

# A masculine housewife with taste

## Austrian traveller Ida Pfeiffer in the Netherlands East Indies (1851-1853)

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### ABSTRACT

In the spring of 1851, Austrian traveller and writer Ida Laura Pfeiffer (1797-1858) embarked on her second trip around the world. Her overseas travels also took her to the Netherlands East Indies (now Indonesia): to Borneo (now Kalimantan), Java, Sumatra, and Celebes (now Sulawesi). She described her experiences in her book *Mijne tweede reis rondom de wereld* (1856b), the Dutch translation of her German book *Meine zweite Weltreise* (1856a, 'My second world tour'). In the last decades, much has been written about the perspective of female travel authors. On the one hand, nineteenth-century Western women travellers were curtailed because of their womanhood, yet they also played a role in the colonial system. While this might have been "different" compared to that of men, they judged the non-white "Other" in equal measure. This article focuses on how Pfeiffer positions herself in her travel texts. Although she adopts elements of the masculine hero narrative, her book also harbours aspects characteristic of her feminine view.

### KEYWORDS

Ida Pfeiffer, travel writing, Netherlands East Indies, colonialism, female travellers.

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## INTRODUCTION

Today, the name Ida Pfeiffer (1797-1858) (Figure 1) will not ring a bell with most people, but, in her own time, she was world-famous.<sup>1</sup> The English writer Henry Davenport Adams (1883: 216) wrote that she would have been as famous as Captain James Cook had she not been a woman. At a time when it was unusual, even inappropriate, for women to travel alone, she visited large parts of the world, from America to India and from Scandinavia to Madagascar. She covered a total of 240,000 kilometres by sea and 32,000 by land. Pfeiffer did not travel for work or religious motives, but because she was driven by an indomitable wanderlust. It is for this reason that she has been characterized as an early tourist (John van Wyhe 2019). The fact that Pfeiffer collected thousands of natural-history specimens along the way, thereby contributing to the scientific developments of her day was of secondary importance to her. However, it did bring her into contact with the German scientist Alexander von Humboldt and Pfeiffer was awarded honorary memberships of several international societies (Van Wyhe 2019: 1-3, 6-7).



Figure 1. Portrait of Ida Pfeiffer (drawing by: C.H.G. Steuerwald, 1845). Collection Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a chapter in my book on travellers in the Netherlands East Indies (Honings 2023: 308-335) but has been expanded for present purposes and embedded in the international debate on Pfeiffer and travel writing. I would like to thank Eli ten Lohuis for the translation of this article.

Ida Pfeiffer was born Ida Laura Reyer in Vienna on 14 October 1797, the daughter of a wealthy textile merchant.<sup>2</sup> She reportedly received the same upbringing as her five brothers. This probably helped her develop her independence of mind. As a child, Ida showed a preference for boys' clothes and toys. When she was thirteen, she had a tutor eleven years her senior who whetted her appetite for travel by telling her stories about distant lands. She fell in love with him, but her parents refused to consent to their marriage on account of his lower social status. In 1819, Ida became acquainted with Mark Anton Pfeiffer, a lawyer from Galician Lemberg (now: Lviv, Ukraine). Despite the twenty-four-year age gap between them, her parents insisted that she accept his proposal. They married in 1820 and settled in Lemberg. The marriage did not turn out a happy one. Mr Pfeiffer ran into financial difficulties, and they had to let their servants go and say goodbye to the comfortable lifestyle to which they had become accustomed. Not long after their wedding, Ida became pregnant, and in 1821 she gave birth to her first child, a son named Alfred. He was followed, a year later, by a daughter, Bertha, who died shortly afterwards. A second son, Oscar, was born in 1824.

The care of her children thwarted Pfeiffer's plans to travel, but in 1842, when her sons were grown up, nothing stood in her way of setting out to venture abroad. Pfeiffer was forty-five at the time, and, although she was aware that not everyone would react positively to her plans, she succumbed to her desire to strike out into the wide world (Gabriele Habinger 2014: 28). She chose the "Holy Land" as her first destination, travelling to Jerusalem via Constantinople (now: Istanbul) (Jennifer Michaels 2013). Nine months later, Pfeiffer returned to Austria via Alexandria and Rome. In 1843 her travel book *Reise einer Wienerin in das heilige Land* (Journey of a Viennese woman to the Holy Land) was published. Originally, the title page merely mentioned her initials; it was not until its fourth edition that the work carried her full name.

The success of her book enabled Pfeiffer to fund a second expedition. In 1845, she spent six months in Iceland and Scandinavia, an account of which she published in her *Reise nach dem skandinavischen Norden und der Insel Island* (1846, Trip to the north of Scandinavia and the island of Iceland). In 1846 she set out on her first world tour, which would last two years and take her to Brazil, Chile, China, Singapore, Ceylon, India, Persia, Russia, and Greece. This resulted in her *Eine Frau fährt um die Welt* (1850, A woman travels around the world).

When Pfeiffer returned home, she allegedly felt like a child who had to go back to school after the summer holidays (Van Wyhe 2019: 119). She was soon making plans for another trip. In 1851 she left for London, where she began her second tour around the world. It was this world tour that also took Pfeiffer to the Netherlands East Indies (now: Indonesia). She wrote about her experiences in *Meine zweite Weltreise* (1856a), which was translated into Dutch that same year as *Mijne tweede reis rondom de wereld* (My second world

<sup>2</sup> On Pfeiffer's life, see Habinger (2014) and Wyhe (2019). I have drawn on these biographical sources for my introduction.

tour) (Figure 2).<sup>3</sup> In the Indies, Pfeiffer contracted the tropical disease that undermined her constitution: malaria. In 1856, she made her last journey, to Mauritius and Madagascar. She again kept a travel diary, but its publication, under the title *Reise nach Madagascar* (1861, *Journey to Madagascar*), she unfortunately did not live to see. Pfeiffer died of liver cancer on 27 October 1858, at the age of sixty-one. She was laid to rest in the St. Marienfriedhof in Vienna. In 1892, many years after her death, her remains were transferred to the Vienna Central Cemetery, where she had been awarded a special grave.



Figure 2. Title page of Ida Pfeiffer's book *Mijne tweede reis rondom de wereld*. Collection Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

#### AN EARLY FEMALE PERSPECTIVE

Pfeiffer was one of the first European women to travel unchaperoned across the Indonesian Archipelago and write about her experiences. In all, she spent eighteen months in the Netherlands East Indies. This places her among the earliest white female travellers in the colony. In those years, relatively few European women lived in the Indies. Until the mid-nineteenth century, the arrival of Dutch women in the colony was not encouraged by the Dutch government. Their presence would create practical problems, colonial

<sup>3</sup> In this article, I use the Dutch version (Pfeiffer 1856b). English translations of quotes from it are mine.

administrators feared: men would work less hard and demand higher wages. The result of this policy was that many Dutchmen in the colony set up a household with a *njai*, an indigenous concubine. European women in the East Indies generally remained in one place, principally Batavia (now: Jakarta), the colony's capital. As it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the first Dutch women explored the Indies Archipelago by themselves, as a European woman travelling through Indonesia in the nineteenth century, Pfeiffer was several decades ahead of her time (Darja de Wever et al. 2003: 17).

In the introduction to her travel book about her second world tour, Pfeiffer emphasizes that she has no literary aspirations: she merely wants to tell in an "unadorned way" what she has seen and experienced along the way (Pfeiffer 1852/1: v). This is a modesty topos that we also encounter in other books by women authors from this period. Marking the Dutch translation of her travel story, the reviewer in the Dutch literary journal *Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen* (1857: 233) remarked that Pfeiffer displayed a "strength of mind and an unyielding will" in the face of difficulties that was rarely seen, even in men. However, Pfeiffer's modesty also shows that she valued the "truly feminine in women", the reviewer claimed. He could therefore praise and recommend her travel diary as pleasant, useful reading.

This reviewer's comments are significant. Pfeiffer's decision to travel by herself was nothing less than a transgression of norms and a violation of the nineteenth-century ideal of womanhood, according to which women's primary duty was in the domestic sphere (Habinger 2014: 51). By embarking on a journey, women left the domestic realm and entered a terrain that many believed was reserved for men and that was associated with adventure, exploration, and masculinity (Carl Thompson 2011: 169). This raises the question of how Pfeiffer represented the colony in her work and how her view compares to that of her male contemporaries. No research has been conducted on the matter to date; adopting a biographical and cultural-historical perspective, existing publications about Pfeiffer have only drawn on her work to tell her life story (Helga Schutte Watt 1991; Mary Somers Heidhues 2004). Only Habinger (2005) has devoted an exploratory article to Pfeiffer's Eurocentric perspective. She pays no specific attention to the Indies, however. Mikko Toivanen's "European travellers in the Dutch East Indies and the transnational politics of imperial knowledge management, 1850-1870" (2019) examines contemporary Dutch reactions to the travel writing of three non-Dutch travellers, including Pfeiffer.

The last decades have seen a renewed interest in Pfeiffer's work from a more critical, postcolonial perspective, analysing Orientalist and colonialist perceptions. In 2012, Jennifer Michaels published an article on "Ida Pfeiffer's travels in the Dutch East Indies and Madagascar". Michaels is particularly interested in Pfeiffer's representation of the Dayaks. The conclusion she reaches is that, although Pfeiffer saw the world through a European lens, she did "not consistently take the position that Europeans are morally and culturally superior to other cultures". On more than one occasion, Pfeiffer is more critical of her fellow Europeans than of indigenous peoples.

Her work might contain representations that are “disconcerting” from today’s perspective, yet:

Viewed within the context of her time, however, she avoids to a large extent the Euro-imperialism evident in much of nineteenth-century travel writing and was less prejudiced and, in many ways, more progressive than many European writers of her time because she did not believe in the superiority of everything European (Michaels 2012: 68, 73).

In 2013, a second article by Michaels about Pfeiffer’s visit to the Holy Land appeared. It examines Pfeiffer’s experiences as a pilgrim through the lens of gender and her representations of the “Other” in relation to nineteenth-century gender expectations. Michaels’s conclusion is that despite being “receptive and accepting of different cultures [Pfeiffer] nevertheless saw these through the eyes of a woman shaped by European, specifically Habsburg, value systems and stereotypes”. Although she was “not directly involved in the colonial expansion of her time, her travel account reflects [...] colonialist and Orientalist discourses”, for example, in the representation of the “native inhabitants”. For example, during her stay in Borneo (Kalimantan, Sarawak, Sabah, and Brunei), she describes the inhabitants almost without exception as dirty and uncivilized. “The Dajakkers, like the Malays, live above a dung heap, in which pigs, dogs, and chickens snuffle around”. The Dajakkers also all look the same to Pfeiffer, and she describes them in ethnographic terms.

In the appearance of the Dajak people, they resemble the Malays. The bridge of their noses is depressed, their nostrils are flared, their mouths are large, their lips are everted and swollen, and their cheekbones protrude. Like the Malays, they file their teeth and paint them black. The expression on their countenance is generally calm and good-natured, although occasionally a bit stupid, which may be partly attributable to the fact that their mouths are always open. (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 63).

However, as Jennifer Michaels in the article “An unusual traveler” demonstrates, Pfeiffer also sometimes revised some of her stereotypes in her travelogues (Michaels 2013: 77-78, 89).

In this article, I choose a different perspective. I would like to find out how Ida Pfeiffer related to the masculine colonial discourse of her day. Much has been written about the perspective of female authors – the “female gaze”. Female travel authors found themselves on the horns of a dilemma. In the words of literary scholar Kristi Siegel (2004: 2): “To get an audience, a woman needed to provide material that was reasonably exciting; to keep an audience, a woman needed to remain a lady”. To what extent did female travel authors adopt elements from the masculine perspective, and to what extent is a different perspective discernible in their work? An important reference point in this respect is Sara Mills’ book *Discourses of difference* (1991), in which she shows that representations in women’s travel texts are more complicated than they were long thought to be: they form a complex tangle of colonial, masculine and feminine elements. On the one hand, women travellers were

curtailed because of their womanhood. On the other, they played active roles in maintaining colonialism. They were “different” yet judged the non-white “Other” in much the same way. However, the extent to which they adopted these roles varies. How did Pfeiffer position herself in her text? To what extent did she adopt elements of the masculine colonial hero narrative and what aspects of her work are characteristic of her feminine view? To answer the latter question, I focus on the role and representation of eating and taste in Pfeiffer’s work.

#### PFEIFFER’S ITINERARY

In 1851 Pfeiffer left Vienna for London on the first stage of her second world trip. She was delighted to board the *Allanadale* on 24 May 1851. On 4 July she crossed the equator, and on 11 August, after seventy-five days at sea, she arrived in the Cape Town roadstead. She spent four weeks in Cape Town.

On 25 September, she sailed for Singapore, where she arrived on 16 November. She then made her way to Sarawak in Borneo, where the Englishman James Brooke ruled as a white rajah.<sup>4</sup> This adventurer, who had helped the Sultan of Brunei in his battle against the Dayaks of Sarawak in North Borneo with his ship and weapons in 1839, was an embarrassment to the Dutch government. To express his gratitude (later he even became an independent monarch) (H.W. van den Doel 1996: 68-69; J.J.P. de Jong 1998: 235), Brooke was appointed Rajah of Sarawak by the Sultan of Brunei. Sarawak, now part of Malaysia, has preserved a special status to this day.

Unfortunately, James Brooke was absent during Pfeiffer’s visit to Borneo, but she was introduced to his cousin, John Brooke, who welcomed her warmly. A visit to Sarawak did not suffice for the adventurous Pfeiffer: she was determined to move through “impenetrable forests and wildernesses” into Borneo’s interior. She travelled inland by water in a *prau*. This took her into areas where no European woman had ever been before. This was not without its hazards, but Pfeiffer’s method, she said, was always to approach the population with confidence and warmth: she shook people’s hands, sat down with them, showed an interest in their activities, and took their children on her lap (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 79, 83).

The indigenous peoples regarded Pfeiffer as something of a curiosity. “From morning to evening I had graciously to consent to being looked at”, she remarked. Pfeiffer’s presence occasionally created uncomfortable situations. Visiting a sultan in Borneo, Pfeiffer writes that she could perceive from his face that he was shy and did not know how to behave towards a European woman. Finally, Pfeiffer arrived in Pontianak, on the west coast of Borneo. It was the first Dutch possession she had ever entered. She dreaded her stay because her image of the Dutch was not positive. “The Dutch are portrayed by many travellers as a cool, unapproachable people, who are only concerned with their own interests” (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 71, 102, 108, 145).

<sup>4</sup> For a description of Pfeiffer’s itinerary, see De Wever (2015) and Somers Heidhues (2004).

Pfeiffer then headed for Batavia, where she arrived on 29 May 1852. The capital of the Indies, about which she had heard so many favourable things, disappointed her, especially when she compared it with Calcutta in India. As a result, nothing would surprise her. In Batavia she visited a number of hospitals and a prison. At the invitation of Governor-General A.J. Duymaer van Twist, Pfeiffer dined in the palace at Buitenzorg (now: Bogor), his country residence, and visited the Botanical Garden with its "beautiful flower beds" (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 154, 156, 165).

On 11 June, Pfeiffer set out for the city of Bandung. She considered it a great honour that the Governor-General had offered to pay for her post horses along the road, as he was not usually so generous. In the Preanger region, Pfeiffer enjoyed the phenomenal views and visited the prosperous coffee plantations. From Bandung, she returned to Buitenzorg. Meanwhile, she had developed a desire to travel to Sumatra. On 8 July, Pfeiffer sailed aboard the *Macassar*. Again, courtesy of the Resident of Batavia, she did not need to pay for the voyage. Five days later she arrived in Padang, then the largest city in Sumatra. From there, Pfeiffer wanted to explore the "Uplands" to meet the Batak people. Now she found herself in areas where no Europeans were to be seen. She marvelled at Sumatra's beauty and mused on the possibilities of exploiting this area more extensively. Its relatively temperate climate would make the island suitable for agriculture, she argued, but to her surprise, the Dutch government did not encourage the settlement of Europeans there. (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 170, 229-230).

On 7 October 1852, Pfeiffer was back in Padang, from where she returned to Java. After a brief stop-over in Batavia, she left for Semarang and then headed for Magelang, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya. After this second stay in Java, she prepared to go to Celebes (now: Sulawesi). On 14 December, she set off towards Makassar but, unable to explore Celebes on account of the rainy season, she went first to the Moluccas. In the vicinity of Ambon, albeit reluctantly, she rented a palanquin, as the roads were too bad to go on horseback. Pfeiffer also visited the Moluccan islands of Ceram, Saparua, and Ternate. Again, her arrival caused surprise among both the indigenous and Dutch people. The commander of Fort Wahai in Ceram assured her that he would have sooner expected the sky to fall than to see her there (Pfeiffer 1856b/2: 13-14, 26).

Finally, Pfeiffer travelled to Celebes, where she visited Manado, Sidengring (Sidenreng), and Makassar, among other places. However, her fragile health soon forced her to return to Java: "To the fever, which has beset me from time to time since my stay in Sumatra, has now been added a kind of swelling or haemangioma on my back, - a result of my arduous journeys and all the exertions in the Moluccas and Celebes." This "greatly frustrated" Pfeiffer's stay in Surabaya. In July 1853, Pfeiffer departed from the Indies with a "sense of wistfulness". Here, she had not only beheld "wonderful nature", but also met new peoples who, despite the dangers, had supplied her with "very pleasant and important observations". Among the Dutch she had met good people, who had invariably supported her with advice and assistance: "As



long as I live, the impressions of this beautiful journey will be erased from my memory no less than the memories of the courtesy and true hospitality of the Dutch." (Pfeiffer 1856b/2: 107, 121-122).

#### A "MALE" PERSPECTIVE

Pfeiffer's travel stories contain characteristics and representations that also feature in contemporary travel accounts by men. For one thing, she repeatedly emphasizes the country's wealth of mineral resources, in much the same way as her male counterparts do. In Borneo, for example, she noticed that ore lay scattered so abundantly over the surface that it was not even necessary to dig mines. During a visit to the island's diamond mines, she marvelled at the amounts that were being mined. She was even presented with a diamond the size of a pinhead. In Java, she visited salt mines and toured coffee plantations (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 66, 126, 287). The "mutual agreement between natural history and European economic and political expansionism" – to quote Mary Louise Pratt (2008: 37) – is also present in Pfeiffer's work.

Equally consistent with the male perspective is Pfeiffer's ethnographic classification of indigenous populations. Of the women of Sumatra, she writes that in terms of beauty "or rather ugliness" they rivalled their "tribal counterparts" in Java and Borneo: "They have the same broad face, the same protruding jaws, the same filed-down, black-painted teeth" (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 203). The colonial racism, animal comparisons, and various "othering strategies" that are typical of nineteenth-century writing also feature in Pfeiffer's text (Mills 1991: 86-89). For instance, many in the indigenous population suffered from "idleness fever" (Pfeiffer 1856b/2: 102). In Batavia, she denounced the fact that the servants of some distinguished European families wore European clothing: "One can hardly imagine what an eccentric sight these dressed-up orangutans produce" (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 156). In Celebes, her servants refused to carry her luggage because she was a woman. Pfeiffer could not let this pass: "I became so angry at this that I gathered all the insults I knew in Malay and Dutch to bring their miserable behaviour firmly to the attention of these beasts" (Pfeiffer 1856b/2: 81).

Again and again, in her text Pfeiffer emphasizes the primitiveness of the populations she encounters. She told indigenous people in the island of Borneo that she caught butterflies to make medicine: "It was necessary to tell them something suited to their powers of their comprehension." Pfeiffer also resembles some male travel authors in that she too repeatedly points out the allegedly violent nature of indigenous peoples and their love of cruel entertainments such as cockfighting. Pfeiffer also believed that Europeans would introduce "benign government" to "uncivilized" regions (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 79, 116, 216).

The most important feature of the masculine perspective is its emphasis on adventure. In many contemporary travel stories, the European traveller presents himself as a colonial hero who finds himself plunged into dangerous situations. In Mill's words (1991: 77): "The adventure hero is the perfect

colonial subject, or at least the perfect colonial male subject.” According to Pratt (2008: 209), the female perspective is different to that of the male. “The masculine heroic discourse of discovery is not readily available for women.” However, this is not true of Pfeiffer’s writing: her work is one big accumulation of adventures. Not for nothing did she hope to emulate the German natural scientist Alexander von Humboldt (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 84).

Pfeiffer found herself in desolate areas not yet or barely mapped by Europeans, sleeping amid the indigenous population. She made her way through tall grass and waded through treacherous swamps. On occasion, fallen tree trunks made the paths inaccessible. Once Pfeiffer fell from a bamboo bridge into a swamp, sinking in up to her shoulders. Her companions had great difficulty freeing her. Dripping wet, she then had an hours-long trek ahead of her (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 94-95, 116). No wonder Pfeiffer was forced to adapt her clothing and footwear to these harsh conditions (see Van Wyhe 2019: 281). In her work, Pfeiffer presents herself as a woman who was in no way concerned with her appearance. In this, she differs from many other female travellers (see Mills 1991: 103). Although she still continued to wear a skirt even in the interiors of Borneo and Sumatra, her appearance was very masculine:

I had [...] a very practical, simple dress. I wore drawers that reached my knees, a skirt and a kabaai. The skirt came down to my ankles, but I put it on during the march and did not take it off again until our day’s journey was done. On my head I wore an excellent bamboo hat from the island of Bali, impervious to rain and sunshine. To ensure complete protection from the sun, I also put a piece of banana leaf on my bare head. As for my footwear, I had to give up stockings and sometimes shoes, as the path often led through pools and swamps. Whoever undertakes such journeys must be dressed like a native. (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 93).

Pfeiffer’s simple clothing was the reason why she did not dare show herself in public, in the theatre in Batavia, for example: “My wardrobe on my travels was seldom arranged in such a way that I could appear in places where the European is seen dressed in all his splendour” (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 162) (Figure 3). From this, we can infer that Pfeiffer was aware of the social norms for clothing. There is no indication in Pfeiffer’s text that her choice of dress could also have been to do with reducing the risk of becoming a victim of sexual assault (see Mills 1991: 102). The only time her clothes were nearly ripped off, the perpetrators were not men, but women. In Sumatra, Pfeiffer stayed at the home of a local rajah. As long as she was surrounded by men, she was fine, but when she was left alone with a group of indigenous women, they insisted that Pfeiffer gave them her clothes. A threatening situation ensued: “I didn’t know how I was going to keep them off me; for to begin with giving would have been the signal for taking by force. I pushed my rucksack behind me, and more than once had to give a woman a push, so that she shot back.” Pfeiffer noted that she felt much safer among men. They might sit “gawking” at her, but otherwise behaved decently (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 253).



Figure 3. Ida Pfeiffer in travel costume, from the fashion magazine *Die Wiener Elegante*. Collection Naturhistorisches Museum Wien, Vienna.

#### IN SEARCH OF DANGER

Masculine also is Pfeiffer's emphasis on how she repeatedly got herself into dangerous situations. The first instance had already taken place in Cape Town, where she was using her butterfly net to capture unusual natural species. One day, when she had caught a snake, she was suddenly besieged by two black women who swore and spat at her, calling her a sorceress they were determined to kill. Fortunately, a chance passer-by came to Pfeiffer's aid. The two women were imprisoned and were given no food other than some "rice water" by way of punishment for four weeks. The voyage and route to the Indonesian Archipelago also posed constant threats and dangers. Pirates were active in many places, Pfeiffer alleges. In the middle of the night, the alarm was raised on board: "Guns, rifles, pistols, sabres, everything was brought up and distributed among the people, the two six-pounders were loaded, and thus equipped we waited for the enemy" (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 38, 45). Fortunately, all ended well and the pirates kept their distance.

In Singapore, Pfeiffer made several treks accompanied by armed guides. This was no luxury: they spotted tiger spoors everywhere. The men shouted and banged their weapons against trees to chase the beasts away. All this, however, did not scare Pfeiffer. One night, on hearing something suspicious,

she jolted awake: "I always had a big knife with me, but that probably would not have helped me much." Pfeiffer realized the danger she was in, especially since criminals had been contracted to work in the neighbourhood. Fortunately, however, nothing appeared to be amiss (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 46-48).

In Borneo, Pfeiffer could not enjoy the views for fear of falling off precipices. The trails were sometimes so slippery that there was nothing for it but to take off her shoes and clamber down barefoot. Pfeiffer had planned to travel from Sarawak to Pontianak across the Sekamiel Mountains. But John Brooke strongly advised against it. "He assured me that the interior was full of wild, largely independent Dayak tribes and that even he, as a man, would not dare undertake that journey. But all objections were fruitless: "I persisted in my decision." In her travelogue, Pfeiffer stresses with some regularity that she was prepared to do things that no man dared to do. She left on 5 January 1852, but the ship ran into a heavy storm, and Pfeiffer writes that she was forced to return to Sarawak. Brooke reiterated that she should abandon her voyage, but Pfeiffer replied that, "although a woman and elderly", she would never allow herself to be swayed by "prejudice and superstition" (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 61-62, 66, 68-70).

Pfeiffer moved intrepidly among the "natives" and "savages", even though she knew that "head-hunters" were active in Borneo. Horrified, she saw dozens of skulls suspended from a wire, their eye sockets filled with shells. One of the tribesmen showed her how the beheading was done: "They cut off the heads from the trunk so neatly that only a very skilled hand can do this. The brains are scooped out of the back of the head with a spoon and thrown away." Frightened Pfeiffer was not, even though she allegedly found herself alone "among such avid lovers of head-cutting". She trusted James Brooke's respected name to protect her even here (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 75, 80).

In Sumatra, too, Pfeiffer sought out danger. She had heard that the "Batakkers" were known to be "cannibals". In 1833, they had killed and eaten two missionaries. She was therefore advised not to risk life and limb, but instead to remain in the safe areas under Dutch rule. But she would not listen. In July 1852 she set out from Padang into the wilderness. Heavy rains had flooded large areas, with the water reaching up to the horses' chests. During the day, Pfeiffer got soaked in the rain; at night she shivered with cold because there was no dry wood for a fire. The horses also presented a hazard: "They stumbled over every stone, fell into every pothole, and seemed to seek out the most decayed places on the bridges to put their feet on." Some were so "unbroken" that they threw her. Pfeiffer claims that she had tried the animals more than many a man ever had (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 193-194, 197, 211, 232, 238).

On one occasion, Pfeiffer was stopped in a Sumatran village by about eighty armed men who looked terribly ferocious. They came at her screaming and ranting, causing her to fear the worst, but she did not for one moment lose her presence of mind and sat down quietly on a stone. Then some "rajahs" appeared, who made it clear that they would beat her to death and eat her if she did not leave: "Their words I did not understand; but their sign language

left me in no doubt; for they pointed at my neck with a knife, at my arms with their teeth, and moved their jaws as if their mouths were already full of my flesh." Pfeiffer realized that it was crucial to make them laugh, "for savages are just like children". At that, she stood up, tapped the first man on his shoulder and, smiling, said to him, half in Malay, half in Batak: "Listen up, little man! You, I can see, will not kill and eat a woman, least of all a woman as old as I am; for this tough flesh would lie a little too heavily in your stomach." The remark proved most effective. The men snorted with laughter: "My fearlessness, my confidence pleased them; I had won the encounter." They assured Pfeiffer that no European had ever approached them who they had not eaten. Only in hindsight did she realise that her life had been hanging by a thread (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 256-257, 261).

#### PAIN, FEAR, AND COMPASSION

The apparent fearlessness that shines through in Pfeiffer's travelogue is, as mentioned before, largely in keeping with the masculine hero and adventure narrative of the nineteenth century. Yet Pfeiffer's text also includes passages that deviate from this. For example, she repeatedly states how tired and exhausted she is: "My pride, however, did not permit me to admit to this weakness." In addition, she regularly complains of pain. Her walks through the spiky grass leave her feet covered in wounds and "pricked by thorns". Every night she had the "natives" remove the splinters from her feet. This hurt so much that she feared she would not be able to continue the next morning (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 226, 240). Such admissions of physical vulnerability do not usually occur in male authors. Moreover, there are several instances in which Pfeiffer owns up to being frightened, notwithstanding her apparent intrepidity. Once, in Borneo, Pfeiffer watched a group of "head-hunters" return to their village with some freshly severed heads. That night, these were hung in the fire. The sight made Pfeiffer shudder:

The desiccated skulls, which clattered against each other during the rather arduous journey, – the indescribable, suffocating stench, spread by the head about to be burnt, – the sight of the people, who were still absolutely overwhelmed with nervous excitement, and were pounding around my bed, after all the fires had already been extinguished – all this made it impossible for me to sleep. I could not lie down any longer, nor did I dare to get up. So, I sat up and thought that any moment I would feel a knife at my throat. (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 81).

It is clear from this last sentence that Pfeiffer was terrified. What is surprising here is not so much her terror as the fact that she writes so openly about it in her book. Such honesty is almost never found in the writings of male authors (see Honings 2023).

Having survived her stay among "head-hunters", Pfeiffer was exposed to new dangers. On one occasion she had to cross a rickety, high, long bamboo bridge over a raging river: "Trembling in all my limbs, I crossed this bridge; the bamboo slats danced under my feet, the railing shuddered under my

hands, and dizzy was the glance I cast on the rushing stream below" (Figure 4). One day she was confronted with a "scene that would certainly have filled the most hardened man with fear". She was travelling down a river when she noticed "a hundred savages, with high, narrow shields, grasping *parangs* [knives] in their hands". The men screamed and made terrifying gestures at her: "My heart trembled in my body". Pfeiffer thought her last hour had dawned, but the scene proved to be a welcoming ritual. "Only someone who has been at death's door can imagine the fear I endured". Pfeiffer remarked. However, she betrayed none of this trepidation to the indigenous people, ever displaying the "greatest cool-headedness". This was the only way, she reasoned, to win some esteem from these "savages" (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 88-89, 120). In her behaviour, then, Pfeiffer conducted herself like a fearless man, but it is in her travelogue that she had the courage to show her fear and vulnerability. Of course, this was also a literary trope in which the reader was invited to share the terrors and the excitement and consequently marvel even more at the Pfeiffer's intrepidity.



Figure 4. A dangerous bamboo bridge in Borneo (Ida Pfeiffer, *Meine zweite Weltreise*, 1856a). Collection Leiden University Libraries.

Likewise deviating from the masculine mode of representation is Pfeiffer's compassion for animals. While other European travel authors also wrote about the cruelties perpetrated by the indigenous people on animals (Honings and Op de Beek 2023), they did not stress these as empathetically (see Mills 1991: 179). In 1852, Pfeiffer travelled the Post Road in Java. Although she expressed enthusiasm for the road and the speed of travel, she felt sorry for the post-horses pulling the carriage. As soon as a mountain loomed, whiplashes and

shouts were used to make the animals pick up their pace. "I felt so sorry for those animals that the enjoyment of the journey was partially lost to me." Although she was assured that the practice was not intended to distress the animals but to ensure that they did not stop halfway up a mountain, Pfeiffer was dismayed: "An association against the abuse of animals would be in order here" (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 177; Bosnak and Honings 2023: 68).

This was not the last time that Pfeiffer expressed her horror at the way animals were treated. In Celebes, she was invited to join a hunting party: "The deer were hunted, caught by dogs, which attacked the poor animals in a gruesome manner and tore the flesh from their bodies, and then finally slaughtered with lances by the people." Sitting next to a local ruler, Pfeiffer had to watch helplessly: "It was a horrible pastime, which I would not like to attend a second time" (Pfeiffer 1856b/2: 102).

#### DOMESTICITY

Female travellers are known for their tendency to put more emphasis on (aspects of) domesticity in their publications than male travellers (Pratt 2008: 210; Mills 1991: 98; Thompson 2011: 194). In Pfeiffer's texts, we find many instances which support this assertion. Whether she is staying with a king or a poor family, on every occasion Pfeiffer shares what their homes and their household furnishings look like. On a visit to an indigenous monarch in Sumatra, she minutely describes the furnishings of the sleeping quarters: "Here one saw beautifully embroidered cushions, inlaid wooden trunks, clean mosquito nets, and three of those enigmatic precious vases." In other homes, she was confronted with far less luxury. In a kampong in Sumatra, the indigenous people lived in "miserable" huts, Pfeiffer observes: "In them, everyone squats on a filthy, torn mat; in a corner, a fire glows, above which an earthenware pot, at most, stands, completing the whole household inventory" (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 92, 221).

In some instances, her description of the houses is fairly positive; in others, she adopts a more condescending tone. The "bamboo huts" in a kampong near Surabaya, which were built closely together on stilts, resembled "snail shells", Pfeiffer states. On Saparua, she marvelled at the Moluccans' dexterity with cutlery, "as if they had been familiar with it from childhood" (Pfeiffer 1856b/2: 38, 108-109). If a place lacked certain facilities, Pfeiffer noted this too. In Borneo, for example, she stayed with a sultan who, to her surprise, had never heard of soap, hair-, or toothbrushes (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 106).

Time and again, Pfeiffer assessed the indigenous living conditions from the perspective of a western housewife bent on order and hygiene. In the neighbourhood of Surabaya, she denounced the custom of throwing refuse into the street. Every evening all was swept up and burnt: "We arrived at the kampong at this unfortunate hour, and could barely make our way through the street because of all the smoke and stench. What might it look like in the rainy season, I wondered, when neither any sweeping nor burning *can* be done!" Pfeiffer got her biggest shock in the kingdom of Tanette in Celebes,

which she was surprised to learn was ruled by women, with a queen on the throne. Nevertheless, the palace was a mess, in Pfeiffer's opinion. The "most woeful disorder" reigned everywhere, and all provisions and household chattels, including a tea service and glasses, were lying scattered around (Pfeiffer 1856b/2: 68-69, 109).

Not only did the palace fail to meet Pfeiffer's western standards of orderliness and cleanliness, she also noticed that the queen rarely washed. Her Majesty took occasional baths in the river, Pfeiffer writes, but came out as filthy as she had gone in, as she merely poured some water over herself. To disguise her alleged lack of hygiene, the queen sprinkled herself with a "fragrant resin". Given the "all-pervading squalor" of the palace and its inhabitants, Pfeiffer thought the caution with which the queen's cup was filled rather excessive. She drank from a chalice into which water was ladled with a special spoon, after it had first been strained through a linen bag (Pfeiffer 1856b/2: 71).

Pfeiffer also writes remarkably frequently about apparel in her travelogue, especially when it deviates from western norms (Mills 1991: 168). When visiting a Sumatran rajah, she remarks: "The sarongs of the women were of heavy silk, and very tastefully and richly embroidered with gold." Simple Batak people, on the other hand, she found "filthy beyond description". "The sarong is never washed, never mended, and never taken off; one wears it until it falls off one's body in shreds." Pfeiffer likewise took a keen interest in the jewellery of non-western women. The wife of a Chinese captain owned "rich clothes, gold jewellery, yes, even diamonds". The queen in Celebes wore "two rows of hollow beads of gold-plated tin" on her chest and shoulders, Pfeiffer recounts, comparable in shape and size to "small hen's eggs" (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 113, 201, 264, 1856b/2: 98).

In addition, Pfeiffer pays close attention to the hairstyles of indigenous women in her travelogue. In the island of Ceram, some "wore their hair up, twisted into a bun", she observed. Others wore a headdress or let their hair "blow about freely, which gives them a wild appearance". In the palace of a prince in Celebes, she made the acquaintance of an "ugly hag", who was so "old, wrinkled and desiccated to a skeleton" that she did not know whether she was the king's mother or grandmother: "Her hair was partly dyed reddish-brown, partly black and grey, and hung down to her shoulders in great disarray, as if she had not seen a comb for weeks" (Pfeiffer 1856b/2: 85).

Mills has noted that, compared to male writers, female travel authors show a great deal of interest in (family) relationships (Mills 1991: 98, 118). Pfeiffer frequently describes marriage rituals and elaborates on how men and women in various areas live together. In Sumatra, she noticed that the women did all the heavy work, including building roads and tending coffee gardens, while the men idled (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 213). Children too attracted Pfeiffer's attention. In the Moluccas, she visited village schools founded by the Dutch, where children learned writing and arithmetic, and sang psalms. In other places, however, she felt children's education left much to be desired.



In Celebes, Pfeiffer looked disapprovingly upon *sirih*-chewing women who neglected their offspring (Pfeiffer 1856b/2: 9, 90). But matters could be worse, she realized. In Sumatra, she observed a woman weaving with an infant on her back:

The child started to cry, and the mother put it to the breast. Perhaps it had been stuffed with a good portion of rice a while ago, because the mother's milk was too much for the child – whatever the reason, a lot of it came back out of its nose and mouth and landed in its mother's lap. She sat down calmly, called a dog, spread the sarong, and let it lick up everything. Then she held out the naked child to him, and the dog also licked him from all sides. Then the child was tied on her back again, and the woman continued her work. (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 265).

This focus on dress, housing, household goods, relationships, and (the raising of) children is characteristic of Pfeiffer's female perspective. In contrast to many other female European travellers in a colonial context (Mills 1991: 98), however, Pfeiffer devotes little or no attention to matters of faith or Christian morality in her texts. These, apparently, interested her less.

#### GOOD TASTE

Research on the female perspective in travel writing has so far had very little to say about the role of taste and tasting. In her book, Mary Louise Pratt focuses mainly on "seeing", on the imperial eyes of the European traveller. In recent decades, attention has also turned to the other senses. What, for instance, is the effect of sounds (Tim Youngs 2019)? How is touch depicted (Sarah Jackson 2019)? In what ways are smells represented (Clare Brant 2019)? And what about taste? Anyone ending up in the tropics had to get used to different eating and drinking customs (Heidi Oberholtzer Lee 2019).

It is clear from her travelogue that Ida Pfeiffer was a taster. Travel texts often contain information about what travellers in the colony ate, and how their food was prepared. What matters here is not what the travellers ate, but how they represented this (Lee 2019: 236). Mills (1991: 99) has pointed out that the female perspective was affected by cookbooks and didactic works on etiquette. However, she does not draw the conclusion that a greater than average emphasis on tasting can be seen as a characteristic of the female gaze. Pfeiffer's travelogue shows that she made constant use of her taste buds on her travels. Again and again, she describes what food she was given and expresses her opinion of any unfamiliar dishes she tasted. Just as she judged the hygienic conditions of the indigenous peoples by the cleanliness requirements of a western housewife, she assessed their food in terms of western cooking standards, which resulted in a sharp distinction between "repulsive" (indigenous food) and "delicious" (European food) in her travelogue.

In Borneo, Pfeiffer was served rice with chicken curry. The sauce had been prepared with coconut oil, which horrified her. Yet, since often she was not given anything else to eat all day, she tried it anyway. If the food was too unpalatable, Pfeiffer pinched her nose and swallowed the dish without tasting

it. In one village, she was welcomed with beautifully coloured pastries. They looked delicious and Pfeiffer was so hungry that she took a bite of one of them. However, the flour with which they had been made turned out to have been mixed with the “fat” (flesh) of kiwanos (*Cucumis metuliferus*, horned melons) and palm sugar. Pfeiffer immediately regretted her impulsiveness: “In order not to offend the good people, who insisted on giving me all manner of titbits, I forced little bits of everything down my throat” (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 80, 90). For the sake of her own safety and out of politeness, Pfeiffer would rather not offend the population when it came to food.

On one occasion, Pfeiffer witnessed how a “Dayakker” (Figure 5) wrung a pigeon’s neck, threw it complete with feathers onto the fire, tore off its head and wings and fed these to a child. He then threw the remains into the fire again, tore it into six pieces and gave these to his other children. To her relief, Pfeiffer did not have to taste any of this. On other occasions, however, she had no choice. Once in Sumatra, a chicken was slaughtered for Pfeiffer, torn into four pieces, and then thrown onto the fire. Even the entrails were removed and eaten. In their “disgusting voracity” the locals put anything alive into their mouths, including worms, beetles and “other filth” (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 85-86, 253-254).



Figure 5. A Dayakker in Borneo (Ida Pfeiffer, *Meine zweite Weltreise*, 1856a). Collection Leiden University Libraries.

In Sumatra, Pfeiffer encountered cannibalism. A rajah told her how and when human flesh was eaten. The population only ate criminals who had been sentenced to death. The person concerned would be tied up and beheaded,

after which their blood was collected and drunk or mixed with rice, like we make "berry juice". Then the corpse was cut into pieces and eaten: "The ears, nose, liver, and soles of the feet are a delicacy for the rajah, who also gets a portion of the torso. They especially enjoy the soles of the feet, the palms of the hands, the head meat, the heart and the liver." They usually roasted the meat first, but did not use any salt. The rajah assured Pfeiffer that human flesh tasted good and that he could eat it every day. Women were excluded from these "dinner parties" (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 217-218).

These representations of the indigenous food culture were meant to illustrate the lack of "civilization" on the part of the indigenous. When Pfeiffer herself did something extraordinary, however, this served an entirely different purpose: to demonstrate her western ingenuity. She emphasizes that, as a westerner, she had a better view of the opportunities presented by the tropical nature than the indigenous populace. On one of her boat trips, the crew caught a metre-long snake. The sailors stripped the skin off the beast and were about to throw the remainder into the sea: "But I urged them not to do this, but to eat the snake instead." The crew members laughed at her; if the meat tasted so good, she should eat it herself. Pfeiffer immediately had a piece of snake meat roasted and then began to eat it. When the sailors saw that she enjoyed it, one after another stepped up to her, until finally there was nothing left of the snake: "It was unanimously decided to eat the rest of the snake, and sailors and soldiers thanked me for my good advice" (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 146-147).

Not only did the quality of the indigenous food leave much to be desired, so did its quantity, Pfeiffer claims. Her stories show that her (western) norm meant a copious meal. The dish she was served in the palace of a king in Celebes, however, was a meagre affair: "They brought me some very small pieces of meat on a couple of saucers, a few sticklebacks or small smelts, and the head and wing tips of a chicken." Elsewhere, the meal was equally disappointing. She was given some small dishes, whose combined contents "would not have overloaded the stomach of an ordinary eater." One contained a sliced hard-boiled egg, another three potatoes, a few slices of gherkin and some onions the size of a "hazelnut" (Pfeiffer 1856b/2: 91, 95). Suddenly, Pfeiffer spotted a tureen:

To this huge soup bowl, I devoted all my attention; my stomach was longingly hoping for boiled chicken or some other delicacy. In this excited anticipation, I put a good portion of rice on my plate, to mix it with the delicious sauce, with the tender chicken meat; but the lid of the tureen was and remained closed. I asked for some salt, to season my rice for now. There – finally the lid opened; they reached for the big ladle and scooped out a thimbleful of salt. I came close to turning into a salt pillar myself with this disappointing heap. (Pfeiffer 1856b/2: 95-96).

Remarkably, Pfeiffer devotes no attention in her travelogue to the dinner at the Governor-General's palace at Buitenzorg, where she was received as a guest of honour. Apparently, it spoke for itself that the meal was excellent. All Pfeiffer notes is that Albertus Jacobus Duymaer van Twist, the Dutch

Governor-General himself, led her to the table and that his wife and he were “benevolent and obliging” (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 166). Nor does Pfeiffer say anything about the dishes she was served at the homes of Dutch residents or assistant residents. She only writes about “repulsive” indigenous food that deviated from Western norms.

Finally, it is notable that Pfeiffer speaks positively about Chinese food. In Borneo, she stayed in a town that was also inhabited by four hundred Chinese people. She admired the large “clean kitchen” and “handsome pigsties”. Unlike the indigenous population of the Indies, the Chinese preferred pork, which even the poorest among them ate two or three times a week. “On the whole, life is much better among the Chinese than (among) the Malays and Dayakkers.” Among them, she was given “good, clean food”. She also liked the eating habits in the Chinese quarter of Surabaya. Wherever she went, Pfeiffer saw neatly laid tables with white tablecloths, glasses, bottles, plates and “good dishes”. The contrast with the indigenous food culture could not have been greater. She was disgusted by how people “let themselves fall on the ground, and stuff large portions of rice boiled in water down their wide throats with their hands”. Pfeiffer was so positive about the Chinese because their cuisine resembled the European more closely. The only thing she frowned on was their preparation of tea. She found it “very bad and bitter” (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 116-117, 1856b/2: 110-111).

#### CRITICISM OF COLONIALISM

Unlike most male travellers in this period, Pfeiffer travelled without a formal brief. She was not a naturalist (although she collected specimens), she had no Christian mission, nor was she entrusted with a governmental position. It was primarily her interest in other peoples and countries and her thirst for adventure that led her to travel. Her outsider position as a woman gave Pfeiffer the opportunity to be more critical and at a remove from the (male) colonial discourse (see Mills 1991: 156; Michaels 2012: 67).

For example, rather than dismiss them outright as barbarians, the “head-hunters” in Borneo made Pfeiffer think. She asked herself whether the Europeans were any better: “Is not every page of our history full of horrors that must raise the hackles even the most insensitive person?” Had westerners not shown their most violent side in the religious wars of previous centuries, at the time of the Inquisition, or during the conquest of the Americas? Had Napoleon not shed the blood of millions? “And even in recent times, while we might (outwardly) be more decent and civilized on the surface, are we therefore any less cruel?”. Pfeiffer’s answer is easy to guess. The halls of the greatest palaces of Europe could be filled with heads that had been “sacrificed” to men’s “tyrannical and self-aggrandizing plans”, she states. Thereupon she launches into a tirade against the westerner who had the audacity to feel superior to “uncivilized” peoples. “Truly, I wonder how any European dares to complain about savages who kill their enemies just as we do, but who may be excused this on the grounds that they are unfamiliar with civilization

and, above all, Christianity, which prescribe and preach gentleness and an abhorrence of bloodshed" (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 75-76).

Pfeiffer also comments on the way in which the "harsh fate" of the indigenous women in Borneo was commented on in Europe. The tone adopted was unjustified in her opinion: "People who talk about this surely do not know what is demanded of a woman in most European countries." In the west one could just as easily see women do gruelling work. Moreover, European women were supposed to do all the kitchen work, take care of any children and work the land. In fact, the lot of the "Dayak women" was enviable, compared to the fate of manual workers in Europe, who work fourteen hours a day in "dank, damp dens, for meagre earnings to stretch their life, which cannot be called a life, from one day to the next, while at best they get to see the sun for a little while on Sundays". Women in Borneo only worked a few hours a day in the fields, did not have to cook, wash, or take care of the children, who went their own way (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 92, 150-151). Pfeiffer's comments are exceptional compared to those of male travellers (Honings 2023) because she not only criticizes the negative aspects of colonialism but the whole idea of western superiority, on which the entire colonial system, including that in the Netherlands East Indies, was founded.

Pfeiffer also disapproved of the opium trade the Dutch conducted in their colony. In the Dutch part of Borneo, especially among its Chinese population, Pfeiffer saw opium addicts who, she thought, presented a hideous sight, incapable of producing a coherent sentence, lying on the ground, pale, hollow-cheeked and trembling. Pfeiffer had no sympathy for the fact that the Dutch were making money from this drug:

It is indeed strange that the governments of Europe should, on the one hand, establish colonies and subjugate countries to [...] expand civilization and Christianity, and, on the other, support their new subjects in vices which are diametrically opposed to the principles of Christianity and the progress of civilization. [...] How can we demand respect for our religion, for our civilization, from the uncivilized nations as long as we see that neither the one nor the other prevents the greediest, the most despicable of acts? (Pfeiffer 1856b/1: 133-134).

Finally, Pfeiffer was critical of the punishments meted out to the indigenous. They received severe corporal punishment for even the smallest transgressions, she observes. For example, she witnessed a man being tied to a pole; he was to receive fifty strokes of the cane on his bare back. When Pfeiffer inquired what offence the man had committed, the Dutch refused to answer her, from which she deduced that something was not right. The Dutch instilled fear into the population with their behaviour: "Those poor people often begin to tremble so much when they are called before officers or officials that they dare not utter a word." This situation was not unique to the Indies: Pfeiffer had witnessed similar practices in British India (Pfeiffer 1856b/2: 16).

As a "simple woman" with "insufficient knowledge", Pfeiffer argued she could and would not judge the Dutch "monopoly system", the colonial

system in general, or the Dutch colonial manner of government. However, she did have a clear opinion on how to treat other people. Unlike male travellers during this period, Pfeiffer rejected the colonial system as a whole:

In my opinion, any kind of coercion is an injustice that should not occur anywhere. [...] I cannot be persuaded that any government has ever taken possession of a country with the charitable aim of making its people happy. The only question has always been: what profit can I make from the country and its inhabitants? England tries to get as much from its overseas possessions as it can; the Spanish, French, et cetera, do likewise; and the Dutch are, of course, no exception to the rule. (Pfeiffer 1856b/2: 59-60).

Pfeiffer was convinced that the indigenous peoples suffered under Dutch colonial rule, although the indigenous forced labour system admittedly also played a part here (Pfeiffer 1856b/2: 60-61). But it was the Dutch who bore the responsibility for the famines in Java. Four years ahead of Eduard Douwes Dekker, better known as his alter ego Multatuli, the author of the famous novel *Max Havelaar* (1860), Pfeiffer was already as highly critical of the same abuses as he was. As a woman, and not employed by the government, she could go a step further in her criticism. She not only pointed out the abuses caused by the system, but even rejected colonialism as such. From what Pfeiffer had observed on her travels, not only in the Netherlands East Indies but also in other countries outside Europe, she was able to claim “that the fate of those peoples who had not come under the rule of the whites was happiest. They could still be exposed to oppression and extortion, but these are not of the same nature as if they lived under the greedy Europeans” (Pfeiffer 1856b/2: 62).

Pfeiffer presented herself as an outsider who had nothing to do with colonialism, conquest, oppression, or the mistreatment of indigenous people. Even so, her presence cannot be termed innocent. She was able to travel across the Indonesian Archipelago thanks to the Dutch government, which received her with all honour: she dined with the Governor-General, was received by officials, and travelled at the expense of the Dutch government. Governor-General Duymaer van Twist was apparently aware of the importance of making a good impression on her; after all, Pfeiffer’s travel texts were widely circulated. He saw her as an ambassador of the Dutch colonial project. And her verdict on the Dutch and the situation in the East Indies was indeed generally favourable. The criticism she voices did not specifically relate to the situation in the Netherlands East Indies, but was levelled against colonialism in general, and was therefore not felt as a threat, especially since it came from a woman. As we have seen, Pfeiffer was an outsider and held no official position in the colonial system, and therefore she posed no threat to the administration in the Netherlands East Indies.

## CONCLUSION

Ida Pfeiffer’s *My second world tour* is unique because it is one of the earliest travel accounts about the Indonesian Archipelago written by a woman. She

spent eighteen months travelling across Borneo, Java, Sumatra, the Moluccas, and Celebes, all the while recording her experiences. In this article, I have tried to hone Pfeiffer's position as a travelling woman in the Netherlands East Indies in the mid-nineteenth century, building on the work of Jennifer Michaels. Michaels has shown that, while Pfeiffer did express colonial views, she also took a more progressive stance. How do my findings compare with Michaels's? I have analysed how Pfeiffer relates to the masculine hero narrative and what aspects of her travel text are characteristic of the female gaze. As we have seen, Pfeiffer reproduces the masculine mode of representation in many ways, especially in terms of the hero or adventure narrative. Again and again, she describes how she fearlessly faced dangerous situations. Nevertheless, her text also contains elements that undermine this image, as when she draws attention to the physical discomforts along the way or emphasizes her fearful moments. Her emotional response to animal abuse represents a similar departure from the typical male manner of representation.

Furthermore, Pfeiffer's text contains such elements as detailed descriptions of (mainly indigenous) dress, furniture, household goods, hairstyles, and children that are clearly in line with the female perspective. That she also frequently writes about (especially unpalatable) indigenous food and dishes, judging eating customs by her western standards can also be counted as a characteristic of her female gaze. In this regard, Pfeiffer's travel stories warrant further research into the representations of taste – a sense that to date has rarely been associated with colonial travel literature by women. This research could tie in with the recent call for more studies into the role and representation of the senses in travel literature.

The most striking aspect of Pfeiffer's work is her criticism of colonialism, as Jennifer Michaels has also noted. But, unlike Michaels, I set out to show that this criticism is related to her womanhood. Even though her own presence in the Indies was not entirely innocent, her outsider position as an Austrian woman, particularly, allowed her to speak out much more sharply than could most male authors of her time. Four years before Multatuli published his highly influential novel *Max Havelaar* (1860), Pfeiffer claimed that the "rule of the whites" had never made people happy. She did not advocate a fairer or better version of colonialism, but opposed colonialism as a system as a whole. One of the first western writers to do so, she conveyed an anti-colonial message. In this, Pfeiffer was extremely progressive.

In the discussion on colonialism in general and Dutch colonialism in particular, Ida Pfeiffer is an important voice. In today's post-colonial era, many are tempted to lump all colonial authors together and dismiss them, but that is not right. Within colonial ideology, there were also individuals who, like Pfeiffer, were critical. Although she also entertained colonial thoughts, she was also opposed to the colonial system and the oppression associated with it. It is important to look at the nuances that can also be found within colonial ideology.

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