up the illusion that they obey only their natural chiefs; to subdue the appearance of it everywhere before the splendour of the Javanese princes, choosing them from among their rivals to appoint them to their posts, thereby obliging them to entire submission or the loss of their dignity... (149–50)

These royal family members competed by exercising different forms of capital (Bourdieu 1990). de Beauvoir describes, for example, the competition between the King of Surakarta and Prince Mangkunegara. Of course, the Dutch colonial regime was the most powerful.

He (Mangkunegara) is an independent prince, with the title of “Pangheran-Adiepatie and Ario,” which express his very aristocratic origin. He possesses considerable property enclosed in the empire, and a private army, composed of Javanese, trained in the European manner. There is a great rivalry between him and the Emperor, both in political influence and material force; each one in turn fears to be supplanted by the other in his system of proud independence. The weakest calls in the influence of the Dutch to his assistance, who, by way of setting them straight, cuts up their possessions, and crushes them more and more. (84–85)

Third were the Javanese officials who served the rulers, be they Dutch or Javanese. Though their power was not as great as those they served, they still held a fortuitous position. de Beauvoir highlights these officials’ lower position in the social hierarchy, which was indicated umbrella size and decoration.

The larger this badge [i.e. umbrella] is made the higher is the rank which it implies. This one is a yard and three-quarters in diameter, and the handle two yards long. It is a family or carriage umbrella, and corresponds to the highest rank [the Resident]. The Assistant-Resident's umbrella has less gold, and gives less shade; the controller has no gold, and can only just screen himself; as to the wedana [a Javanese official], I should not be surprised to see that he had got nothing but the handle. (76–77)

Fourth in the social hierarchy were the ethnic Chinese who had economic power to bargain for their position in the society. However, they could easily be imprisoned in vast numbers (76). de Beauvoir considered them great survivors, as the Chinese moved to Java to avoid economic poverty.

In all the towns the Celestials [i.e. the Chinese] form a little colony, which the government indeed takes care to keep as small as possible. These people, essentially intelligent and keen-sighted, who can live upon nothing, can bend to all circumstances, and are marvellously gifted in everything that relates to commerce, are as greedy of gain as they are of work. The most difficult trades cannot disgust them; they understand cleverly how to create needs which they only are in the position to satisfy. Thus some hundred emigrants from the Celestial Empire, who no doubt left their native land in poverty, become the principal purveyors of provisions in a province containing a million Javanese. (75)

The ethnic Chinese people were treated simultaneously as both subjects and objects. The Dutch controlled the Chinese population growth in Java and retained “the right to imprison 2000... Chinese in five minutes” (76). At the same time, through their economic intelligence and willingness to take work that others rejected, the Chinese became agents of economic activity despite their minority status and limited participation in politics and society.

Fifth were the common people, the *wong cilik*, who held the lowest position in Javanese society, and prostrated themselves should a European pass them by.

A white man no sooner appears than all the natives crouch down upon their heels in token of veneration and respect. Not one man has stood upright during the whole length of the thickly peopled road we have traversed at full speed. They seem to fall to right and left, as the dust was raised by our flying horses, as if they had been card figures knocked down at our approach. (28)

Noting their social subordination of the *wong cilik*, de Beauvoir describes the top-down process of road building or repairs.

Is there a road to construct or repair? The Resident carries to the princeling of the Mataram race the plans drawn by the engineers of Leyden and the native Toumongong or Pangheran sets thousands of forced labourers to work at once, and the road is made. (151)

The orders and plans for road construction and repairs, which came from Europe, were directly conveyed to the local nobleman—the “princeling” respected by indigenous persons but subjugated under the Dutch—not to the builders. The indigenous leader, in turn, sent the orders to his own underlings, the minor nobles—the Toumongong or Pangheran. These men dealt directly with, and instructed, the *wong cilik* tasked with the actual labour.

In this multilayered structure, Beauvoir acknowledged that the discourse of power in the Indies was not simply that of colonizer and colonized. It was much more complex, whose dynamics simultaneously comprised a part of the colonial structure while being independent of it. Society was constituted by power relations and social relationships wherein actors could simultaneously be dominant over some while subordinate to others. As de Beauvoir correctly recognized, some natives held great power and had sufficient education and networking to keep abreast of developments in Europe, while majority were manual labourers. Europeans

were universally given deferential treatment, whereas the common Javanese served Europeans through physical labor and threw themselves at those passing on horses. The nobility and native officials received them with feasts and accompanied them as guests.

In identifying the dynamic social hierarchy in the East Indies, de Beauvoir began to break from homogenizing tendencies of the Dutch colonial government (Claver 2014). Despite the longstanding self-differentiation between and among the diverse ethnic groups in the Indies, where written and oral tradition proudly tells of (for instance) a Minangkabau bull defeating one from Java and thus quashing Javanese expansionism (Khoon 1999, 257), the colonial government simply categorized ethnic groups indigenous to the archipelago as “inlanders” (Hannigan 2015, 164), distinguishing them from “foreign Orientals” (persons of Chinese, Arabic, or Indian descent) and from the Europeans themselves (Tan 2008, 15). Thus, although he still tended to generalize certain groups, be they of class (Javanese royalty, officials, and commoners) or migrant identity (i.e. the Chinese), he did recognize that the population of the Indies was not homogenous, and that practices differed by group or context. This contrasts with the extensive generalizations of earlier explorers such as Van den Bosch (Hannigan 2015, 135), who looked down at Javanese’ intellectual abilities (as discussed in the previous section), or Houtman, who described the Chinese as bootleggers and the Javanese as secretly drinking alcohol despite religious prohibitions.

The Chinese are very subtle and industrious people, and will refuse no labour nor pains to earn money. There they make much aquavitæ of rice and cocos, and traffic much therewith, which the Javars by night come to buy, and drink it secretly, for by Mahomet's law it is forbidden them. (Houtman 1745, 408)

### Views on colonialism

de Beauvoir's description of the Dutch colonial society in the East Indies parallels his understanding—and criticism—that colonialism was about power. As mentioned, Beauvoir frequently describes the Javanese as kind. He saw the quality as generally positive, though found it to be a weakness too, an excessive willingness to please that indicated subordination.<sup>2</sup> “Forced service seemed only to cause good-natured smiles on all these worthy plum-coloured faces” (37–38). Indigenous servants and workers were everywhere. They drove carriages, harvested sugar for Europeans' fortunes, and served as guards and soldiers to defend the colonizers. Such was the extent of their service that, at a single dinner,

I have a Malay to supply me with iced water, which he pours out at arm's length; there are two to change my plate; three to bring round the dish; to moment for coffee. I believe if I wished for a dozen dishes and particularly if I could call for them in native dialect, I should give employment to the twelve men in red who stand behind my chair. (7)

de Beauvoir was particularly surprised by how the wong cilik prostrated themselves to express respect and kindness. His shock at this display of subordination is reiterated many times in his writing.

I thought they must certainly take us for the Governor. But there can be no mistake now; we are white men, and that suffices to make all heads bend. The further we advance into the interior the more inconceivable does the servility become. Yesterday only the people who crossed our path bowed down to the ground immediately; today from the depths of the rice plantations, 100 or 150 yards off, our presence is the signal for a general abasement. Worse still, as they crouch upon their heels, they turn their backs to us, and keep their eyes fixed upon the ground! (34–5)

de Beauvoir was aware of the power imbalance between the colonizer and the colonized based on racial differentiation. The greater the extent

of the Javanese' servitude, the worse it appeared to him. He argues that the subordination of the wong cilik served as a reason for the Europeans to stay in Java.

Good heavens! If the abuse of influence on the part of the white men is in proportion to the excess of servility on the part of the black, what bounds can stop the rulers whose subjects, already in the attitude of the lowest abasement, dare not to raise their eyes towards them! What a capital country population for a government to have to deal with. If ever the system of official candidature should be exiled from fair France it ought certainly to take refuge here. (28)

These led him to criticize the system. The colonization of Java, and by extension the East Indies, was an exercise in European power.

This has not been the work of a day, but the fruit of a well calculated, if not a just policy and of an absolute and despotic authority, against which however the Javanese raise no murmur, as it is but a copy of power of the sultans before the invasions. There is the touchstone and to my thinking this proves that Java is not a "colony" since there are no colonist and the position of a planter has no existence for the Europeans any more than for the native but it is a splendid "mine" minutely regulated by the Government in the smallest details, with the most perfect arrangement for pouring into the State treasury, all that can be extracted from this beautiful island—the most fertile country in the world; or rather it is great "farm" managed by small number of officers, who have rule over thousands of forced labourers. (147–48)

The Indies was ruled by a small, "despotic" European government dominating a much larger population. Though Gold—"all that can be extracted from this beautiful island"—played a role, power served as a hallmark of the colonial system. He described the Dutch as "leeches" and "parasites" (155) feeding on the "gentle but proud people" (149) of the island. de Beauvoir rejected, at least partially, the standard narrative in

which “common sense” is used to explain visits by Western travellers to “civilise” the natives and the colonies (Rosenberg 2014). This narrative, which resulted in an exoticism and objectivation of the colonized world, later gave rise to several critiques of colonialism, led by such writers as Alphonse Daudet who mocked other writers for using what he termed “orientalist tropes” (Yee 2008).

The rejection of the glories of colonialism is also reflected in de Beauvoir’s implicit criticism of some Europeans in Java, whom he viewed as living in “exile” (6). This was a sarcastic way of saying that “unsuccessful” Europeans could find achievement in Java (Udasmoro 2009) because there were no obstacles to their survival. In Java, for de Beauvoir, all of them could be kings and enjoy power unavailable to them in Europe.

Java is the court of the Great Mogul, and I am the Great Mogul; so can you be if you come here! (36)

Ultimately, he concludes that only the temptation of power convinced Europeans to endure life in the Indies and perpetuate the existing system. Financial motives, he argues, did not fully explain the need for forced labor and subordination, as “it has been found necessary to give up [forced labour in the indigo, cochineal, and tobacco sectors], which under the system of forced labour brought ruin to the State and the peasant” (60). “God, Glory, and Gospel” (Hanigan 2015; Wright 1970) were secondary motives to power. Describing European women in Ambarawa, de Beauvoir writes,

...fascinated by that indescribable something which is so intoxicating in the tropics, attracted by the languid softness of Creole life, and lulled by a half-sleep and half-delirium which is but the beginning of death, they love Java, the magnificence of their palaces, the semi-royal power of their husbands or their sons, and the arena in which all manly power can be developed, and they sacrifice their health to their duty. (129)

de Beauvoir calls for liberty, deciding to “speak with the more frankness that in thus pleading the cause of liberty,” “certain to find [him] self in the road where the colony will find her real prosperity” (145). This was not, however, full independence, which was unthinkable for a European like him, with his notions of cultural and moral superiority, not to mention his noble background. Rather, he wanted development and economic opportunities be made available for the Javanese.

It must be hoped that a change will happen before long, and that, without any violent commotion, this feudal system, which clips so many wings and stifles so many aspirations, may give place to the modern ideas of development, progress, and life. And how easy this would be with a staff which, devoted with their whole hearts to this country, yet endure rather than like the heavy rule which they themselves have over the Javanese, and who would guide them with such noble zeal from this intellectual and moral night to the wide domain of liberty, civilisation, and Christianity! (169)

Despite his desire for the indigenous peoples to receive a degree of freedom that “may give place to the modern ideas of development, progress, and life” (Beauvoir 1870, 169), he could not imagine more than that. True social and political independence, free from the influence of colonial powers, would endanger his and his fellow Europeans' position. Despite the need for criticism, the colonial system remained the only game in town for de Beauvoir.

### **Java's French connection**

de Beauvoir's writing came on the heels of a long history of contact between France and Java. Since the sixteenth century, the French had travelled to the Indonesian archipelago for a variety of reasons, most commonly for “Gold, Glory and Gospel.” The first travellers to Sumatra exemplified the typical understanding of European writings on Indonesia. These included the Italian adventurer Giovanni da Verrazane and French

explorer Pierre Caunay, who travelled to Sumatra from Honfleur, France, between 1526 and 1529 for the trade in, and exploration of, the Spice Islands. They called the Malays poor traders (Dorléans 2014, 3) and blamed them for the failure of French trading efforts in Sumatra. A Frenchman from Brittany named François Pyrard de Laval, who journeyed from 1601 to 1611, also faced great obstacles; he wrote that the natives had stolen valuable goods from his ship (Dorléans 2014, 17). Another seventeenth-century traveller, François de Vitré, travelled to the East Indies between 1601 and 1603. More French explorers arrived in the eighteenth century. For instance, the French East India Company launched in 1760 and 1861 expeditions to Java and Sumatra under Charles Henri d'Estaing. Pierre-Marie François (1767–1771) also searched for the Northwest Passage. Their journeys were described as fraught with violence (Dorléans 2014). In the nineteenth century, enabled by technological developments, French travellers went to Java in search of new experiences, unlike those found in the Americas and Africa.

For these and a host of other factors, the French exhibited enormous interest in, and fascination with, the exotic cultures and landscapes of the East Indies. The novelist, Honoré de Balzac, was interested in Javanese culture and wrote a novel about the island, *Voyage de Paris à Java* (Balzac 1995), though he did not have the opportunity to travel there (Udasmoro 2007). Published in 1832, his novel was enjoyed by the French public. The Indonesian painter Raden Saleh gained the respect of the French royal family for his painting, *La Chasse au Tigre* (The Tiger Hunt), which was acquired by Prince Louis-Philippe in 1864. Another painting of his, *La Chasse au Cerf* (The Deer Hunt), was exhibited in the Louvre in 1847. Javanese *gamelan*, a type of percussion-based music, inspired the compositions of renowned musician Claude Debussy, *La Fille Aux Cheveux de Lins* (The Girl with Flaxen Hair) and *Les Feuilles Mortes* (Dead Leaves) in the early twentieth century (Grangé 2011). In 1876, the French poet Arthur Rimbaud visited Java as a soldier, but deserted (Udasmoro 2009; Grangé 2011), and the archaeologist Desiré Charnay (1828–1915) came to the archipelago on an educational mission between

1878 and 1879. During the 1889 summer festival at the Champs-Élysées, the Javanese stand and its exhibitions of Javanese dance, music, and handicrafts attracted French visitors. It was the Prince of Surakarta, Mangkunegara, who sent his best traditional dancers and artists to Paris (Dorléans 2014, 32, 515, 521).

### Changing views of the Orient

de Beauvoir's travel report is arguably part of shift in perceptions of the Orient in France (at least) in the latter part of the nineteenth century. This different perspective was primarily advocated by crosscultural travellers who lived with local people, and were exposed to the different cultures and societies. This is seen in *The Voyage of François Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies* (Gray 1887) and *The Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil* and *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies* (van Linschoten 1885). Furthermore, John Huyghen van Linschoten, a Dutch merchant among other occupations, gave greater emphasis to the plethora of flora (tropical plants) and fauna (rhinoceroses) in the East Indies. He also conveys his good impression about Malacca and the Malay language in what he calls India but was more properly known as the East Indies.

Lying about them, (seeking) in all things to differ (and varye) from their neighboursoo so that (in the end) they made a speech by themsleves and named the towne Malacca, which in short time hath gotten so great resort, by means of the aptnes and propernes of the place, specially for merchants, that it is become one of the best principallest kingdomes of all the countries, thereabouts and this speech called Malayo is reported to be the most courteous and seemelie speech of all the Orient (Linschoten 1885, 106)

The rise of narratives such as Linschoten's (and de Beauvoir's) is inseparable from the emergence of less Orientalist approaches, particularly in anthropology, in viewing non-European persons in the nineteenth century. de Beauvoir lived in, or at least was at the cusp of, an era that

promoted scientific rigor and objectivity. Writing about the 1889 Paris Exhibition, Young (2008, 349) states that “the emergence in the 1870s and 1880s of the new human science disciplines of ethnography and anthropology introduced a pressure—felt acutely at the 1889 Exhibition—to more fully, truthfully, and informatively represent colonial cultures at the exhibit.” Initially intended to provide a better understanding of “primitive” societies in colonies of European powers, anthropology later viewed human societies as objects that could be examined objectively, as with the natural sciences (McDaniel et al. 2012). Many early anthropologists drew from writings of travellers, such as missionaries and traders, to make their conclusions. As this discipline developed, anthropological concepts were applied, albeit not as rigorously, in travel literature. The British explorer Alfred Russel Wallace, for instance, used what may be termed an evolutionist anthropological approach in describing the Dayak of Kalimantan.

We learn thereby, that these people have passed beyond that first stage of savage life in which the struggle for existence absorbs all of the faculties, and in which every thought and idea is connected with war or hunting, or the provision for their immediate necessities. [Dayak games] indicate a capability of civilization, an aptitude to enjoy other than mere sensual pleasures, which might be taken advantage of to elevate their whole intellectual and social life. (1869, 137–38)

At the same time, de Beauvoir was also at the cusp of changing perceptions of the Orient. “Sylviane Leprun has argued that the 1889 Exhibition marked a transition point, where an older romantic-exotic vision of the non-West as mysterious and other begins to give way to a more ethnographic sensibility aiming at capturing the ‘truth’ of the colonies” (Young 2008, 361, n34). And by the time de Beauvoir produced his travel writing (1870), contemporary French colonial literature exhibited a “hesitation concerning colonial policy, epistemological uncertainty, and a feeling of besieged identity” (Yee 2016, 201). “Reductive views” on the

Other were also challenged. This in turn was reflected in “much nineteenth-century writing on ‘the Orient...’, which was “engaged in a self-conscious polemic aimed at the very same Orientalist tradition” (113). Some French authors, including Alphonse Daudet, questioned the depiction of colonized countries and their culture, as evidenced by the former’s novel, *Tartarin de Tarascon*, which was part of a trope featuring “the contrast between Orientalist presuppositions and colonial realities” (Yee 2016, 119). All these had political corrolaries; in the 1860s and 1870s, “there was considerable opposition to colonial expansion from within France” (122).

Of course, this is not to say de Beauvoir was such a critic or a novelist, but this point speaks to the era in which he was writing. Of course, he never fully abandoned orientalism and its essentialism. But by distinguishing different peoples and broadened his understanding of Javanese society, his work arguably parallels what Jennifer Yee calls “Critical Orientalism,” which in the nineteenth-century French realist] novel resists the Orientalism that Said (1978) had described. Critical Orientalism is a “self-aware Orientalism” that “repeated cast into doubt” Orientalism’s “adequacy as a response to the ‘real’” (Yee 2016, 114). In the same way, de Beauvoir’s was reacting against the derogatory views of previous European writing, if not of some of his contemporaries. By recognizing the central role of power in colonialism and the nuances of Javanese society, de Beauvoir was able to challenge the existing colonial narrative and exoticism of cultures.

### **After Java**

After the publication of his writings on Java, Siam, and Canton, de Beauvoir wrote about his journey to Beijing, Yeddo, and San Francisco. For all three writings, which were “well-received by the critics,” de Beauvoire was awarded with the Academie Française prise in 1872 (Lombard n.d.). A year earlier, he also received the Legion of Honor. In 1870, he joined the French army and fought against the Germans, and became part of the “diplomatic corps” of the Third Republic (1870–1940), rising to “Head of Cabinet at the French Foreign Office, under Duc Decazes” (Lombard n.d.). He died in 1929.

## Conclusion

This analysis of Marquis Ludovic de Beauvoir's travel report, *A Voyage Round the World: Java, Siam, Canton* (1870), has shown the author's nuanced perspective on Java. Despite his cultural background as a European, as well as the colonial system that he enjoyed, de Beauvoir partly diverted from the common narrative of indigenous peoples as primitive and barbarian. He recognized that his initial apprehensiveness was misplaced and over time, he became increasingly positive in his appraisal of the Javanese. Though he still believed that the indigenous peoples required colonial rule to prosper, de Beauvoir recognized Java's complex situations—including its social interactions and exercises of power. In doing so, his views were distinct from the generalizations made by fellow Europeans such as Houtman, Verrazane, Caunay, and de Vitré.

As seen above, de Beauvoir understood that colonization did not simply focus on the vertical power relations of dominance and subordination (Said 1978) between the colonizer and colonized. Rather, he recognized its complexity, where different actors could simultaneously be dominant over some while subordinate to others. The structure of the colonized society, he learned, was dynamic and multifaceted, making colonization more than simply about God, Gospel, and Glory (Rosenberg 2014). de Beauvoir thus leaned away from orientalist narratives and acknowledged the role of power contestation in the colonial narrative. He described Dutch colonials as “leeches” and “parasites” on the Javanese (“gentle but proud people”). In his counternarrative, de Beauvoir provides an impressive, crosscultural description and understanding of the Other despite the constraints of his cultural and social milieu. At any rate, there is a need for a more nuanced model of research on colonial travel writing, one that diverts and even deconstructs mainstream narratives of God, Gospel, and Glory, and of universal dominance and subjugation. Travel studies must recognize that views questioning orientalism and exoticism were emerging even when these ideologies were still dominant.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Persons so identified included indigenous Africans and Australians (Darwin 1871, 201).
- <sup>2</sup> This subordination is constructed by the lengthy historical process of domination by the Dutch and upper-class Javanese. As such, the identity of kindness is not an embedded one, but socially constructed in relation to the social position of people in Javanese society. It is constructed by the feudal system, created by society's upper classes (such as the nobility), as well as the ethnic construct that positioned ethnic Europeans in society's highest strata. In Indonesia, until the country proclaimed its independence in 1945, the social hierarchy was influenced by ethnicity, with the ethnic Dutch occupying the highest strata, the foreign Asians (ethnic Chinese, Arabs, and Indians) in the middle, and the pribumi or indigenes at the bottom. It was also influenced by social class; the nobility and rich occupied the highest position, while the poor were at the bottom. Those with greater religious knowledge, meanwhile, were socially positioned higher than those who were secular. Beauvoir saw these complexities of social relations as a weakness of the local people. They were not only positioned structurally under the Europeans, but also within their own ethnic groups. The lower class was the most subordinated group in society.

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