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'Kampong Smells', Guna-guna and 'Indigenous Perkaras': The representation of Indonesians in the work of P.A. Daum

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‘Kampong Smells’, Guna-guna and ‘Indigenous Perkaras’

Rick Honings

ABSTRACT

– In the historiography of the Dutch East Indies literature, the image has arisen of P.A. (Paul) Daum (1850–1898) as an author whose work experienced a striking transformation during his stay in the Indies: from a colonial to an anti-colonial author. Where Daum still showed himself an out-and-out colonial at the start of his authorship, he is said to have started to see the Indonesians with very different eyes over the years and finally to think and write about them with more nuance and understanding. This article, that focuses on the representation of Indonesians, argues that here is no such development to be found in Daum’s attitude towards the indigenous people of the colony. To this end, three works by Daum, published over a ten-year period, are analysed: *Uit de suiker in de tabak* (*From Sugar to Tobacco*, 1884), *Goena-goena* (*Guna-guna*, 1887) and *Aboe Bakar* (1894).



KEYWORDS

P.A. Daum; Dutch East Indies literature; colonialism; Indonesians; islam

P.A. (Paul) Daum (1850–1898) ranks as the ‘first major writer of Indies-Dutch letters’, after Multatuli.¹ Though he did not live beyond the age of 48, he wrote ten Indies novels. He was born in The Hague in 1850.² Initially working for the Dutch Railways, he became a journalist with The Hague newspaper *Het Vaderland* in 1878. That same year he was invited to join the editorial board of the Indies paper *De Locomotief*, which was published in Semarang, on Java. Late 1878 he travelled to ‘the East’.

After a four-year stint as an editor for this daily, a new opportunity presented itself to Daum. In 1883 he took over the insolvent newspaper *Het Indisch Vaderland*. His first Indies novel *Uit de suiker in de tabak* (*From Sugar to Tobacco*) was serialized there in 1883 and 1884. Daum would pre-publish all the other novels that he was to write over the next ten years in this format too, under the pseudonym Maurits. Since his works were intended as feuilletons, they were written at great speed. Daum captivated his audience with realistic dialogues and apt characterizations.³ The downside of his ‘feuilletonistic haste’ was that the novels do not always have a tight composition.⁴ And yet, one cannot help but feel admiration for Daum: his works still bear reading, even today in 2020.⁵

After the demise of *Het Indisch Vaderland* Daum moved from Semarang to Batavia, where he became an editor with the newly founded *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, which appeared from 1885. Daum fell seriously ill in the course of 1897. He suffered from a ‘bad liver’, which meant malaria.⁶ In 1898 he returned to the Netherlands. The man who

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The representation of Indonesians in the work of P.A. Daum

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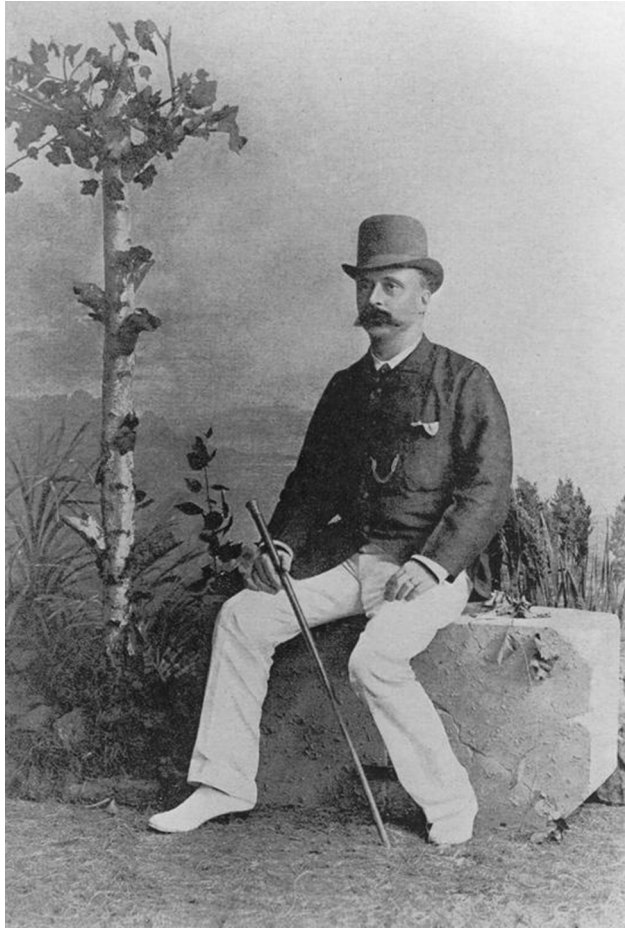


Figure 1. The journalist and author P.A. Daum in the Dutch East Indies, without year. Collection University Library Leiden, Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies, KITLV 502997.

had become so attached to the tropics was never to see the Indies again. He passed away on 14 September 1898.

Daum may by now have acquired a firm place in the canon of Dutch-Indies literature but this position is by no means self-evident. His work found relatively little recognition in the Netherlands during his life.⁷ Notwithstanding two English translations, he has never received international fame.⁸ In Indonesia, Daum's work remains unread and unstudied until today although one of his novels – *Herman van Brakel, Ingenieur B.O. W.* – was serialized in the Malay newspaper *Bintang Betawi* in 1903; it appeared anonymously, which was not unusual in those days.⁹ In 2017, Faruk Sudibyo, who wrote about five Dutch colonial novels including *Guna-guna* by Daum in his doctoral dissertation, noted that Dutch colonial novels tend to be ignored by Indonesian literary scholars: 'It is time to make a critical study to include Dutch literature as part of Indonesian literary studies.'¹⁰ It is a barrier to research that Daum's novels have not been translated into Indonesian so far.

Yet Daum was a representative of the ‘new’ literary trend that opposed the idealistic, edifying literature of the times; not for nothing did he admire the French author Émile Zola. In his preface to *Uit de suiker in de tabak* Daum stated that his book had arisen ‘from aversion to the conventional boarding-school literature that the novel-reading public is presented with’, which was characterized by an ‘untrue’ depiction of ‘people and situations’.¹¹

With Daum’s demise, interest in his work also dwindled. It was not until the 1930s that his writing gained recognition again, thanks, in part, to writers Menno ter Braak and E. du Perron. Next, it was Rob Nieuwenhuys who became the greatest champion of Daum’s oeuvre, writing an essay about him as early as 1939.¹² He devoted a separate chapter to him in his standard reference work on Indies literature *Oost-Indische Spiegel*.¹³ Nieuwenhuys, in his turn, fired Gerard Termorshuizen’s enthusiasm for Daum, thus passing the ‘baton’ to him: Termorshuizen edited Daum’s work and in 1988 received his doctorate from Leiden University for his biographical study *P.A. Daum. Journalist en romancier van tempo doeloe* (P.A. Daum. Journalist and Novelist of Indies Olden Times). Ten years later he oversaw the scholarly, three-volume publication of Daum’s complete works.¹⁴ Since then, Daum has never again been absent from Dutch literary history.¹⁵



Figure 2. Daum with his wife Hendrika Daum-Vink and their five youngest children on the front gallery of Hotel Wisse in Batavia, 1894. Collection University Library Leiden, Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies, KITLV 27643.

Daum's life and works may have received a great deal of attention over the past decades, yet virtually all the books and articles published about him have been written from a biographical and/or cultural-historical perspective. While Edward Said's pioneering study *Orientalism* appeared as early as 1978 and postcolonial studies have since evolved internationally to become a thriving subject area, its impact in the Netherlands has so far remained limited.¹⁶ To date, there have been very few scholars taking a postcolonial approach to Daum's oeuvre.¹⁷ Petra Boudewijn alone has drawn attention to the representation of Indo-Europeans in his books. These are, on the one hand, represented as a threat to the white European at the same time that they also confirm the latter's superiority.¹⁸

Although Said's theoretical insights have been criticized on several points over the years, his work is still a foundational text: it has presented a new, critical way of reading colonial literature. The starting point for this article is another aspect of Daum's work that has received but scant attention: the representation of the Indonesians. Since Gerard Termorshuizen's assigned Daum a permanent place in Dutch literary historiography, the image has arisen of the author experiencing a striking transformation during his stay in the Indies: from a colonial to an anti-colonial author. Where Daum still showed himself an out-and-out colonial at the start of his authorship, he is said – by Termorshuizen – to have started to see the Indonesians with very different eyes over the years and finally to think and write about them with more nuance and understanding. And, Daum allegedly adopted a critical stance towards the 'European as colonizer, particularly in his conduct vis-à-vis the indigenous population'.¹⁹ In an article as late as 2013 Termorshuizen argued that over time, Daum began to see the Indonesian as a 'thinking and feeling human being'. As a logical consequence, Daum criticized 'the individual European's behaviour towards the natives'.²⁰ This process towards an anti-colonial perspective reached, according to Termorshuizen, its completion upon the publication of Daum's final novel *Aboe Bakar*, which Termorshuizen characterizes as a fascinating book because it presents a unique indigenous perspective (with an indigenous main character) and comprises a critical view of European colonialism in general and the role of the Dutch ruler in particular. What makes Daum special, according to Termorshuizen, is that in comparison to other Dutch writers from the era of imperialism his books show sympathy for Islam and contain a critique of the Dutch colonial project in 'the East'.

In this article I would argue that there is no such development to be found in Daum's attitude towards the Indonesians. Contrary to what Termorshuizen thinks, Daum did not adopt an anti-colonial perspective during his years in the Dutch East Indies (1878–1894). To illustrate this, I present a postcolonial analysis of three works by Daum, published over a ten-year period: *Uit de suiker in de tabak* (1884), *Goena-goena. Een geschiedenis van stille kracht (Guna-guna. A history of hidden force)*, 1887) and *Aboe Bakar* (1894). The first is Daum's Indies debut, the second is his best-known (and most frequently reprinted) book while the third is Daum's last novel, of which Termorshuizen has recurrently claimed that, of all his books, it demonstrates his altered, anti-colonial attitude towards the Indonesians best. The reception of Daum's literary work in the daily and weekly newspapers of his time will be left aside; this aspect of his authorship has already received ample attention in the past.²¹ Besides, only relatively few reviews of his novels were published during Daum's life. This article draws attention to Daum's position in the colonial discourse of his time as it focuses on the representation of the Indonesian characters by the implied author in the novels.

Van De Suiker in De Tabak (From Sugar to Tobacco, 1884)

Daum's debut novel was published in instalments in *Het Indisch Vaderland* between 19 December 1883 and 1 July 1884; the book version followed in 1885.²² Adopting a first-person perspective, the novel tells the story of failed student James van Tuyll, who is sent to the Indies], where his uncle Wim has a sugar factory. James himself also ends up 'in sugar', initially as an overseer with Van Heert. There, he becomes involuntarily involved in the cover-up of the death of a European child, murdered by supervisor Versluis. Following Van Heert's death, he starts working for Drossaarts, who also owns a sugar plantation. Around this time the widow Van Heert, out to get him, is particularly troublesome; she upbraids him for refusing her money and tries to foist the murder of the child on him.

During a visit to the Sanders family, James falls in love with the daughter of the house, Héléne. When he is given the opportunity to take over, with his uncle's help, the sugar enterprise owned by Drossaarts, who is about to try his luck 'in tobacco', he is approved as a suitable party for the girl. They marry and settle down near the sugar factory. Soon afterwards, Héléne tries to get James to cultivate tobacco, too; it is said to bring in mountains of gold. Eventually, James gives in: he enters into a partnership with Koorders, who already has a tobacco plantation. Financially, this proves a good choice but Koorders is a bad influence on him. He starts to regularly visit indigenous women in the desa together with this business partner. As a result, his marriage suffers.

After Koorders and his wife have returned from their leave in the Netherlands, it is James and Héléne's turn. Following a short stay there, they head for Paris, where they spend a fortune and James gets caught up in a scandal. Having made friends with a French family who pass themselves off as upper-class, he falls for the charms of their beautiful daughter, Esther. He embarks on a secret affair with her, not realizing that the family is after his money. By the time his affair comes to light, James has put himself in an impossible position. Héléne does not want anything to do with him anymore.

Then, James receives news that business is not going well. He returns to the Indies with Héléne, from whom he is now separated. The situation is beyond repair. At the end of the narrative James heads for the interior of Java, where he accepts a job as a supervisor. He spends his days here, without a European wife, with neither money nor a zest for life, in bitter loneliness, with a *njai* (an indigenous woman whose status is between a housekeeper and a lover) by his side.²³

It should come as no surprise that *Uit de suiker in de tabak* is written from a Western point of view; its focus is on the Dutch world in the Indies, with visits to planters, the Club ('Sociëteit') and European parties. Nowhere in the novel is the Dutch presence called into question; on the contrary, it is represented as part of the natural order of life; there is nothing out of the ordinary for James to try his luck there when he has been sent away from the Netherlands after an indiscretion. The colony is represented as a profit-making area, where business and trade thrive and white people lead a life of luxury. They overindulge, drinking expensive champagne and smoking cigars. The Indies are represented as a land of plenty, where the rules are not as restrictive as in Europe. Fortunes can be made in the Indies in very little time.

What this wealth is a result of – the exploitation of the indigenous population – is not stated explicitly in the novel. Whilst Indonesian labourers do now and then appear in the

novel, the fact that they had to work for the colonial oppressor is presented as a natural given. There is no coercion. They owe it to the Dutch that they have learnt to use and exploit their land more efficiently; they were incapable of doing so of their own accord. Without the Dutch, James argues, the population would be ruled by 'poverty and unsafety'.²⁴ In this way he legitimizes the colonial project.

At no point is the reader allowed insight into the Indonesian characters' thoughts or perceptions; there is an 'exclusive focus of the colonialist narrative'.²⁵ Nowhere in the novel are the Indonesians named and never do they appear as individuals. They are invariably part of groups ('a dozen natives')²⁶ and stripped of their humanity. They are portrayed as mere servants, working as housekeepers and factory hands or plantation labourers. Only excesses of this forced labour are mentioned, in this context signifying examples of bad governance. James hears about a Dutchman who has murdered two slaves, for instance; he learns from his aunt that uncle Wim flogs 'natives' with a stick when they disobey, he finds that Mrs Van Heert uses corporal punishment on servants while he himself canes two Indonesians towards the end of the novel. With these instances, Daum shows how a colonial should *not* behave.

It is striking how Daum systematically projects negative qualities onto Indonesians, as antitheses of the Dutch. Whereas ideal representatives of the latter group are energetic, practical and sensible, the Indonesians are characterized as lazy, slow and stupid. When the Resident, who is portrayed as a kind of Deity, is due to arrive, and the Dutch rush their personnel, it says: 'The native servants were walking back and forth more quickly and did even less than they normally did'. Some hundred pages further down we read: 'Servants were walking back and forth hurriedly, insofar as Javanese servants can be said to hurry'. Besides sluggish and stupid, they are also untrustworthy – they steal like magpies – vengeful and therefore potentially dangerous. They are easily incited by malicious individuals because they lack the (European) ability to think for themselves. James experiences this in person as some Indonesians, incited by Mrs Van Heert, set fire to his house on two occasions. In this situation, the Indonesians' allegedly missing talent for decisive action is also mentioned again. Nobody lends a helping hand: they let him roast 'quietly'.²⁷ Towards the end of the novel, Indonesians set fire to two tobacco barns, with all its consequences.

Indonesian culture is portrayed as inferior in the book. In fact, the book suggests that there is no culture at all, only nature. As much is apparent, for instance, from the scene where James upon his arrival in the Indies looks out of the window and watches 'the magic landscape bathed in brilliant moonlight, from which no other sound rose up than the shrill song of the crickets, the heavy, monotonous croak of the frogs and in the far distance in a desa the full tones of the gamelan'.²⁸ Crickets, frogs and Indonesians fuse together to become a homogenous group, all lumped together; Indonesians are dehumanized.

The book offers an ambiguous portrayal of Indonesian women. On the one hand, they are dirty and filthy, and the very opposite of refined. They do not make suitable marriage partners for the civilized Dutchman. It is not for nothing that the villain of the story, Versluis, is married to the daughter of a desa chief; a respectable European would never go so far. But they do qualify as partners in a sexual relation. Drossaarts is single, but 'owns' and lives together with a *njai*, who remains unnamed. The downside of this

arrangement is that his house is ‘native-like dirty’: the floor is sticky, the food badly prepared, there are hairs in the soup, and plates, dishes, tablecloths and napkins are filthy while unpleasant ‘kampong smells’ waft about the house. This is no accident because, after all, natives are closer to animals, according to the novel. The instance where Drossaart’s *njai* flies into a temper indicates as much: ‘The brown sister did not renounce her dogged nature and brayed and bellowed until Drossaarts lost his, for her certainly loving, patience and threw her out of the room, threatening harshly that she would get twenty with the rattan cane, if she as much as dared open her mouth.’²⁹ This animalization leaves nothing to the reader’s imagination, and nor does Drossaarts’s reaction, putting out his *njai* like a troublesome dog.

On the other hand, indigenous women are occasionally also portrayed as positive but then only in an eroticizing sense. Indigenous women are represented as sex objects. According to James, their ‘yellow complexion’ lets them compete ‘in enchanting beauty with the whitest white’. In the end, he chooses a Dutch wife for the sake of good taste.³⁰ Yet his marriage does not prevent him from still going out into the *desa* in search of erotic adventures. The suggestion is that the Indies lures husbands away from marital fidelity. In this way the ‘East’ paves the way for moral corruption. James, who is described as a negative character, is represented in the book as the opposite of the colonial ideal. It is not for nothing that he ends up with a *njai* in a small village in the interiors of Java, lonely and disillusioned. For the reader he is an example of how a white person should not behave in the colony.

Lastly, *Uit de suiker in de tabak* takes a practical stance towards acculturation: the mixture of Dutch and Indonesian cultures. In contrast to the British colonies, where there was a sharp distinction between European and native, it was not unusual in the Indies to adopt certain customs. The book has Dutch planters walking barefoot, eating rice with sambal and seeing no reason not to go *tandakken* (dance) now and then. Marrying an Indo-European woman also does not present any problems, as uncle Wim and aunt Jet’s marriage demonstrates; it is represented in the most positive terms. But there are limits to acculturation. The greatest danger for the white person in the colony lies in ‘verindischen’, ‘Indiesisation’, over-acculturation. The example of Mrs Van Heert shows how dangerous this can be. This full-blooded European woman becomes addicted to gambling and lowers herself – literally! – to the level of natives: ‘She was sitting on a mat before the door, dicing very amiably with a native woman.’ Eventually, having lost everything, she ends up in the *desa* until she is ‘saved’ by uncle Wim: she may be ‘nasty’, but you cannot leave a European woman ‘to her own devices in the *desa*’.³¹ In the end, she dies in poverty, with nobody mourning her passing.

Goena-goena (Guna-guna, 1887)

Goena-goena appeared in the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* between 16 April and 16 August 1887; the book edition followed in 1889.³² In contrast to *Uit de suiker in de tabak*, this novel has an omniscient narrator. While Indonesians are relegated to the background in Daum’s debut, an indigenous woman gets to play a crucial role in this novel. Its main character is Jean Bronkhorst, who has been a notary in the Indies for twelve years. He is married to Marie. They are well-off and live in a comfortable house that is furnished the European way. All this comes to an end when the next-door Borne family have Betsy and

her husband Den Ekster stay with them. Betsy and her husband do not have a good marriage. So, she is relieved when her husband dies after a short illness. It is never resolved whether Betsy's Indonesian babu, who masters the art of 'guna-guna' (black magic), is guilty of his death.

Given that Betsy is young and beautiful, there are plenty of candidates wishing to marry her, including Indo-European coffee planter Charles Prédier but she rejects him as she has set her sights on the rich and handsome Bronkhorst. The notary, however, is a good and decent man, and although he is fond of Betsy and likes being in her company, he controls himself. Then, she enlists the help of her old Indonesian babu to conquer his heart thus. Using 'indigenous' sorcery and magic, and with the help of one of her sons, she succeeds in making Bronkhorst lose his heart to Betsy.

The indigenous magic spells eventually make Bronkhorst fall head over heels in love, so that he can only think of Betsy and becomes more and more estranged from Marie. In the Indies community, where gossip is the order of the day, Bronkhorst and Betsy's secret relationship gets out very soon. Betsy tries to convince Bronkhorst that he should divorce his wife but Marie is being troublesome. And so, things go from bad to worse: Bronkhorst appears to have lost his mind. Towards the end of the book he is prepared to give up everything for the sake of Betsy, but then the European community steps in. With the help of Betsy's sister Lida and her husband and the Resident and his wife, the spell is broken: they force Betsy to leave and Bronkhorst comes to his senses after a violent delirium. The novel's last sentence is: 'The guna-guna had spent its force.'³³

Much like *Uit de suiker in de tabak*, *Goena-goena* consistently emphasizes the untrustworthiness and uncleanliness of the indigenous population. Indonesians pretend to be loyal and kind-hearted in front of their white 'masters' but in reality, they are malevolent and untruthful. Where hygiene is concerned, they are the very opposite of Europeans. Smells immediately give away the presence of an Indonesian, the narrator claims. A terrible stench permeates houseboy Sidin's room: 'The atmosphere was rotten; it stank of straw mattresses that had never been aired, of the humid mould on floor slabs and walls, of rancid coconut oil and of the mixture of tobacco smoke and the smoke of dry *nipa* leaves.' This representation of 'uncleanliness' is in sharp contrast to the 'cleanliness' of the European household of the Bronkhorst family, which is Marie's responsibility. Not for nothing is it remarked that she wages a fierce battle against the 'native human and insect world' – reducing humans to the level of animals.³⁴

A binary opposition between (Indo-)European and Indonesian is created in other ways too. This is especially clear from the way in which Betsy's babu is portrayed. She has been by Betsy's side since her childhood. In contrast to almost all other Indonesians in Daum's work, she is given a name, Sarinah; a standard name in a great number of Dutch-Indies stories and novels, and therefore in the first place an Eurocentric idea of an Indonesian name. Posing as an exemplary servant before Betsy, she is in truth unreliable and dangerous. Admittedly, she regularly gets to speak in the book (usually after Betsy has spoken first) but the reader is never allowed insight into *her* perceptions and thoughts. Although Betsy has known her all her life, she has always remained a stranger even to her (and, consequently, to the reader). With her black magic, she is unfathomable and frightening to Europeans.³⁵

Betsy's babu is represented in a most negative way. It is recurrently stressed how ugly she is. She looks like a brown witch: old, with long grey hair, a wrinkly face and a

repellent, ‘toothless mouth, red inside from chewing *sirih* (or betel leaves, the habitual chewing of which colours the inner mouth and teeth red), resembling a ‘wide open wound’. Set against Sarinah’s old age and ugliness are Betsy’s youthfulness and beauty: what with her feminine forms and full bosom, she is said to be a feast for the eye. Sarinah’s ‘toothless mouth’ contrasts with Betsy’s beautiful ‘white teeth’. The narrator describes Sarinah as an animal. While this is not stated explicitly anywhere, she is continually perceived as well as treated as a dog. Where Betsy sleeps in her comfortable bed, the babu lies on the floor, snoring on a mat. She does not eat at a table but sits on the floor, using her hands. She invariably adopts a physically low position and makes animal noises: she groans, snarls and growls. Betsy bosses her around and beats her, and on one occasion explicitly calls her a ‘cheeky, old animal’.³⁶

Sarinah’s animality also appears from the fact that she has a ‘Mohammedan’ view on marriage. She has children, by different men, all over Java. Set against this well-nigh animal-like procreative instinct is the sacred, monogamy-based matrimony of the (Indo-)Europeans, entered into on the basis of a healthy mix of ‘mutual affection’ and financial security.³⁷

The book also creates a binary opposition between Bronkhorst (a paragon of civilization) and Sarinah’s son, Ketjil (‘little one’). He is a ‘fat native’, who looks ‘funny’ and watches European women ‘unashamedly’. It is not only his appearance that is unfavourable; his behaviour is too: he wheedles money out of Westerners, is addicted to gambling, a troublemaker and a swindler. He is rude and abusive towards his mother. In addition, he is filthy, slow, lazy and hateful, like all other Indonesians, according to the narrator. On his mother’s instructions he procures the substances with which to put a spell on Bronkhorst but even then, he is only after personal gain. He is not alone in this, incidentally: this goes for every ‘native’, in particular the most pious. On his journey he talks with a *hadji*: someone who has made a pilgrimage to Mecca and is consequently held in high esteem by most Indonesians (ninety percent of the Indonesians were, after all, Muslims). What with his ‘usurer’s servitude’ he is not a jot better than Ketjil, however.³⁸ Here, a theme emerges that Daum is to develop in *Aboe Bakar*: the untrustworthiness and pernicious influence of Islam.

In the course of the narrative Bronkhorst’s character undergoes a radical change. But the change is not of his own making: the ‘guna-guna’ is to blame. In his PhD study Gerard Termorshuizen set out that the topic of black magic is merely of secondary importance in the novel, despite its title; it is primarily part of the *couleur locale*.³⁹ I do not share this conclusion; in fact, I would argue that guna-guna is the novel’s central subject. Black magic is represented as an invisible weapon that the Westerner cannot control. It is a theme frequently found in Indies-Dutch literature, culminating in the well-known novel *De stille kracht* (*The hidden force*, 1900) by Louis Couperus.⁴⁰ In Couperus, guna-guna is the natives’ instrument for disrupting the lives of the Europeans; the Resident Van Oudijck, the main character of Couperus’ novel, is chased away at the end of the book because of black magic but the colonial system as a whole remains intact and is not questioned. In Daum, the guna-guna serves a different function. It is used to pull the West towards the East. In this sense, it poses a threat to the whole colonial system as such and to the superiority of the West in general, which it could undermine. Black magic may cause ‘West’ to change into ‘East’, and European into native, the implied author claims. It functions as the catalyst for ‘Indiesisation’ in the process of

acculturation, enabling an extremely hazardous reversal of norms and standards – as if at a malicious carnival.

In the first part of the book, for instance, Bronkhorst is pictured as the ideal European: he is rational, honest, kind, gallant, energetic, healthy and civilized. Under the influence of *guna-guna*, however, he begins to more and more resemble a ‘native’. This is clear from his behaviour while under its influence. Dismissing Western conjugal ethics, he rushes headlong into an amorous affair with Betsy. He is unconcerned that his behaviour damages his reputation in European circles. He no longer responds rationally, but passionately and ‘nervously’ – characterizations that are brought to bear on the native population. He squanders money.⁴¹ Bronkhorst presents Betsy with a valuable diamond ring as a gift, gives her money and rents a house for her. As another allusion that he is beginning to resemble someone from the indigenous world, Bronkhorst becomes lazy, sluggish and sickly: he no longer does any work, but just sits drowsing, staring blankly into space, dreaming away, capable of nothing.

Finally, the notary becomes insolent, rude as well as violent. The novel establishes a connection between natives, their quarrelsome nature and violence. Blinded by his love for Betsy, Bronkhorst begins to equal a ‘native’. At the zenith of the crisis he is going through, he is rude and harsh towards his own wife: ‘She suddenly felt how he seized her by the shoulders, and with a great thrust pushed her before him into the inner house, where she slipping on the smooth marble would have fallen, if she had not grabbed a portiere.’ Bronkhorst’s thoughts turn violent then: ‘the more murderous the consequences, the better.’⁴²

Betsy also undergoes a transformation. This Indo-European beauty is not a sympathetic character as she colludes with the natives and incites her *babu* to use *guna-guna*. At the start of the book, she is an example of an Indo-European woman who approximates European civilization as closely as possible. Yet she gradually loses this status, as a result of her Eastern blood. At the end of the novel Betsy’s true (Indonesian) self is revealed: she is unreasonable, violent, she screams and shrieks until foaming at the mouth. She is no longer beautiful, but ‘hideous’, very like a monster.⁴³ Her swollen and infected eye is the result of an attempt to calm her down, and vinegar was dripped onto her face. But instead of vinegar, ink was accidentally poured over her.⁴⁴ She is thus literally made black (read: native) in the novel.

Towards the end of the book, she together with her malicious *babu* is expelled from the European community. This breaks the spell of the *guna-guna*. But this is only possible because all Europeans as well as Indo-Europeans – from the Resident and his spouse, Betsy’s sister and her husband to Bronkhorst’s doctor, even – close ranks. Everyone sides with Marie, who is described as a decent, good woman; the narrator also shares their sympathy for her. Thus, they jointly protect the superior West against the dangerous East. This is a survival of the fittest, with the East once more subjected by the West.⁴⁵ The (implicit) moral is that ‘white’ conquers ‘brown’ through solidarity and concerted action.

Aboe Bakar (1894)

Ten years after *Uit de suiker in de tabak*, *Aboe Bakar* was published (1894); the book had been pre-published between 23 May and 4 December 1893 in the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*.⁴⁶ The novel is told by an omniscient narrator. What makes this book special

is that Daum describes the adventures of an indigenous main character here and for the purpose immersed himself in the world of Indonesia.

The reader is introduced to Indo-European John Silver, an ‘unpleasant man’, who lives together with the *njai* Peraq (= silver).⁴⁷ They have three children, one boy and two girls, with a fourth on the way. John is consumed by his hatred of an Arab, who he suspects of seducing his *njai*. That his fears are not wholly unfounded is clear when the child is born, and the boy has an Arab look: ‘Of that hairy monkey’s child with its broad head and coarse bones he could not possibly be the father.’⁴⁸ The child is called Adam. John hates his son and thinks up a cunning act of revenge: when the boy is six, seven years old, he sends him to Batavia to receive a European education. Some years later, he dispatches Adam to the Netherlands to further his education, under the pretence that he has high expectations of the boy. Adam, in turn, does not see his parents all this time, and becomes estranged from them.

In The Hague Adam lives as if he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He successfully courts a girl, Nora Tiele, and gets engaged to her. But then he receives a letter calling him back to the Indies because his father is ill. After a long voyage he returns ‘home’, just in time to see him alive. Some days later is disclosed what his father had kept hidden all these years: he never acknowledged Adam as his son. Apart from not inheriting a thing, Adam also loses his status as a European and now ranks as a ‘native’ before the law. Everyone is astonished, but Adam acquiesces in the situation. His engagement to Nora is broken off. He sets his sights on an Indonesian woman, Minah.

The second part of the novel narrates how Adam fares in his new position. He leaves for Mecca, to return a hadji. He is circumcised, studies the Koran, calls himself Aboe Bakar (a companion of the prophet Mohammed) and takes a second wife, Dailah. He prospers as a cattle trader; he invests his money in real estate. In the course of the story, Aboe Bakar comes more and more under the influence of a *penghulu*: an Islamic spiritual leader. It is at his promptings that he withdraws from his company, sells his houses and moves to the interior to devote himself to Islam. Aboe Bakar is not aware that he is being cheated: the spiritual man is after his money, which he unthinkingly transfers to him. Minah, meanwhile, accumulates gambling debts with the spiritual leader’s wives, who pit her against her husband. In the end she poisons Aboe Bakar, who dies a painful death. It turns out, after his death, that his money has disappeared without a trace. His brother Bram lodges a protest with the Dutch government, which, however, refuses to get involved in ‘dirty indigenous perkaras’.⁴⁹

Gerard Termorshuizen’s enthusiasm for *Aboe Bakar* stems from what he sees as Daum’s choice of an anti-colonial perspective: here, the process in which the colonial Daum has become more critical and has gained more insight into the native population has allegedly come about. As an instance of this, he adduces Adam’s statement in which he calls the Indonesians a ‘poor and oppressed people’: ‘They constantly have to work for others; and everyone always speaks ill of them. They are continuously treated like dogs, and no-one asks, what right he has to treat them thus’.⁵⁰ Termorshuizen also quotes a tirade by Adam’s mother, ranting about ‘kaffirs’, godless Europeans who act as if there were no God and who Allah will certainly cut down to size someday.⁵¹ Daum has portrayed this indigenous woman as a personality and an ‘example of living consciously’ – she is a hero.⁵²

Yet this argument wrongly equates the characters' statements with the author's own views; Termorshuizen seems to have overlooked that the omniscient narrator, who defends the European way of life throughout the book, condemns this sort of statements as 'most peculiar' reasonings.⁵³ Moreover, *Aboe Bakar* is hardly a true description of reality. Since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), the idea is generally accepted among scholars that texts consist of representations of reality and that these representations do not so much reflect reality itself as a mere view on it. This is also true of *Aboe Bakar*: the book offers an orientalist representation of the Indies.

Nowhere does the book's colonial outlook surface more than in the manner in which Adam or Aboe Bakar is represented. According to Termorshuizen, the novel is the 'history of a transformation'.⁵⁴ I would argue, on the other hand, that Daum's – or more specifically: the implied author's – actual aim is to show that Adam/Aboe Bakar remains one and the same person throughout the book – viz. a dumb and thoughtless 'native' – and that no change whatsoever comes about.

As the child of an Indonesian *njai* and an Arab, Adam has not a drop of European blood. This becomes only too clear when he is sent to the Netherlands. His Arab origins have given him physical strength, an excessive growth of hair and a distinguished self-assurance, which commands respect. Yet in contrast to this physical strength is the uncleanliness, showiness, laziness, vacuity and immorality associated with Easterners. The book contains various mirror scenes intended to show who (or rather: what) Adam truly is. When he lives in a rented room in The Hague, the dirtiness of his room is emphasized: it has the 'all-pervading pub stink of cigars and wine'. This corresponds with what both Mecca ('everything narrow, sombre, filthy') and Aboe Bakar's Indies house look like. Even his mother is astonished at the filth.⁵⁵

Adam is lazy, sluggish and indolent in both the Netherlands and the Indies. Despite being given the best possible European education, he makes a bad student: according to his teacher, he is 'physically as strong as he is intellectually weak'. He much prefers to occupy himself with simple matters, not of the mind: going to pubs, drinking alcohol, smoking cigars and buying expensive things. He has no zest for work, keeps no commitments, is incapable of keeping up intellectual conversations. His vacuity also shows in the Indies. When it transpires that he has been disinherited, he does not act. In the narrator's judgement: 'Not an instant did the thought occur to him to fight these circumstances and overcome them in the end.' Even Adam's older brother Bram, who is three-quarters Indonesian himself and no genius either, is surprised at Adam's apathetic attitude: 'The boy does not understand it, he thought, he does not even see how serious this is.'⁵⁶ Bram presumably owes this insight to his little bit of European blood.

Later in the book it is similarly shown that Adam is incapable of great things: he becomes a cattle trader ('not such a difficult business as the trade of the Europeans or Chinese'). Yet he walks around in a stylish gown, wearing a white turban, like a dignified gentleman, just like the *penghulu*, so that they, the narrator says, 'seemed higher creatures, than the few Europeans in their white jackets'. But this is merely a version of the colourful little suit his mother had dressed him in when he was sent to Batavia as a child. The outfit had made him look like a 'big show monkey' to Europeans. Time and time again Adam is shown to be 'inferior', incapable of seeing through situations and people.⁵⁷

Adam may not be a prodigy when it comes to matters of the mind, he is anything but slow when it comes to pleasures of the flesh. Other than Dutch children, he is precocious, as his profuse beard is meant to connote. This he has his hairy father to thank for, who is portrayed as a randy Arab. Just as he seduced Adam's mother, so Adam seduces the girls in The Hague. He leers at them from behind the window in his room and tries to make a date with the virtuous Nora – with obvious ulterior designs. It is thanks to Nora's parents that these are averted.

And in the colony, too Adam is governed by his carnal desires. Not long after his arrival he has already forgotten about Nora; he soon sets his sights on the indigenous Minah, with whom he enjoys himself 'perfectly'. When he is fed up with her, he takes a second wife – pleading that he is only following the Koran. She holds an irresistible attraction for him; he finds it impossible to resist her, however hard he tries. Much the same goes for his drinking; he is incapable of staying off the cognac.

Another characteristic of Adam/Aboe Bakar is his mendacity. In the Netherlands, he deceives Nora's father by making him believe that his father is fabulously rich and that he will inherit a fortune. He is just as unreliable as Aboe Bakar. When he sets off on his pilgrimage to Mecca, he is sorely disappointed by the journey and the holy city: he finds it a miserable place. But he presents himself as a pious Muslim, just for show. Back in the Indies, he tells those in the kampong about all the 'glory' he has experienced in the holy city. In the narrator's judgement: 'He was lying, with a vengeance, without understanding himself that he was lying so.'⁵⁸

Adam is not only a liar but also a coward. He does not dare write Nora that he has been demoted to a 'native'; he simply no longer stays in touch. When, as Aboe Bakar, he travels by ship, he surreptitiously buys a second-class ticket. As soon as it is safe to do so, he joins the 'native deck passengers, mindful of the Koranic promise, that the humble will inherit eternal life', but when there are some unruly European military men on the deck, he uses his ticket to evade them.⁵⁹

Adam's biggest mistake – according to the Eurocentric narrator – is his conversion to Islam. This only happens because he is incapable of independent thought and, consequently, easy to manipulate. The narrator speaks of his 'gentle, compliant nature, his sluggish mind', which allow him to be 'hypnotized', as it were, by Islam. Elsewhere it is said that he was 'not so quick-witted' and not 'smart enough' and therefore easily led. In fact, this is no different from how he was tempted, in the Netherlands, by the European way of life. Just as this lifestyle eventually proved a mere thin 'vener', so his religiosity is merely superficial: it is no more than a façade.

The novel's narrator goes to great lengths to show that the pious Aboe Bakar's belief does not amount to anything. Adam can barely keep his eyes open during the Koran reading. Even though alcohol is forbidden, he cannot stay off the cognac. It is even suggested that he only became a Muslim because of the prospect of the many 'virgins with great black eyes and swelling bosoms' in the hereafter.⁶⁰ The reason why he chooses a second wife is nothing to do with Islam, either; he simply does not find Minah attractive anymore. In short, Islam is a hypocritical religion, the narrator suggests. Even Bram, Adam's brother, warns him not to get carried away by that 'shabby cattle'.⁶¹ Incapable of thinking for himself, Aboe Bakar is a naive boy, to whom the *penghulu* has no trouble transmitting his dangerous Islamic, anti-Western ideas.

The narrator portrays Islam as a danger to colonialism. Natives, like Adam, do not, in principle, present a threat to the Dutch; they belong to the brainless, gullible masses. But when they have dangerous ideas thrust upon them by evil-minded persons, they pose a danger, as *Uit de suiker in de tabak* and *Goena-goena* too showed. Islam is portrayed as a contagious disease, as a virus, in *Aboe Bakar*. It is not for nothing that Adam falls seriously ill after his conversion and circumcision: he suffers from ‘wound fevers’, loses weight, is practically skin and bone, apparently ‘in appearance not half the man he had been’. Worse, he, who had always been calm and peace-loving, becomes aggressive. ‘Living according to the Koran’, he uses violence against his *njai*.

It is with good reason that the spreader of the virus, the *penghulu*, is a sly and untrustworthy figure. He has sneaky ‘little eyes’, ‘bushy’ eyebrows, a wrinkly face, an aquiline nose and a toothless mouth, which imparts something ‘diabolical’ to him. The house where he lives is filthy beyond a Westerner’s imagination; his wives are shabby, immoral and devious. He is the antithesis of the European colonizer’s ideal: he forbids Aboe Bakar to trade, urges him to renounce his possessions and his comfortable life and forbids him to love his own wife. Moreover, he entertains some ultra-reactionary ideas. He opposes the train and the telegraph. His reasoning is, according to the narrator, that technology decreases the natives’ ‘submissiveness’, making them less susceptible to radical views.⁶²

The *penghulu* is a swindler. He pretends to be engaged on pious matters but he is meanwhile busy cheating the gullible Aboe Bakar. Whilst the Koran condemns gambling as sinful, he encourages his wives to dice to make Minah run up debts. Furthermore, they encourage her to start a relationship with another man. The message is clear: Islam is not a real religion, but a dangerous pseudo-religion. Its practitioners are not humans but animals that treat each other as such. Aboe Bakar’s naivety is his fatal flaw: he is murdered by his own wife, Minah. She does not lose any sleep over this, incidentally: blinded by the *penghulu*’s ideology and as a result of her own limited humanity, she feels no remorse for her deed.

Conclusion

In this article I have analysed three Indies novels by P.A. Daum, published over a ten-year period (1884–1894), from a critical, postcolonial perspective, with special focus on the representation of the Indonesian population. Daum’s books were written in a colonial context and from a Eurocentric viewpoint (they originated in a colonial discourse), and were intended for an (Indo-)European audience. It is exactly because Daum’s feuilletons were so popular that they were influential: they not only offered a reflection and representation of colonial reality in the Indies, they also helped shape it.⁶³

In *Uit de suiker in de tabak*, *Goena-goena* and *Aboe Bakar* the indigenous population is systematically and consistently portrayed as being inferior by the implied author – in contrast to the superior Europeans. Only James from Daum’s debut novel does not meet the colonial ideal. He in no way lives up to the ideal colonial identity of the white colonial who is energetic, civilized and moderate that is propagandized by the implied author in Daum’s novels. His character functions as an anti-example.

Though the Europeans in Daum’s books have, of necessity, regular contact with Indonesians, they lack all understanding of or genuine interest in their personality,

culture or vicissitudes. Most Indonesians are not named in Daum's books. Where they do get a name, like Sarinah in *Goena-goena* or Aboe Bakar in the novel of the same name, these are first and foremost the result of Eurocentric ideas about indigenous names. The gap between 'us' and 'them' widens, if anything, over time. In contrast to what Termorshuizen claims, no development towards a deeper sympathy for the indigenous population is discernible in Daum's work. On the contrary, the implied author seems to become even more adamant in his negative views about the Indonesians. Where they remain largely in the background in *Uit de suiker in de tabak*, the implied author emphasizes in *Goena-goena* and *Aboe Bakar* the danger they pose to the Europeans. In the former, black magic is portrayed as a native weapon. It has the power to transform West into East. Indo-Europeans in particular have to be careful not to give in to their 'exotic' blood, like the character Betsy, who is literally blackened in the end. But Europeans too need to make sure they do not become 'Indiesised'.

Aboe Bakar paints a typically orientalist picture of the Easterner. Whilst Daum was influenced by Émile Zola and aspired to an objective narrative style, his narrator is by no means neutral: the implied authors of his novels systematically defend the West. There is no question of the 'native' being accorded any positive characteristics. If the narrator conveys anything, it is that besides being filthy, offensive and immoral, he is incapable of using his mind – since he does not have one. A country populated by brainless masses, open to dangerous ideologies, asks to be colonized, the implicit moral is. Daum's work thus helped promote Dutch imperialism.⁶⁴

This analysis of Daum's works may serve as a case study. While as early as 2012 Elleke Boehmer and Francis Gouda advocated a 'neerlandophone postcolonial studies', the postcolonial approach has, until now, still not seen large-scale adoption across the field of Dutch-Indies letters. Forty-two years since the publication of Said's *Orientalism* it is high time that the history of Dutch-Indies literature was rewritten from a postcolonial perspective.

Notes

1. Termorshuizen, *P.A. Daum*, 16.
2. On the life and works of Daum, see Termorshuizen, *P.A. Daum* and, 'Daum, Paulus Adrianus (1850–1898)'.
3. Cf. Van Zonneveld, "Het Batavia van Daum," 33.
4. Termorshuizen, *P.A. Daum*, 251–2.
5. Cf. Anbeek, *Geschiedenis van de literatuur in Nederland, 1885–1985*, 56.
6. Termorshuizen, *P.A. Daum*, 487.
7. Bel, 'Terug van weggeweest', 1997.
8. The novel *Ups en downs in het Indische leven* (1892) was published in English as: *Ups-and-downs of life in the Indies*, with a preface by E. Beekman: Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987 (2^e ed. 1999).
9. Cf. Maier, 'Echt waar gebeurd', 88.
10. Marwati, "Dutch Colonial Novels Have Close Ties with Colonial Practises"; Unfortunately, Sudibyo's dissertation (in Indonesian) is unavailable. I have not been able to obtain a copy of this work: Sudibyo, *Stereotip yang ambivalen*.
11. Daum, *Verzamelde romans*, 1, 9.
12. Nieuwenhuys, "Maurits, romancier van Tempo Doeloe" later published in Nieuwenhuys, *Tussen twee vaderlanden*, 67–100.

13. Nieuwenhuys, *Oost-Indische Spiegel*, 237–51.
14. It was on this occasion that Termorshuizen, ed., *Rondom Daum* appeared.
15. Cf. Beekman, *Paradijzen van weleer*, 331–94.
16. Said, *Orientalism*; and Cf. Boehmer & De Mul, *The Postcolonial Low Countries*.
17. Cf. Galinowicz, *Mimicry en hybriditeit in koloniale en postkoloniale literatuur*.
18. Boudewijn, ‘Over donkere dochters, Indische dames en ’n blanke lelie’ and “‘You must have inherited this trait from your Eurasian mother’”. See Boudewijn, *Warm bloed*, on the representation of Indo-Europeans in the Dutch East Indies literature from 1860 to the present.
19. Termorshuizen, *P.A. Daum*, 449, 452.
20. Termorshuizen, “Daum, Paulus Adrianus (1850–1898).”
21. Cf. Termorshuizen, *P.A. Daum*; and Bel, “Terug van weggeweest.”
22. Termorshuizen, *P.A. Daum*, 208.
23. Cf. Baay, *De njai*.
24. Daum, *Verzamelde romans*, 308.
25. Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*, 64.
26. Daum, *Verzamelde romans*, 194.
27. *Ibid.*, 1, 17, 51, 117, 168.
28. *Ibid.*, 1, 24.
29. *Ibid.*, 1, 79–80, 128, 139.
30. *Ibid.*, 1, 14.
31. *Ibid.*, 1, 73, 77.
32. Termorshuizen, *P.A. Daum*, 410.
33. Daum, *Verzamelde romans*, 3, 208.
34. *Ibid.*, 3, 16, 98.
35. Cf. Daum *Verzamelde romans*, 3, 34.
36. Daum, *Verzamelde romans*, 3, 69–70, 72.
37. *Ibid.*, 3, 72, 76, 78, 171.
38. *Ibid.*, 3, 183.
39. Termorshuizen, *P.A. Daum*, 412–413, 418.
40. Cf. Bel, *Bloed en rozen*, 274.
41. Daum, *Verzamelde romans*, 3, 177.
42. *Ibid.*, 3, 190, 195.
43. *Ibid.*, 3, 199–201.
44. In his preface to a reprint of *Goena-goena*, E. du Perron remarked about this scene that he did not think it had been meant as humorous so much as meaningful: see Du Perron, *Verzamelde werk* 7, 137.
45. Cf. Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*, 77.
46. Termorshuizen, *P.A. Daum*, 442.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Daum, *Verzamelde romans*, 3, 776.
49. *Ibid.*, 3, 945.
50. Termorshuizen, *P.A. Daum*, 449–452.
51. Daum, *Verzamelde romans* 3, 847–848, 862–864, 886. Cf. Bel, *Bloed en rozen*, 277.
52. Termorshuizen, *P.A. Daum*, 450. Also see Termorshuizen, ‘Van hoer tot heldin’, 109.
53. Daum, *Verzamelde romans*, 3, 860, 848.
54. Termorshuizen, *P.A. Daum*, 443.
55. Daum, *Verzamelde romans*, 3, 801, 872, 884.
56. *Ibid.*, 3, 793, 827, 838.
57. *Ibid.*, 3, 782, 874, 897–8, 910.
58. *Ibid.*, 3, 870–3.
59. *Ibid.*, 3, 877.
60. *Ibid.*, 3, 855, 891, 908–9, 918.
61. *Ibid.*, 3, 859.

62. Ibid., 3, 917.
 63. Cf. Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*, 5, 13–14.
 64. Ibid., 75.

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