



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
MODERN EDUCATION
(IJMOE)
www.ijmoe.com



A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN COLONIAL WOMEN WRITERS IN SARAWAK IN TWO DIFFERENT TIME PERIOD

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Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 18.06.2025

Revised date: 09.07.2025

Accepted date: 13.08.2025

Published date: 10.09.2025

To cite this document:

Muhammad, N. F., & Fadzli, M. A. (2025). A Comparative Study Between Colonial Women Writers in Sarawak in Two Different Time Period. *International Journal of Modern Education*, 7 (26), 709-722.

DOI: 10.35631/IJMOE.726047

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Abstract:

This article examines the colonial-era writings of two Englishwomen, Margaret and Sylvia Brooke, through a comparative analysis of their respective portrayals of life as consorts to the 'White Rajahs' of Sarawak. Margaret, wife of Charles Brooke (the second Rajah), and Sylvia, wife of his son Vyner (the third and final Rajah), occupied similar roles within the Brooke dynasty but approached their experiences from markedly different personal and historical vantage points. Their memoirs, shaped by generational shifts and contrasting temperaments, offer divergent narratives rather than a unified perspective. The relationship between the two women appears to have been distant, even strained, and this tension is mirrored in their writings. The concurrent publication of certain volumes of their memoirs may have reinforced a sense of literary rivalry, especially for Sylvia. Margaret's tone is measured and discreet, while Sylvia adopts a more assertive, self-promoting stance, reflecting the broader cultural and media shifts of the early 20th century. These differences also manifest in their representations of colonial knowledge. Margaret displays a sustained interest in the indigenous communities of Sarawak, signalling an engagement with local contexts. In contrast, Sylvia projects a louder, assertive image, consciously cultivating her public persona as the 'Queen of the Headhunters.' Rather than subsuming both figures under broad postcolonial-feminist notions of ambivalence, this study argues for a more nuanced reading of colonial women's writing, one that recognises the intra-gender and intergenerational conflicts embedded within imperial narratives. The comparison underscores the need to move beyond homogenised interpretations of white women's roles in empire, attending instead to the complexities of individuality, authorship, and power in colonial settings.

Keywords:

Colonial Women Writers, Margaret Brooke, Sylvia Brooke, Postcolonial Feminism, Generational Shifts, Intra-Gender Conflict.

Introduction

This study explores the colonial travel writings of Margaret and Sylvia Brooke, the second and third Ranees of Sarawak, focusing on how they represented their roles and experiences during different phases of the colonial era. Both women, as wives to the White Rajahs, wrote extensively about their lives in Sarawak, offering unique perspectives shaped by their individual personalities, relationships, and eras.

The aim is to compare and contrast their writings to reveal differences in how they navigated their identity, diaspora, and colonial duties. This comparison challenges the idea that colonial women writers formed a unified, homogenous voice and instead suggests that class, generation, and personal circumstance shaped their narratives in distinctive ways (Mills, 1991). The study seeks to reassess colonial-era women's travel writing, showing it as a diverse field rather than a uniform expression of imperial ideology. It adds complexity to how colonial women's voices are understood in postcolonial scholarship, questioning the representational authority of Western women in the colonial context (Spivak, 1988).

There are four theoretical frameworks that were used in this study, which are concepts from colonial and postcolonial studies, travel writing theory (Pratt, 1992), women's travel writing, and lastly, postcolonial feminism, particularly focused on Southeast Asia (Malaya and Borneo). While past scholarship has often homogenized women's colonial writing, this study highlights individual differences. A comparison with Isabella Bird and Emily Innes, two colonial women writers in 19th-century Malaya, illustrates how class and personal experience can dramatically affect literary portrayals, even in the same region and period (Morgan, 2003). This insight guides the comparative approach for Margaret and Sylvia Brooke.

Literature Review***Women's Travel Writing: Homogeneity vs. Heterogeneity***

The first section explores previous research on women's travel writing, especially in the context of colonialism and postcolonial feminism. A central debate within the field is whether to view this body of work as a monolithic genre or as a collection of diverse individual narratives. Some scholars, such as Brian Matthews and Jyotsna Singh, suggest women's colonial writings share common themes of domesticity and moral supervision, largely due to the gender roles imposed by colonial society. However, this generalization risks erasing the individuality and complexity of each writer's position.

In contrast, a significant body of scholarship argues for a more nuanced approach. Theorists like Susan Bassnett, Sara Mills (1991), and Shirley Foster (1990) argue for recognizing the diversity within women's travel writing. They emphasize that context, class, personal background, and the writer's purpose are crucial variables that shape each narrative uniquely. For instance, the writings of Margaret Brooke, focusing on the cultural and administrative life

in a developing colonial state, present a starkly different perspective from the societal critiques of Frances Trollope in 19th-century America. This demonstrates how individual experience, focus, and attitude produce highly distinct texts even within the broad category of "women's writing."

To ground this study in the specific context of colonial Malaya and Borneo, it is essential to review the findings of previous scholarly work on the region's key female writers. While Margaret and Sylvia Brooke have been subjects of historical biographies, detailed literary comparative analysis is less common. Existing scholarship has often focused on individual figures, highlighting their unique contributions and perspectives, which provides a foundation for a direct comparative study.

The table below summarizes key scholarly findings on colonial women writers relevant to this region, illustrating the current state of research and identifying the gap this study aims to fill.

Table 1: Summary of Key Scholarly Findings on Colonial Women Writers in Malaya and Borneo

Author(s) & Year	Focus of Study	Key Findings / Arguments
Reece, R. H. W. (2004)	Historical biography of Margaret Brooke, the second Rane of Sarawak.	Margaret's writing in <i>My Life in Sarawak</i> portrays her as an active participant in the "civilizing mission." Her narrative constructs a romantic, paternalistic view of Brooke rule, but also reveals her personal struggles and loneliness within the colonial hierarchy.
Morgan, S. (2003)	Comparative analysis of Isabella Bird and Emily Innes in the Malay Peninsula.	Class and purpose created vastly different narratives. Bird, an upper-class traveler, wrote an aesthetically-focused, authoritative imperial account. Innes, a middle-class colonial wife, produced a grievance-filled narrative focused on domestic and social frustrations, challenging the romance of empire.
Gullick, J. M. (2001)	A study of expatriate life in colonial Malaya, referencing various personal accounts.	Women's roles were often confined to the domestic sphere, but their writings provide invaluable insight into the social fabric, racial tensions, and daily realities of colonial life that are absent from official male-authored reports.

Ooi Keat Gin (2011)	Analysis of Sylvia Brooke's role and writings as the third Ranees.	Sylvia's literary output, including <i>The Three White Rajahs</i> , reflects a more modern, self-conscious, and performative persona. Her writing occurred when Brooke rule was more established but also facing external threats, lending her narrative a sense of theatricality and dynastic justification.
Goh, L. (2002)	A postcolonial reading of various English-language texts from Malaysia and Singapore.	Colonial writers, including women, often employed tropes of the "exotic" and "primitive" to frame the landscape and its people. Their works were instrumental in shaping a European understanding of the region, often overlooking or simplifying local complexities.

As the findings in Table 1 illustrate, scholars have established that colonial women writers in this region were not a homogenous group. Factors such as class (Morgan), historical context (Reece; Ooi), and personal circumstance (Gullick) profoundly shaped their literary output. However, while individual studies of Margaret and Sylvia exist, a direct, text-based comparative study that analyzes their narratives through the combined lenses of travel writing theory, postcolonialism, and feminism remains a significant scholarly gap. This study will build on these existing findings to explore how two women, in the same role but in different colonial eras, represented their lives and the state of Sarawak.

Colonial Discourse, Postcolonialism, and Identity

This study also draws upon major scholarly perspectives on colonial discourse and identity formation. Sara Mills (1997) views colonial discourse not merely as a collection of texts but as a system of thought that frames colonized cultures as inferior and existing on a separate, "primitive" timeline. Writers use linguistic strategies, such as tense and modality, to establish colonial distance and dominance. Similarly, Elleke Boehmer (2005) emphasizes how colonialist literature centers white, male experiences, often omitting or silencing indigenous perspectives. Boehmer stresses the necessity of integrating gender and race into any analysis of colonial discourse. This framework is vital for examining how the Ranees, as white women, participated in or potentially complicated this patriarchal and racialized system.

The response to this system is found in postcolonial theory. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002) describe postcolonial literature as work that challenges the Eurocentric worldview, grappling with themes of identity, displacement, and cultural conflict. Central to this is a critique of Orientalism, a concept defined by Edward Said (1979) as the West's construction of a false, monolithic, and inferior image of the "East" to justify domination. His theory exposes how Western literature often erases the diversity of colonized peoples, portraying them as a homogenous "Other." In response, postcolonial writers often engage in "writing back," a concept Helen Tiffin (1995) describes as the process of rewriting colonial texts to deconstruct European narratives and reveal suppressed indigenous voices. These theories provide the critical tools to analyze the representational strategies in Margaret's and Sylvia's texts.

3. Postcolonial Feminism and Intersectionality.

Finally, this study is framed by postcolonial feminism, which challenges the universalism of Western feminism and addresses the intersectional struggles of women in formerly colonized societies. As Raj Kumar Mishra (2013) explains, postcolonial feminism emerged from "third world" contexts to critique Western feminism's frequent failure to account for the unique lived experiences of women at the intersections of gender, race, class, and colonial oppression.

Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (2003) argue that postcolonial feminism serves a dual purpose: (1) to "racialize" Western feminism by forcing it to confront its own white, middle-class biases, and (2) to insert feminist concerns into a postcolonial theory that too often defaults to a male subject. This involves examining how Western women historically positioned themselves in relation to indigenous women, sometimes as allies, but often as agents of a "civilizing mission" that reinforced racial hierarchies (McEwan, 2001). Furthermore, Joan Anderson (2000) links postcolonial feminism with global justice, showing how systemic inequalities are exacerbated for women in postcolonial nations. This theoretical lens is crucial for this study to avoid universalizing the Ranees' experiences as "female," and instead to analyze how their positions of privilege as white, elite women intersected with the gendered and racial hierarchies of colonial Sarawak.

Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological and analytical framework used to conduct a comparative study of the autobiographical travel writings of Margaret Brooke, *Good Morning and Good Night* (1934), and Sylvia Brooke, *Sylvia of Sarawak* (1936).

Research Design and Method

This study employs a **qualitative, comparative textual analysis** as its core research method. This approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth, interpretive examination of language, themes, narrative voice, and ideology embedded within the texts. A qualitative design is best suited to answer the "how" and "why" questions central to this research, such as how each woman constructed her identity and represented her colonial experience.

The analysis is conducted through a **postcolonial-feminist lens**. This theoretical standpoint guides the interpretation by focusing on the intersection of gender, race, class, and power within the colonial context. It specifically helps in deconstructing the assumption that women's colonial writing is a homogenous body of work, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the heterogeneity in Margaret's and Sylvia's narratives.

Conceptual Framework

The study is structured according to the conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1. The framework operates as a pyramid, moving from a broad theoretical base to a highly specific case study at its apex. This model ensures that the analysis of the specific texts is firmly grounded in the relevant scholarly fields.

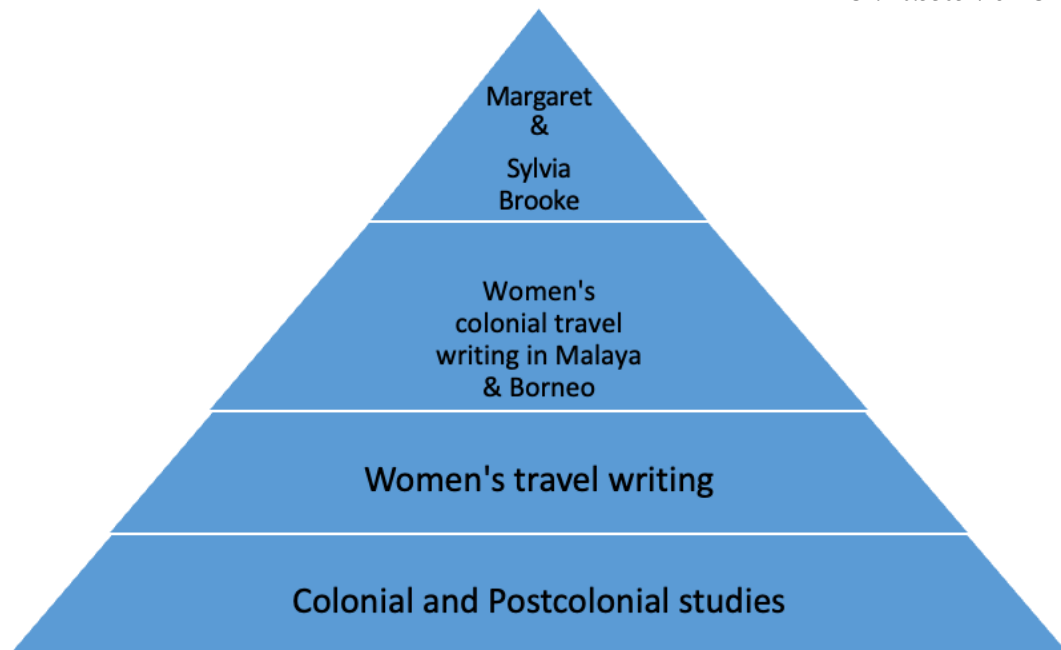


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Level 1: Colonial and Postcolonial Studies:

The foundation of the research lies in the broad field of colonial and postcolonial studies, providing the critical theories (e.g., Orientalism, colonial discourse) needed to understand the power dynamics of the era.

Level 2: Women's Travel Writing:

The focus then narrows to the specific genre of women's travel writing, engaging with scholarly debates about how female authors navigated the conventions of travel literature and imperial representation

Level 3: Women's Colonial Travel Writing in Malaya & Borneo:

The scope is further refined to the specific geo-political context of the Malay Archipelago. This allows the study to incorporate regional histories and scholarship relevant to the Brooke administration in Sarawak.

Level 4: Margaret & Sylvia Brooke:

At the apex are the two specific case studies. The analysis of their autobiographies serves as the primary data through which the broader theoretical concepts are explored and tested.

Sources of Data and Collection Methods

The primary data sources for this research are the two autobiographies:

1. Brooke, M. (1934). *Good Morning and Good Night*. Constable & Co.
2. Brooke, S. (1936). *Sylvia of Sarawak: An Autobiography*. Hutchinson & Co.

These texts were selected due to the authors' unique, shared position as Ranees of Sarawak, which provides a controlled basis for comparison, while their publication within a two-year span minimizes the influence of major temporal shifts. The autobiographical form is ideal as its first-person narrative style offers rich insight into the authors' subjective experiences, ideologies, and emotional responses.

The primary texts were sourced and collected through academic library databases and digital archives. Secondary data sources, including historical records, scholarly articles, and critical theory texts identified in the literature review, were used to contextualize and support the textual analysis.

Data Analysis Process

The data analysis followed a systematic, multi-stage process, which can be visualized in the flow chart below:

Stage 1: Close Reading → Stage 2: Thematic Extraction → Stage 3: Comparative Analysis → Stage 4: Synthesis

1. Close Reading: Each autobiography was read multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of its narrative structure, tone, style, and recurring motifs.
2. Thematic Extraction: Passages from both texts were identified and extracted based on a pre-determined thematic framework. This framework is organized into four sections corresponding to key phases of the colonial experience: "The Arrival," "Settling In," "Social and Community Life," and "Departure." This ensures a fair and systematic comparison across similar aspects of each woman's journey.
3. Comparative Analysis: The extracted excerpts for each theme were placed side-by-side for direct comparison. The analysis focused on identifying divergences and convergences in their representations, paying close attention to word choice, perspective, and the construction of self and the 'Other'.
4. Synthesis: The findings from the comparative analysis were synthesized and interpreted through the postcolonial-feminist lens to answer the core research questions regarding the diversity within women's colonial writing.

Challenges and Limitations of the Study

This study acknowledges several potential challenges and limitations:

- Authenticity and Editorial Influence: The study treats the autobiographies as authentic representations of the authors' views. However, a limitation is the impossibility of knowing the full extent of editorial influence from publishers in the 1930s. The "authentic voice" is, therefore, an interpreted construct based on the final published text.
- Limited Scope: The research is a case study focused on only two authors from a privileged background. Therefore, the findings are not intended to be generalizable to all women's colonial travel writing. The deep focus on two texts provides depth at the expense of breadth.
- Elite Perspective: The primary sources reflect the perspective of the colonial elite. This study is therefore limited to the viewpoint of high-ranking European women and does not represent the experiences of non-elite colonial subjects or the indigenous women of Sarawak, whose voices are largely absent from these texts.

Analysis

This section focuses on analyzing Margaret Brooke's autobiography *Good Morning and Good Night* (1934), divided into four parts: 'The Arrival,' 'Settling In,' 'Social and Community Life,' and 'The Departure.' It explores her initial experiences arriving in Sarawak as a young bride, adjusting to her new role both as a wife and a prominent figure within the colonial community. Margaret portrays herself as a responsible and caring Ranee, close to the native population and particularly supportive of Malay women, though her account remains subjective and self-

justifying. The final part reveals her emotional farewell to Sarawak and candid reflections on the difficulties in her marriage. Throughout, the analysis connects her narrative to key theoretical frameworks, including colonial and postcolonial studies, travel writing, and women's travel writing in the Malaya and Borneo context.

Excerpt 1 (The Arrival)

"How lovely it is, Charlie," I said. "Trees everywhere! And that glorious mountain! Can we go up it someday?" "Better try!" said my husband grimly. "That mountain is called Santubong!" (p. 40).

Analysis 1

Here, Margaret shows her emotion about the things she saw on her journey to Sarawak. However, her husband, Charles, does not share the excitement she has as he always encounter such scenery before. Apart from that, there is a strong sense of Margaret's naivety and lack of knowledge, here, to go with her enthusiasm and curiosity, compared to her husband's experience, his absence of emotion, and knowledgeability. Margaret and Charles are thus distinguished in stereotypically feminine and masculine terms.

Excerpt 2 (Settling In)

However, the sayings and doings of the English society did not interfere with my healthy appetite or cause me sleepless nights. I grew to understand and agree with the Rajah's wish that I should not become too intimate with the English ladies at Kuching. "Let them say what they like," he said, "and don't talk too much," and, following his advice, we all got on very well (p. 51).

Analysis

In this excerpt, once again, Charles has done an action of silencing of Margaret which seems more likely to be a means of maintaining control or power, in which Margaret gives away nothing incriminating about him, but the other women might divulge something of value or benefit to the Rajah about their husbands.

Excerpt 3 (Social and Community Life)

Accordingly, early morning, the Rajah, Mr. Skelton, myself and Ima went on board, where, inside the netting, I felt as though I were a bird in a cage. How lovely! I thought, feeling important and like heroines "about to face danger with a smile on my lips," but, as it behoves me to write and tell no lies, I did not much believe in the danger, although I thoroughly enjoyed the precautions being taken (p. 80).

Analysis

This extract clearly shows that Margaret as a woman longed for some adventure and action in her life. As compared to man, a woman in the colonial time was not to go through any dangerous task. Their role was only to provide for the husband at home and wait for their husband to return home to serve him. Therefore, when Margaret was facing this dangerous situation, she was feeling excited about it without having any scared or anxious feeling.

Excerpt 4 (The Departure)

The Rajah received us at the Astana landing-place, and on the whole his welcome was not enthusiastic. Never mind, I thought, it will be all right by and by. And so it was! My darling

Malay women swarmed up to the house in the afternoon. They patted me affectionately. They cried and I cried, they laugh and so did I. “Come back to us, Rajah Rane,” they said. “Come and live beside us again!” (p. 262).

Analysis

After few years being at England for her recovery process, Margaret came back to Sarawak to meet her husband, at the same time visiting Sarawak which she dearly missed. Her husband gave her rather a cold welcome as she stepped her feet there. However, Margaret was greatly welcomed by the Malay women and it made her forget the sorrow caused by her husband.

This section consists of the analysis for Sylvia of Sarawak (1936) written by Sylvia Leonora Brooke, the second Rane of Sarawak after Margaret Brooke. The division of data analysis will also be in four parts which are ‘The arrival’, ‘Settling In’, ‘Social and Community Life’, and lastly ‘The Departure’

Excerpt 4 (The Arrival)

That was the penalty of marriage with the East. You were obliged to follow your husband or your child. Leonora was then too young to be aware of separation, but as the years went on, which would I choose, Vyner or her? I closed my eyes to the future and deadened my soul to what might have to be. Saying to myself that I could do no good in England, I turned gaily to the novelty of travel. At last, I would see Sarawak, the country that was my husband’s home (p. 165-166).

Analysis

As a woman, it is a must for a wife to follow their husband to the colonial country to provide accompaniment and also to give service in terms of domestic preparation. Therefore, Sylvia had no other way but to follow her husband to Sarawak, even if she had to leave her daughter, Leonora, in someone else’s care in England. Apart from this, Sylvia refers to being married to the ‘East’ as well, not only to Vyner, and that this marriage was considered as a ‘penalty’ to her which reveal the fearful attitude that she had. However, the fearful feeling was covered up by saying that she would close her eyes to the future which brings a more positive attitude that can be attain when she indulges herself in the excitement of travel. However, there is no sense of travelling to Sarawak as the Rajah’s wife in order to ‘do good’ – only to enjoy herself.

Excerpt 5 (Settling In)

A temporary theatre had been erected outside the house round which an enormous crowd had gathered. Once again Oliver and I were forced to sit in bewildered and uncomfortable silence. There is no more awful feeling than being in a country the language of which you are unable to understand. You can laugh and ejaculate, and pretend as much as you like, but the effort of it is not worthy of the result: the soft and somewhat injured look of a Malay to whom you have said you are bored to death when you meant to express gratitude and thanks (p. 174).

Analysis

Being someone who just got to Sarawak for her first time, Sylvia was not feeling good and uncomfortable among the foreign natives. The language barrier has made it difficult for Sylvia to get along with the natives. Apart from that, there was an expression of feminine sensitivity that was shown by Sylvia towards the supposedly injured feelings of the local people, which was caused by the language barrier.

Excerpt 6 (Social and Community Life)

There was no mixed club in Sarawak when I first went out. There was a club for the men, with billiards and bowls and tennis, and then there was a little building clamped to the side of the Rock Road they had christened the “Ladies’ Club.” Here we would sit in the evenings and wait for men, and believe me or not, it was a long, long period of inaction. If a man passed along the road we would rear our heads and try and mesmerise him over the hedge to join us. There were not enough of us to play tennis or bridge, so we were forced to discuss one another and tear one another to shreds... It was simply the fashion in Sarawak to keep away from petticoat influence. If a man was seen talking to a woman he was nominated a “poodle faker,” and if he so much as dared to approach me he was told that he was trying to “get at me” for promotion (p. 201).

Analysis

Being someone who gets to mingle around with the other gender since childhood, Sylvia found it hard to adapt to the atmosphere at Sarawak where men and women did things separately most of the time. It was due to the tradition of the Sarawakians who tend to be serious when comes to dignity due to their religious belief. Sylvia, however, tried to break the tradition by encouraging the people to mingle regardless of their gender.

Excerpt 7 (The Departure)

I have flown to and fro between England and Sarawak three times now, and still I am uncertain how I feel. I love and yet I hate it, I am thrilled at its prospect, and yet I dread its approach. You need health and courage and good nature, because every part of your body and mind are at straining point. And above all you need endurance because the change from the warmth of the East to the cold climate of our English weather is almost more than flesh and blood can stand (p. 277).

Analysis

In this extract, Sylvia was revealing her blended emotion and feeling when she needs stay at Sarawak but at the same time she wanted to be at England where she came from. It can be seen that Sylvia was showing the melodramatic feature of herself when she mentioned the love-hate feeling she had for Sarawak. However, due to her unstable health condition, Sylvia mostly feel that it was very challenging to keep up with the heat of the East and the big change in climate between Sarawak and Europe.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the principal findings derived from the comparative textual analysis of Margaret Brooke’s *Good Morning and Good Night* (1934) and Sylvia Brooke’s *Sylvia of Sarawak* (1936). The analysis was conducted through the thematic framework outlined in the methodology: “The Arrival,” “Settling In,” “Social and Community Life,” and “Departure.” The findings reveal profound differences in how each Ranee constructed her identity, represented her colonial role, and portrayed Sarawak, challenging the notion of a monolithic voice among colonial women writers.

Summary of Comparative Findings

The core divergences in the narratives of Margaret and Sylvia Brooke are summarized in Table 2 below. This table highlights how their differing historical contexts, personal temperaments, and perceptions of the Ranee's role shaped their autobiographical accounts.

Table 2: Comparative Analysis of Key Themes in the Writings of Margaret and Sylvia Brooke

Thematic Area	Margaret Brooke (<i>Good Morning and Good Night</i>)	Sylvia Brooke (<i>Sylvia of Sarawak</i>)
1. The Arrival & First Impressions	Portrays her arrival with a sense of romantic wonder and trepidation. Describes Sarawak as a beautiful but untamed wilderness, reinforcing the trope of the 'exotic' land awaiting benevolent European influence.	Depicts her arrival with theatrical drama and self-focus. Her narrative is more concerned with the personal and social adjustments to her new royal status than with the land itself.
2. Representation of Colonial Life & Duty	Frames her role in terms of maternal duty and partnership in the "civilizing mission." Her narrative emphasizes the establishment of institutions (schools, courts) and her efforts to embody a paternalistic, caring authority.	Presents colonial life as a stage for social performance, courtly intrigue, and personal liberation from the strictures of English society. Her duties are often framed as glamorous or burdensome social obligations rather than a civilizing mission.
3. Portrayal of Self and 'Others'	Constructs her identity as the dutiful consort and "Mother of the people." Her descriptions of indigenous people are often affectionate but condescending, positioning them as simple, childlike subjects in need of guidance (benevolent Othering).	Creates a narrative persona of a modern, rebellious, and complex individual. Indigenous people and the local landscape often serve as an exotic backdrop to her personal story, their agency and complexity largely unexamined.
4. Tone and Narrative Purpose	The tone is earnest, nostalgic, and at times melancholic. The book serves as a memoir to legitimize the early, formative years of Brooke rule and frame her life as one of meaningful sacrifice and purpose.	The tone is cynical, witty, and highly self-conscious. The autobiography functions as a tool for self-fashioning, seeking to establish her own legend as a glamorous and unconventional queen, often at the expense of a deeper political analysis.

Discussion of Main Findings

The comparative analysis yields three main findings that directly address the research questions:

Colonial Ideology is Historically Situated, Not Monolithic: The most significant finding is that the two Ranees reflect two vastly different phases of the colonial project. Margaret's narrative embodies the Victorian-era ideology of paternalism and the "civilizing mission," where colonial rule is justified as a moral duty. In contrast, Sylvia's writing, produced in a later, more

cosmopolitan era, is largely divested of this overt moral purpose. Her narrative reflects a more modern, self-aware colonialism concerned with image, dynasty, and personal experience, indicating a shift in how colonial elites perceived their own roles over time.

Personal Identity Overwrites a Uniform "Female Colonial" Voice: The study finds that individual personality and ambition were paramount in shaping these narratives. Margaret's persona is that of the dutiful, stoic matriarch, whose identity is subsumed by her public role. Sylvia constructs herself as the protagonist of her own drama—a modern, complex woman rebelling against convention. This stark difference demonstrates that the lived experience of being a "colonial woman" was not uniform; rather, it was a space where individual women could negotiate and perform their identities in highly distinct ways.

The Representation of the 'Other' Varies in Style, but Not in Effect: While both women write from a position of white European privilege, their methods of representing the people of Sarawak differ. Margaret employs a gentle, maternalistic condescension, while Sylvia uses the local population and culture as an exotic backdrop for her own adventures. Though the styles differ—one paternalistic, the other self-absorbed—the end result is the same: the indigenous subject is "Othered" and their agency is marginalized. This supports postcolonial critiques of imperial representation while simultaneously highlighting the varied literary strategies used to achieve it.

In conclusion, the findings strongly support the study's central thesis: women's colonial travel writing is not a homogenous genre. Factors such as the specific historical phase of colonialism, class position, and individual temperament are crucial determinants of the narrative, producing richly diverse and often contradictory accounts.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for future research:

Broaden the Scope to Non-Elite Voices: This study focused on two women from the apex of the colonial hierarchy. Future research should actively seek out and analyze the diaries, letters, or memoirs of non-elite European women in Borneo and Malaya, such as missionaries, nurses, or planters' wives. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how class intersected with gender and race in shaping the colonial experience.

Incorporate Indigenous and Local Perspectives: A significant limitation of colonial texts is the absence of indigenous voices. A valuable future study would place the writings of the Ranees in a "contrapuntal analysis" (as termed by Edward Said) alongside indigenous oral histories, local Sarawakian narratives, or post-independence literature to challenge the colonial archive and highlight suppressed perspectives.

Comparative Analysis Across Different Colonial Empires: This study was confined to the unique context of the Brooke Raj. A comparative study analyzing the writings of colonial women in British Borneo against those in Dutch-controlled Indonesia or Spanish-ruled Philippines during similar time periods could reveal how the specific nationality and structure of an empire influenced female literary representation.

Explore Different Literary Genres: This research focused exclusively on autobiography. A future project could compare the autobiographical writings of Margaret or Sylvia Brooke with their other literary outputs, such as fiction, poetry, or official correspondence. This would explore how genre conventions and intended audience shape a writer's voice and representation of colonial life.

Conclusion

This study set out to compare and contrast the memoirs of Margaret Brooke and Sylvia Brooke, two colonial women writers who occupied similar positions as Ranees of Sarawak but wrote from very different perspectives. The findings reveal that although both women experienced the same role within the Brooke dynasty, their narratives diverged significantly. Margaret's memoir reflects a measured and discreet tone, showing her deep engagement with the local community and her attempts to integrate into Sarawakian society. In contrast, Sylvia's writing is bolder, emotionally candid, and more self-assertive, reflecting both her personal temperament and the cultural environment of the early twentieth century.

The analysis further demonstrates how class background, temperament, and historical context shaped each woman's representation of colonial life. Margaret, writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, emphasized loyalty, restraint, and idealized images of her role, aligning with the values of her time. Sylvia, however, wrote within a changing media landscape that encouraged greater self-promotion and emotional openness. These differences highlight that women's colonial writings were not only shaped by gender but also by individual experience, generational shifts, and broader socio-cultural influences.

Finally, the study challenges the long-standing assumption that colonial women writers formed a single, unified narrative. Instead, it demonstrates that their voices were diverse, sometimes conflicting, and shaped by personal as well as historical circumstances. By foregrounding individuality and intra-gender differences, this research argues for a more nuanced understanding of colonial women's writing that moves beyond homogenized interpretations of "white women in empire." Recognizing these complexities allows for richer readings of women's contributions to colonial literature and underscores the importance of situating their works within both personal and historical contexts.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Head of Research Management Center KIAS, Dr Nur Azwani binti Mansor for her exceptional guidance, unwavering encouragement, and invaluable expertise throughout this project. The insightful comments and thoughtful feedback have been instrumental in shaping this research from its initial concept to its final form. This research was made possible by the generous financial support from the Center for Core Studies KIAS. My deepest appreciation also goes to my family and friends for their patience, understanding, and constant encouragement throughout this academic journey. Finally, I am deeply grateful to my colleague Mursyidah Amani binti Mohamed Fadzli for her time, valuable suggestions, and constructive criticism. Her perspectives were crucial for improving the quality and direction of this work. Her intellectual collaboration has created a supportive and inspiring research environment. The friendship and discussions made the long hours during writing much more bearable.

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