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Dangerous Liaisons and other Tales from the Twilight Zone: Sex, Race, and Sorcery in Colonial Java

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I have only once seen witchcraft on its path. I had been sitting late in my hut writing notes. About midnight, before retiring, I took a spear and went for my usual nocturnal stroll. I was walking in the garden at the back of my hut, amongst banana trees, when I noticed a bright light passing at the back of my servants' huts towards the homestead of a man called Tupoi. As this seemed worth investigation I followed its passage until a grass screen obscured the view. I ran quickly through my hut to the other side in order to see where the light was going to, but did not regain sight of it. I knew that only one man, a member of my household, had a lamp that might have given off so bright a light, but next morning he told me that he had neither been out late at night nor had he used his lamp. There did not lack ready informants to tell me that what I had seen was witchcraft. Shortly afterwards, on the same morning, an old relative of Tupoi and an inmate of his homestead died. This event fully explained the light I had seen. I never discovered its real origin, which was possibly a handful of grass lit by some one on his way to defecate, but the coincidence of the direction along which the light moved and the subsequent death accorded well with Zande ideas (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 34).

In this extraordinary paragraph, Evans-Pritchard entices readers into sharing a field experience of witchcraft as an element of everyday life by drawing on narrative conventions of spooky tales of the supernatural. Yet after presenting witchcraft as ontologically real, he abruptly shifts discursive gears, explaining away what he saw while demoting witchcraft from a materially efficacious practice that occasionally can be observed in action to a "Zande idea" that does not correspond to facts of nature. It was not witchcraft but a fluke; with that, the incident is explained and dismissed. After conjuring a world in

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which witchcraft exists, he exorcises it with words such as "real" and "coincidence."

Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande is probably the most famous study of magic ever published. Heralded for his breathtakingly provocative challenges to epistemology, Evans-Pritchard was a skilled contributor to the new genre of ethnography, which brought stylistic features from other genres that recounted personal experience to bear on the description and analysis of "primitives," then under colonial rule. Yet paragraphs such as this one reveal tensions in such blurring of genres, and the limits of relativist anthropology. This is only one of several passages where Evans-Pritchard engages in an iconoclastic "ontological politics" (Latour 2002; Mol 2002), transforming Zande entities into mere (and mistaken) ideas and explaining away things he saw or Azande said. Throughout the text, Europeans and natives remain socially and epistemologically distinct, a position reinforced by repeated use of the pronoun "we" to distinguish Zande ideas and practices from those Evans-Pritchard shares with his readers. If it were only a matter of asserting a difference, such a writing practice would not be pernicious. But his explanations are meant to trump those of the Azande. Like others of his time, Evans-Pritchard assumed that he knew more than those he described. For all that his work troubles assertions about Africans as irrational, in the end it confirms European superiority. Because of their upbringing, habits, and culture, the Azande believe in magic. Educated Europeans know better: *their* culture is shaped by science, which provides access to reality.

But even as Evans-Pritchard assured readers that witchcraft was a matter of native belief, others offered rather different assessments. In newspapers and magazines, novels and travelogues, reminiscences and essays, in conversations at colonial clubs and on verandahs and in casual encounters aboard ships and in hotels, stories were told of Europeans bewitched or bested by native magicians. In these accounts, European witnesses do not try to explain away what they saw or heard; commonly, skeptics end up believers or victims (sometimes both). Contrary to the impression conveyed by anthropologists, not only credulous natives but doubting Europeans could be susceptible to witchcraft. Magic spilled across racial and cultural divides into the lives of Europeans.

I first came across such material by chance, in a book published a year prior to *Witchcraft* by another Englishman, Geoffrey Gorer.[1] Smack in the middle of a travelogue about Southeast Asia, Gorer reports an encounter with a German badly shaken by an up-close and personal experience of sorcery in the

[1] Anthropologists know Gorer as the author of a staid monograph on the Lepcha of Sikkim and several studies of national character. At this time, however, he was an aspiring popular writer with bohemian tastes, with books on the Marquis de Sade and a trip to West Africa. He turned to anthropology after his return from Southeast Asia, when a major in the Gurkha Rifles who had read his Africa book invited him to spend a year in Sikkim. To prepare, he briefly studied with Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead (Gorer 1938).

Netherlands Indies. When you know to look for them, anecdotes of this sort pop up everywhere. They range from a shrewd district officer's candid bafflement about a haunted rest house in colonial Nigeria (Hives 1930), to a tale of tribal revenge via witchcraft on a rapacious capitalist in French West Africa (Seabrook 1940); from an account of a district officer in Fiji bested by a native magician (Forbes 1919), to stories about the voodoo sacrifice of American soldiers during the occupation of Haiti (Seabrook 1929).

Since authorities commonly dismissed popular materials of this kind as sensational, it is not surprising that they have received little scholarly attention. Postcolonial critics have, however, tackled fiction with similar themes, as in Low's (1996) perspicacious analysis of the "colonial uncanny" in Kipling's tales of India, and Brantlinger's (1988) discussion of the rise of "imperial gothic" in works by Kipling, Conrad, and H. Rider Haggard. These charismatic characterizations wed traditions of eerie imaginative writing (and explanations of their psychological effects) to the sociopolitical relations of colonialism. Although they are writing about fiction, since much postcolonial critique insists on the imaginary quality of colonial texts in general there is no reason their analyses cannot be extended beyond literary texts.

Such work moves beyond anthropology's focus on native belief. But analyzing deluded Europeans rather than credulous natives still situates these materials under the sign of the fantastic, highlighting the judgment of unreality underpinning Evans-Pritchard's brusque swerve to explanation. Moreover, these materials tell attentive readers about much more than the dream life of Europeans. While these texts clearly are shaped by their European tellers, and share characteristic plot lines, figures, and storytelling techniques with literary kin, European projections and narrative conventions only account in part for what they say. Crucial specificities mark tales of magic produced in and about particular places. Stories told in or about China or India are not the same as those told in or about the Amazon: the relevant actors, technologies, social relations, and colonial politics clearly differ. In short, they bear the traces of many agents. As well they should: elements of the quotidian texture of a shared colonial experience, they originated in the folds of entwined lives. They make their way into metropolitan literature only after being routed through rumor into congeries of text.

Such narratives open numerous zones of colonial engagement to inspection and reflection. They highlight transactions that have no place in judicial, administrative, and ethnological concerns with objects, activities, and talk identified as purely "native." But these stories do more than reveal the continual mediation that characterized colonialism on the ground—they underscore the ontological risks at stake in colonial encounters. If popular writers understood little about 'the native point of view' they also were unconstrained by injunctions to explain. Tales of magic, written in the register of what Taussig (1987) calls "epistemic murk," insinuated that reality was less stable and borders more permeable

than learned discourse and colonial politics officially acknowledged. While bewitched Europeans had no place in developing genres such as scientific articles and administrative reports, they challenge the structures these sought to assemble. Such materials trouble political and epistemological hierarchies, not least because of their capacity to invade psyches supposedly resistant to them.

Rather than mining such materials for what they reveal about native beliefs or European imaginations, or revealing the "truth" they conceal, I propose a different optic. This article brings anthropology's interest in magic as an analytical object into dialogue with studies of colonial societies and of the making of scientific facts. The anthropology of magic clearly developed in relation to colonizing processes. As a description of the mentality of certain groups under colonial rule, magic simultaneously marked the difference between rational Europeans and subject populations and justified forms of intervention. Yet literature on colonialism (e.g., Stoler 1995; Stoler and Cooper 1997; Bhabha 1994) shows that constant work was required in colonial societies to produce such neat distinctions between European and native, or even to maintain a properly European identity with the appropriate forms of subjectivity, including (as I will show) skepticism about magic.

In turn, ethnographic and historical studies of scientific practice challenge simple divisions between a pre-existent and stable nature, as the isolable object of suitably scientific knowledge, and culture, a skein of false beliefs, by attending to the material practices that make things real. In particular, studies that focus attention on the emergence of entities, on their stabilization by extensions of networks of human and nonhuman actors, on the resemblance between facts and fetishes (Latour 1987; 1993; 1999; 2006; Mol 2002; Pickering 1995) are particularly relevant to re-thinking both the practices that came to be labeled "magic" and the formation of magic as a scholarly and popular object.

Thus, studies of colonialism and science have in common an emphasis on the messy hybridity of practice, which belies continual ideological efforts to produce clear divides. I fuse these insights in linking conceptual differentiations between magic and science to the racial divisions of colonial rule. At the same time, I bring to the anthropology of magic an historical and critical perspective on the category itself. Rather than existing as a stable transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon, I argue that magic was produced through translation in colonial encounters.

I address only one colonial arena that yielded tales of magic: that portion of "the mysterious East" known as the Dutch East Indies. Taking as my point of departure the conversation reported by Gorer, I focus on a genre I call *guna-guna* tales.[2] Tales similar to the one told by Gorer's interlocutor had circulated

[2] For that matter, I focus here on only one genre of such stories in the Indies. For others, and for relations among them, see Wiener 2003 and n.d.

for some time among Europeans living in the region. Typically, the victim is a European man, secure in his understanding of the world; the instigator is a Javanese or Eurasian woman out to ensnare him or seeking retaliation after being tossed aside. Stories about intermixed people and their intermixed desires, they are an offspring of mixed-race relationships in colonial Java, the jewel in the Dutch colonial crown.

How did such stories emerge and gain traction? What experiences did they speak to, and what work did they do? Who told such stories, and why? What responses did they elicit? To answer such questions I trace the production of *guna-guna* as a matter of concern from the 1880s through the 1930s, addressing its appeal to various parties within the Indies and beyond. I also examine efforts by a few officials and ethnologists to tackle the topic of *guna-guna*. As will become evident, *guna-guna* stories are intensely dialogic: narratives report and imagine conversations, and address other texts. In following these narratives over time we also can see magic emerge as a complex boundary object (Bowker and Star 1999), simultaneously a site of discipline, danger, derision, and desire.

Gorer's story, however, is more than a token of a type. Apart from being singularly uncanny, it offers an exemplary clarification of the moral, political, conceptual, and ontological issues at stake. Atypically for the genre, it forefronts race, and explicitly joins colonial racism to the problematic of magic. More broadly, compromised categories and destabilized differences permeate both the tale and its telling. This story instantiates a critique of the kind of sorting of realities and people Evans-Pritchard and his followers did so well. Indeed, it shows such sorting to be fundamentally impossible.

LET'S BEGIN WITH A STORY...

It was a balmy night in 1935, on a steamer from Batavia to Singapore. Geoffrey Gorer had come on deck to enjoy the sea breeze. Suddenly he realized that he was not alone. Only yards away stood a fellow passenger, a mysterious German named Muller. Muller had refused the usual shipboard conviviality to a marked degree. He had emerged from his quarters only at meals, which he ate with his eyes locked on his newspaper. Such behavior had aroused Gorer's curiosity. Crewmembers had told him Muller would be traveling all the way to Europe, the steamer's sole passenger to Amsterdam.

Muller obviously was in great distress; tears rolled down his cheeks. When Gorer asked what was wrong he replied, brokenly, that he was terribly lonely. But when Gorer invited him inside for a drink, Muller let loose a stream of invective against the crew. He was returning to Europe to get away from Asians. For five years, he had been forced to spend his time surrounded by their "brown faces." It was enough to drive one mad. He even dreamed of them.

And with that, Muller began his tale. In happier days, he had helped his uncle run a hotel in Berlin, until financial woes led to his uncle's suicide. Muller then

parleyed his local knowledge into a precarious living, leading tours of Berlin's nightlife. In this way he met Jan, a wealthy Indies rubber planter who took a fatherly interest in him and offered him a job. Muller had no desire to leave Berlin, but Jan left passage with a shipping agent in case he changed his mind. When the economy continued to slide downwards, Muller headed to Java. But by then the Depression had affected Jan as well and he had no work to offer. Stuck in Java, Muller eventually found a post supervising the native staff in a hotel near Batavia, the colonial capital.

There life proved unbearably lonely. He could not fraternize with guests and he would not with the staff. Eventually, he became involved with a Eurasian woman named Anna. Anna considered herself European, but as her Dutch father had never acknowledged her she was legally a native; Muller certainly regarded her as such. She lived with her Javanese mother and uncle, whom Muller described as "'a thoroughly disreputable old fellow, who made a living by doctoring the sillier natives and giving them amulets and love philters . . . . I thought he was an old rogue and let him see it'" (Gorer 1936: 121).

Muller soon found himself supporting not only Anna but also her family. Still, he was content with the arrangement until Anna announced that she was pregnant and insisted that he marry her. He refused, but did offer to acknowledge paternity and continue supporting her. Anna, however, was determined that her child be legitimate. So incessantly did they quarrel that Muller refused to see her. But she made embarrassing scenes at his hotel until he called the police.

With that Anna stopped contacting him, but her uncle began dogging his steps. One day, when Muller was at the barber, the uncle dashed in and grabbed a lock of his hair. Not long after, on a rainy day, he materialized to scrape up a patch of mud where Muller had stepped. This alarmed a Javanese waiter at the hotel, who urged Muller to leave town before the man could make a spell, or at least to seek protection from a *dukun* (healer/magician). But, Muller told Gorer, "'Of course I couldn't do a thing like that; everybody would know about it, and my position would become impossible. And, anyhow, I didn't believe he could do anything except perhaps poison me; and I took good care not to eat anything which I hadn't seen others already eat'" (123).

Time passed. Then Muller received a letter from Anna. She admitted she had been unreasonable, but as the baby was nearly due would he come see her? At first Muller tossed it aside. But she was, after all, the only person with whom he had any intimacy, and, he confided to Gorer, not bad for a Malay. On his next evening off he dropped by.

Anna and her mother fussed over him, and prepared a feast. (Muller, still cautious, only ate what they ate first.) Everything was fine, until, dinner ended, Anna again raised the question of marriage. At first cajoling, she then began to threaten him, and he headed for the door. Throwing herself before him, Anna grabbed his legs, demanding that he explain his refusal. After all, he had liked her enough to spend two years with her, and she swore she

would take good care of him. Muller, thoroughly annoyed, said that if she had to know he would tell her—she was a Malay, and he didn't want to spend his life with someone of her color. She became furious, and swore that he wouldn't marry anybody of a different color, adding, "you won't see anybody who looks a different colour!" She then bit his hand. Muller wrenched free and left.

The next morning, he was minding the front desk at the hotel when Anna walked up. Furious, Muller shouted at her to leave or he would call the police, but she responded with astonishment and in English, a language Anna did not know. Then up walked Anna's uncle, who berated Muller, also in English, for frightening his wife. Baffled, Muller recognized the voices of a British couple staying at the hotel, and apologized. At noon he went to the hotel dining room, and was stunned by what he saw: "'Every table was occupied by Annas and her uncles. Every white woman I saw looked like Anna, every white man like her uncle. It was horrible, and what was worse, I couldn't do my work properly any more; when all the clients looked the same I never knew which were speaking to me'" (Gorer 1936: 126).

The local (Dutch) doctor thought at first he was joking, and when he realized he was not recommended that he wear dark glasses. The staff guessed something was up, however, and the Javanese waiter again urged him to see a *dukun*. Muller, who by now hated Javanese, and could not accept that he had been bewitched, refused. But finally he could take no more, and agreed to a consultation.

After hearing his symptoms, the *dukun* confirmed that Muller had been ensorcelled. He suggested that he marry Anna, since that would end the spell, but Muller refused. In that case, if Muller could bring him a lock of Anna's hair, some nail parings, and a drop of her blood, the *dukun* would work a counter-spell. Muller told Gorer: "But we're in the twentieth century; I can't go about picking up other people's nail-clippings, even if she'd give me the chance, which wasn't likely; and apparently it wasn't any good if anyone else did it. So the magician said he couldn't help me. But as I was going away he added: 'It won't travel over water'" (1936: 127).

Muller held out as long as he could but finally decided to return home. If distance did not work, a psychoanalyst might. In the meantime, he avoided looking at anyone. When Gorer protested that he had been looking at him, Muller responded that Gorer's back was against the light, which obscured his features. Gorer concludes: "I didn't reply, but lit a match so that the flare lit up both our faces. After that I went back to my cabin, for the expression on his face showed clearly enough how mine had appeared to him" (1936: 127).

RACIAL AND SEXUAL POLITICS IN COLONIAL JAVA

The first generation of scholars influenced by Evans-Pritchard mainly drew from his work a sociological insight: accusations of sorcery reveal a society's stress lines. This is a useful starting point. In the case of *guna-guna*, the

pertinent relationships were those between European men and Indonesian or Eurasian women, as these were affected by the evolving sexual and racial politics of colonialism in Java.

Dutch involvement in Java began when the East India Company established headquarters on its northwest coast in the seventeenth century at a place they called "Batavia." When the Company declared bankruptcy in 1799, its assets devolved to the Dutch government. Barring a brief interregnum (1811–1815) during which the British East India Company conquered Java to keep it out of Napoleon's hands, the island formed the core of a colonial state known as the Netherlands Indies. This empire began to dissolve in 1942 with the Japanese occupation; the Netherlands officially acknowledged Indonesian independence in 1950.

Mixed-race relationships on Java dated from Batavia's founding. Since the Company preferred to hire bachelors, opposed immigration by European women, and forbade marriages to non-Christians, the men it recruited as merchants and soldiers commonly established relationships with *nyai*, Indonesian women who kept their houses and shared their beds. (Ambitious men often married mestizo daughters of the rich and powerful.) This resulted in a novel cultural formation. While Company employees dressed Dutch and remained nominally Christian, their public and private lives incorporated Indonesian practices; most colonial households were more Asian than European (Taylor 1983).

Of the many features of this blended colonizer culture that lingered even as Java passed into Dutch control, this domestic pattern proved especially durable. Old colonial hands counseled young men to find a *nyai*, and laws addressed the status of their mixed-race offspring. The latter counted as Europeans only if acknowledged by their fathers. At least in theory, men had to provide for acknowledged children; a law passed in 1848 denied Indonesian women all rights, including guardianship, over children whose European fathers admitted paternity.

In the late nineteenth century, however, changing colonial policies brought new interests and actors to Java, producing conditions that eventually challenged these patterns. Initially, the Netherlands ran its colony as a highly profitable government monopoly. In 1870, advocates of free trade came to power and passed laws allowing capitalist investment in the Indies, in ventures such as plantations and refineries. Some thirty years later, partly in response, an alliance of business and religious groups instituted an "Ethical Policy." Based on the claim that the Netherlands owed a debt of honor to the people of the Indies for the enormous wealth generated there, this was the Dutch version of the "civilizing mission." Like the latter, arguments that European rule would benefit native peoples justified imperial expansion as the colonial state engulfed formerly independent regions through treaties and wars of conquest. "Ethicists" instituted a host of programs to uplift subject populations, primarily by promoting European immigration, the education of local elites, and intensified agriculture.

Both policies led to a surge in Europeans going to the Indies to live and work: the European population doubled between 1860 and 1900, and increased fourfold again from 1900–1930 (Van der Veur 1955: 87). In a radical departure from the past, this group included "respectable" women. In addition, new technologies of transportation and communication—the steamship, the telegraph, the Suez Canal—facilitated contact with Europe, enabling colonials to take leaves and keep up with developments back home.

These events set into motion a process that Locher-Scholten (1994) calls the "totokization" of the Indies, after a new vernacular identity: the *totok* was someone born in Europe, who retained metropolitan identifications and expected eventually to return home. *Totok*s began to set the tone for colonial culture, drawing attention to departures from metropolitan norms. Increasingly, colonials distinguished those who were culturally European and those merely classified European legally.[3] Europeans raised in the colony, whose speech, habits, and values reflected that upbringing, became known as "Indies people." Many Indies people traced their descent to families who had lived in the colonies for generations, and had Indonesian ancestresses. Those whose mixed background was evident from appearance and behavior were known as "Indos," for "Indo-European."

Totokization proceeded slowly, and never entirely was complete. For one, the longer *totok*s stayed in the Indies, the more they too might adopt elements of Indies culture, especially those who married or took up with Indo or Indonesian women. Moreover their children, brought up by Indonesian servants, could become Indies people. Despite totokization, considerable cultural mixing marked colonizer life, certainly until the 1920s. The semi-native drag that even *totok*s wore at home scandalized and bemused many visitors, as did their midday consumption of semi-native fare (the famous *rijsttafel*), invariably followed by a nap (Scidmore 1984 [1899]; de Wit 1984 [1912]).

Adoption of the Ethical Policy brought pressures to stabilize cultural-racial distinctions. Since the superiority of European civilization justified colonial expansion, the policy presumed a clear gulf—in manners, morals, and mentality—between Europeans and natives. But everyday life confounded such presumptions. As such matters became profoundly at issue much boundary work ensued. Those behaviors most in conflict with metropolitan standards provoked particular concern. These included sexual mores, as well as behaviors judged superstitious.

Given the role played by religious groups in bringing to power the legislators who promoted the Ethical Policy, it is hardly surprising that cohabitation came under increasing criticism for encouraging immorality.

[3] See Stoler 1992, 1995. As she notes, the legal category "European" included Eurasians acknowledged by their European fathers. But many such persons were not recognized as such by less formal criteria, such as appearance or culture.

Vice alone did not serve as grounds to condemn carnal relations with natives, however. Some reformers asserted that sexual license undermined European prestige, especially when practiced by administrators (Adelante 1898; Kohlbrugge 1907; see discussion in van de Doel 1994). Not only did sex with natives outside of marriage raise questions about European morals for subject populations (particularly among Muslims), but, said reformers, the lecheries of some whites aroused local ire, threatening "peace and order." Moreover, such relationships could encourage unseemly familiarities by the women's male kin, potentially leading to corruption and nepotism. As the heads of local European communities, critics asserted, civil servants should model propriety for both native subjects and other Europeans. In short, by bringing into question European superiority, loose sexual behavior placed the colonial venture at risk. Such arguments convinced policy-makers, who banned cohabitation by Dutch civil servants early in the twentieth century (Van Marle 1951–1952: 486). As anticipated, the prohibition had a broader impact. At least in Java's urban centers, involvements with native women no longer were conducted openly or sanctioned socially.

But of course, as Muller's story shows, they nonetheless continued.[4] Demography offers one reason why: although their numbers continually increased, white women remained in short supply. The 1930 census (about when Muller arrived in Java) counted only 884 European women to every 1,000 European men. Men like Muller, who were lower in the status hierarchy—who did not work in the civil service, as plantation managers, or in business—largely lacked the cultural and economic capital to attract a white woman. Even well situated men took time to accumulate the resources needed to establish a European household, and many saw nothing wrong with dalliances in the interim. Then too, for many the tropics represented a zone of indulgence, a place to act outside the constraints of bourgeois respectability. Thus *totok*s continued to regard Indonesian and Eurasian women as fair game for amorous adventures, despite changing mores and, increasingly, nationalist objections. Some still kept a *nyai* until they could afford to marry, while others engaged in casual fornication; prostitution rose as cohabitation declined (Van Marle 1951–1952).

By the time Muller arrived, social groups had become more distinct than ever before. Activism by Indonesian labor unions, communists, and nationalists had brought the Ethical Policy increasingly into disfavor; opponents insisted it only had served to produce an underemployed and overeducated native class with radical ideas. Alarm over such "disorder," and widespread skepticism about progress in the wake of The Great War, precipitated new policies, aimed at

[4] Van Marle (1951–1952) provides a good discussion of such issues.

reviving indigenous traditions and promoting indirect rule. A new separation marked life in the Indies in the interwar period. As visitors noted (e.g., Couperus 1924), colonizing classes had relinquished most remnants of mestizo culture. *Totok*s became more insular and judgmental vis-à-vis Indies people, even forming their own political party. For some *totok*s, little differentiated many Indies people from natives.

Given the time and place, Anna and Muller, then, made a likely pair. Both found themselves on the peripheries of colonial society, Anna by virtue of race and Muller by virtue of class. Since his position as hotel manager barred him from socializing with European guests and put him in constant contact with Javanese, Muller may have found it vital to emphasize his whiteness. Although legally a native, Anna's paternity may have made her a more acceptable mistress. In turn, Anna's position—on the fringes of both European and Javanese society—no doubt rendered her susceptible to Muller. According to Van der Veur (1955 and 1969), some Eurasian women in this period were obsessed with the desire to marry *totok*s. Like others in her situation, Anna tried to parley her ambiguous identity into a relationship that might lead to a permanent commitment, and greater opportunities for her child. Anna had reason to have high hopes for Muller: Germans in the Indies had a reputation for being less racist than Dutchmen and Englishmen, and more likely to marry their mistresses (Van der Veur 1969: 75). Here, then, are cracks where witchcraft might take root.

DESIRE AND DANGER

Totokization produced conditions in which *guna-guna* could thrive both as a practice and as an object of discourse.[5] As a practice, because more Indonesians had reason to resort to *guna-guna* as more Europeans came to the Indies, for shorter sojourns, and the European endogamy promoted by colonial policies began to be more plausible, producing greater tensions in relations between European men and the Indonesian and Eurasian women with whom they became sexually involved. As an object of discourse, because the new actors entering Indies society were apt to find stories about bewitched men intriguing. Indies life appeared full of novelties, especially regarding sex and superstition. *Guna-guna* offered both. Before, few media had existed to disseminate such materials (Nieuwenhuys 1978); Europeans lived in a primarily oral culture, in which the social art of conversation thrived on gossip. Certainly gossip circuits formed an ideal medium for sharing, embellishing, and evaluating *guna-guna* stories. Passage from word of mouth to less ephemeral

[5] *Guna-guna* may have occurred in mixed race relationships prior to this period (e.g., Blussé 1986; Stockdale 1995 [1811]: 51). But it was certainly more limited in scope when going partly native was the norm rather than scandalous, when marriage to another European was exceptional, and when magic was not yet inherently implausible or uniquely native.

published texts, however, allowed *guna-guna* stories to proliferate more promiscuously.

The most detailed description of *guna-guna* appears in a quirky work by H. A. van Hien, a *totok* renowned for his numerous books documenting Javanese mysticism and religious practice. *The Javanese Spirit World*, four volumes in its final version, is a compendium of incantations, divination practices, creation tales, spirits, and powerful places and objects, liberally framed by theosophical and ethnological concepts. Immensely popular, it went through six editions after its original 1894 publication; the last appeared in 1934, during Muller's residence on Java.

> *Goena-goena* means to unite or bring something together; also, a means administered in secret to make someone absent-minded, "*broewet*," of which condition one makes use to obtain from him or her what one desires. . .
>
> Someone is in love with a girl, but she wants to know nothing of the infatuated one. Now the man goes to a *doekoen goena-goena* . . . . Such a *doekoen* then tries to come into contact with the girl and to administer to her by secret channels, usually by means of female servants or family members, a powder of the *Djaka toewa*, a small beetle, that before being killed, dried, and pulverized, is fed with *ketjoeboeng*-leaves. If this succeeds, then the *doekoen* places a *goena-goena* before the door of the girl's house the next Monday or Thursday evening. This *goena-goena* consists of two cut out dolls, representing the girl and the man who desires her, which are buried in the ground. On that day she has managed by intervention of a servant or housemate to obtain a few of the girl's hairs, that combined with the lovesick man's hair, incensed with *stanggi* and wound with *kananga* flowers, are hidden in the girl's pillow.
>
> The administration of the *Djaka toewa* brings the girl into a state in which she realizes little ("*broewet*") . . . and she then is inclined to do everything that one desires. The *doekoen* now has to do nothing more than try to speak to her, at which opportunity she, without being perceived, touches an uncovered portion of the [girl's] body with *minjak doejoeng*, i.e. mermaid's tears, and asks her to come to the lovesick man . . . . Usually this succeeds, and the *doekoen* conveys the girl into the arms of the enamored man . . . .

Rather neatly, Van Hien draws together agents that appear only in part in other accounts of *guna-guna*: human intermediaries, *dukun*s, *kecubung* leaves, pulverized beetles, buried images, hidden body debris, incense, flowers, and mermaid's tears. He also provides an extraordinarily suggestive gloss for the term *guna-guna* itself: its double inflection as both a means to make someone succumb to another's desires (thus an instrument of power) and a means of uniting what otherwise would—and presumably should—remain apart.[6] The latter is striking, for ultimately colonial *guna-guna* is all about mixing. Among other things, it marks a form of engagement that works against purificatory technologies of race and rationality.

[6] Did Van Hien mean to suggest that the phrase itself could be glossed as "uniting"? If so, this is a unique interpretation. In Old Javanese, *guna* (from Sanskrit) means virtue, excellence, accomplishment, or skill (Zoetmulder 1982: I, 553). To *maguna* is to possess good qualities, be excellent, virtuous, talented, expert, capable, useful, and thus attractive to others.

Still, so far, Van Hien's description appears purely ethnographic, a description of curious customs among the Javanese, although written from an unusual perspective in that it does not frame the discussion with phrases such as "Javanese believe." But he continues:

> Although rare, one also finds victims of *goena-goena* among Europeans. During our journeys and collecting data for this work, we had the opportunity to get to know a few of these miserable beings. They declared to us not to know how they hit on the idea of taking that woman or girl as spouse.
>
> Those who formerly had a housekeeper and cast her off for the sake of a legal union with another woman most lay themselves open to the application of *goena-goena*. But the goal then is mostly revenge; seldom is affection still at stake. If that revenge is directed against the man and the *goena-goena* does not have the desired effect—to carry the lost one back into his former housekeeper's arms—then one resorts to malignant *toembals* or to secret poisons that usually cause a stomach illness through which he is sacrificed. If the revenge is directed against the woman, then it ends, if the woman does not quickly leave the house, with the victim's death.
>
> How many young women did we see during our investigations sink into the grave after having been married only a few months; and how many a promising young man, who after much labor obtained a position that allowed him to marry, did we see lie in a coffin, his face contorted by the pain that preceded death, while outside the architect of that death eyed the mournful cortege that brought him to the grave with a sneering laugh and glances of satisfaction. . ..
>
> One sees once in a while European youths hanging out with Native women who are neither amiable nor pretty, are even already past their first youth, and to whom they are as subservient as a slave, literally doing or having done everything desired of them. Do not be surprised about that, reader. It is the result of *Goena-goena*, that, continually employed, makes the man into a vacant individual, makes him grey before his time, and after only a few years totally unfit for marriage (1934 III: 46–48).

Here Van Hien links the mystery of attraction with fear of subjection and painful death: as discrete ends and acts or in the unfolding of a relationship over time. The impressionable Indonesian damsel in distress, duped by unscrupulous men and their venal accomplices, vanishes, to be replaced by the manipulative, devious, spiteful femme fatale. White men materialize as innocent victims, kept in place by induced docility, or, for those who managed to escape, subjected to fearsome retribution.

Van Hien, as is his wont, distinguishes clearly between *guna-guna* and acts that may follow from it. Most colonial accounts are less fastidious; indeed, such blurring is constitutive. Thus Dutch uses of the term usually do not wholly square with vernacular meanings. In Indonesia, *guna-guna* refers to practices that aim to attract.[7] While initially covering much the same territory, over time colonial *guna-guna* came to encompass acts and effects of "black magic" emerging from intimate relationships; by the 1930s, it was virtually

[7] *Guna-guna* appears in several archipelago languages, including Javanese, Balinese, and the national language Indonesian (which derives from Malay, the language of colonial administration). There is no space here, however, to track these uses. Here my focus is its use by Europeans.

synonymous with any act of sorcery. Usually, however, it referred to hostile magic against Europeans intimately involved with Javanese or Eurasians.

The term *guna-guna* made its public debut in 1887, as the title of a novel by *totok* journalist P. A. Daum, which first appeared in serial form in the newspaper he founded and edited, the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, one of the most widely read in Java (Beekman 1996: 332). Contemporaries regarded Daum's novels as *romans à clef*. Thus, although technically a work of fiction, he likely based it on rumors about people he knew, changing names and circumstances to avoid charges of slander or libel (Beekman 1996: 333).

In the novel, a Javanese nursemaid (and her *dukun* son) assists an Indies woman named Betsy in disposing of one husband and capturing another. (Allusions to Betsy's dark hair and eyes suggest that she, like most women then classified European, had Indonesian ancestors.) Bronkhorst, the object of Betsy's affections, is happily married to a (blonde, blue-eyed) *totok* he met on leave in the Netherlands. Repeated ingestion of *guna-guna* potions draws him increasingly under Betsy's spell; he not only loses interest in his family but in his greatest passion, his work as a notary. (That Bronkhorst is a notary, someone who vouches for authenticity and truth, is remarkably suggestive.) His wife, however, who shocks the European community by her constant cooking and cleaning, and shares neither their penchant for gossip nor their casual belief in magic, proves "too strong" to be vulnerable to the sorcery meant to drive her from her home. After the ensuing scandal leads to Betsy's forced departure from town, the notary returns to normal (Daum 1964 [1889]).

Daum's novel has a quasi-ethnographic character at times, particularly in a famous chapter describing the *dukun*'s trip to Java's south coast to purchase *minyak duyung* (mermaid's or sea cow tears) for the *guna-guna*. But in many respects it differs from later discussions: Betsy is not a *nyai* but a mestizo European. And *guna-guna* produces an irresistible, even obsessive attraction, as it does for Indonesians.

Guna-guna as a way to explain erotic fascination emerged as increasingly relevant as the practice of marrying or living with native or Indo women came under fire. In portraying women as seductive agents, *guna-guna* tales mark the growing disapproval of mixed-race alliances while morally exonerating white men. Consider this characterization of Javanese women by an opponent of interracial liaisons: "Whatever the abominable means employed—whether they mingle their spittle or blood or some other filth in his food; or whether they know how to invoke and use secret powers unknown to us to make him a supine tool in their hands—they dominate him completely, still more fatally than the hypnotist dominates his subjects" (Koot 1905: 13, cited by Ming 1983: 82).

With its litany of menacing adjectives, this comment pinpoints why *guna-guna* might appear sinister. *Guna-guna* sapped the will, generating confusion

and tractability (recall Van Hien's "*broewet*"). Such disturbances eerily target colonizer masculinities. The sense of superiority proper to the male colonizing subject arose from an authoritative and self-assured agency, based in reason. What could be more insidiously threatening than an unknown force that could exact compliance, rendering such men subject to those (natives, and women to boot!) they should command? In effect, *guna-guna* emasculated European men. Or emasculated them further. Seduced, rather than seducers, they already were feminized.

Daum's Bronkhorst serves as a good example. As he succumbs to *guna-guna*, he becomes dominated by desire rather than by duty. A model paterfamilias and responsible public figure, respected for his sound judgment and successful investments, turns into a moony adolescent, consumed by longing and indifferent to social mores.

So inflected, *guna-guna* tales constitute a male genre. Certainly European women narrate them differently, affording more nuanced insight into the motivations that might inspire such acts, even sympathizing with native women as victims of their fickle lovers (or of rivals [Rush 1990; Taylor 1983]). One Indies resident claimed that Javanese women mainly resorted to *guna-guna* to stay in the relative comfort of a European household and ensure a continued connection to their own children; some managed through *guna-guna* to become legal wives (v. W. 1907). A lady traveler, less likely to share intimacies with Javanese, offers a keen observation on the effect of *guna-guna* stories on white men: "the chilling tales of slow, mysterious deaths overtaking those who desert Malay wives or return to Europe without these jealous women, act as restraining forces" (Scidmore 1984 [1899]: 120–21).

As cohabitation with Javanese or Indo women more often became a temporary stage in the lives of European men and not the norm, *guna-guna* tales came to focus more on revenge than seduction. Stories highlight the painful deaths of men who abandoned native mistresses for European women, or of their innocent wives or fiancées.

Such emphasis dovetailed with a mounting sense of the perils of colonial life. Anxieties about hidden native malevolence—expressed through both petty and deadly acts—flourished. As Rush notes, "If one were to believe [the] stories, being poisoned was one of the commonest ways to die in colonial Indonesia" (1990: 155). Fear of poisoning of course proved easier to acknowledge than trepidation about sorcery, since it entailed physiological processes recognized by medical science. But such phenomena could be difficult to disentangle.

By the 1920s, *guna-guna* was firmly ensconced in colonial lore. Given its domestic provenance, *guna-guna* tales continued to flourish in networks of rumor. Not surprisingly, in print they flowed easily into conversational and experiential genres. Novels, enabling as they do a vicarious experience of forms of life through the depiction of the quotidian and intimate, offered a particularly comfortable home for such materials. Novels also could address the

circumstances under which such stories were told and depict the full range of responses they elicited. But *guna-guna* also found its way into essays, commentaries, memoirs, and travelogues. Casual references in newspapers and magazines indicate the frequency with which such stories circulated.

However established they were as a feature of colonial culture, *guna-guna* incited greater interest at some moments than at others. It also continued to mutate. As we will see, developments in the Indies and Europe stimulated renewed attention to *guna-guna* in the 1930s. Both novel techniques and new actors mark narratives of that time: most notably, Indo rather than Javanese women appear as the instigators of *guna-guna*. In general, materials appear more race-conscious.

Consider, for instance, a second novel titled *Goena-Goena*, published in 1930 by Caesar Kijdsmeir, an Indo-sounding pseudonym.[8] Henk Daeman is a *totok* businessman who falls in love with and marries a very white-skinned Indo. Her darker-skinned and culturally more native cousin, once Henk's secretary, is infatuated with him, however. This drives her down the road to superstition (from card-readings to minor love charms and eventually to more sinister acts), prostitution, and eventually murder as she becomes increasingly desperate. Henk finally flees the Indies in terror after the death of both his wife and child. Another *totok*, Henk's friend, also is killed by *guna-guna* by his Eurasian ex-wife. In the novel the darker a woman's skin and less European her manners, the more likely she is to succumb to superstition and immorality.

Narratives about *guna-guna* did not only reflect but also shaped life in colonial Indonesia. If such tales flourished in particular circumstances, they also played a role in the formation of colonizer subjectivities. *Guna-guna* inserted itself into the experience of white skeptics, if only in the form of rumors. Here Muller is again instructive. In the language of the Indies, he was a *totok*, European by birth and culture. All the more interesting, then, that his tale conforms in its general outlines to such a staple of Indies gossip. Muller's story suggests that even the most heavily defended European sensibility could be invaded by Javanized colonial genres and their ontological ambiguities.

DISCIPLINE, DENIAL, AND DISDAIN

In theory, one might expect *guna-guna* to be of both political and anthropological significance. Political, because rumors about *guna-guna* present Europeans as vulnerable to native experts while suggesting that differences between European and native mentalities were negligible; at the very least, *guna-guna* undermined the authority of those supposedly in charge.

[8] His real name was Albert Zimmerman (Salverda 1994: 31). Kijdsmeir cribbed some of his plot from another Daum novel (1997 [1893]). In the latter, the Creole wife is killed not by *guna-guna* but by the widely feared "pill number eleven" that gave the book its title; a jilted *nyai* is responsible.

Anthropological, because of disciplinary commitments to the topic of magic, although *guna-guna*'s tendency to flow into European lives certainly might have given pause. Yet *guna-guna*—even when its victims were only Indonesians—barely registers in either domain.

Sorcery or witchcraft interested the colonial state only when it led to acts criminal by other criteria, such as the killing of the presumed witch. The issue that then faced judges was whether native belief counted as a mitigating circumstance (and on this score courts were inconsistent). But what Indonesians claimed witches were capable of doing, or what (if anything) witches had to do with *dukun*s (who did periodically engage administrative interest, as potential "fanatics" or swindlers [Wiener 2003]), did not concern authorities. Such indifference was in marked contrast to British Africa, where colonial officials found themselves caught in all kinds of conundrums (how to differentiate witches from healers; how to differentiate themselves from the witches they apparently were protecting) after passing laws that made it a crime to accuse another of witchcraft. All things considered, it is not surprising that Africanist anthropologists had a lot to say about sorcery. Conversely, administrative apathy may in part explain why Dutch anthropologists paid so little attention to *guna-guna*. But perhaps, too, *guna-guna* appeared only peripherally relevant to a body of scholarship that sought to contribute to comparative ethnology by plotting populations across the archipelago on an evolutionary ladder running from fetishism through animism to spiritism.[9]

The few occasions when *guna-guna* did attract expert interest, therefore, are worth some attention. Excluding Van Hien (who had no academic education and wrote popular books), the main scholarly treatments of *guna-guna* were written by two physicians, both employed by the colonial state and known for their contributions to ethnological knowledge. Each came to take note of *guna-guna* through his medical practice—not surprisingly, since doctors were likely to encounter *guna-guna* (whether they acknowledged it or not) through queries from anxious patients (recall Muller). Their discussions are instructive on several grounds. First, each draws on agents familiar to science to account for the effects described as *guna-guna*. Although they start from different mechanisms (indeed, their explanations are mirror opposites), their scrutiny entails a reduction of the practices and actors involved in *guna-guna*, selecting certain elements and ignoring the rest. More specifically, they distribute *guna-guna* as physiology or psychology. Through their

[9] Officials did pay attention to "fetishes" they deemed disruptive to peace and order. Witchcraft began to arouse some interest in the 1930s, both in relation to customary law (a major field of practical and theoretical elaboration) and to awareness of its significance to missionaries, officials, and anthropologists in Africa (Lesquillier 1934; XIVe Missiologische Week van Leuven 1936). Such discussions, however, remained thoroughly divorced from the lively popular concern with *guna-guna*.

work we can see the purifications—the separation of entities into distinct ontological zones as ideal or material, cultural or natural, mental or corporeal, modern or backward (Latour 1993)—through which not only *guna-guna* but "magic" became an object of expert knowledge. They also exemplify positions developing in Indies society among skeptical or agnostic *totok*s, which are given their fullest expression in novels.

Dr. A. G. Vorderman, Superintendent of the Civil Medical Service for Java from 1890 to 1902, was a renowned researcher who took a particular interest in local plants and their uses. He addresses *guna-guna* in a short piece on two native poisons that had come to his attention. Defining *guna-guna* as means used to make someone ill, he begins his discussion by precipitating out the nature at work in this segment of Javanese culture. Specifically, he divides *guna-guna* into "charms" and "superstitious acts," on one hand, and "the administering of foreign supplements in the food or drink of the person to be manipulated," on the other (1893: 81–82). Leaving the first to ethnologists, he claims the second as the arena of scientists such as himself. Implicitly, he regards superstitions as harmless, or as working solely on the psyche. But the addition of substances to comestibles is another matter, since these might affect biological function. The substance that interests him comes from feeding the leaves of a plant known as *kecubung* to a (unidentified) species of beetle: the beetle's feces are administered in *guna-guna*. While Vorderman notes that these work "toxically on the human organism" to produce a "chronic poisoning," he does not further specify the effects. He does, however, identify *kecubung* as the plant botanists know as *Datura fastuosa*. From this, knowledgeable readers could infer some of those effects, which include hallucinations, disorientation, and memory loss. One might argue that these suffice to explain how *guna-guna* operates. *Datura*, however, is not just any hallucinogen: it traverses the historical and ethnographic literature on magic, popping up in discussions of European witchcraft and Amazonian shamanism. Yet despite its widespread deployment, *Datura* produces remarkably different experiences in different places.

By contrast, Dr. J. H. F. Kohlbrugge has little use for poisons or ingested substances in his much lengthier discussion of *guna-guna*: instead, he focuses on the "charms" Vorderman ignores, such as buried pieces of paper. Kohlbrugge spent several years in Java, first in private practice and later in the employ of the colonial state. His experiences, and catholic reading in both scholarly journals and the Indies popular press, led him to write a book on "the mental life of the Javanese and their overseers"; ultimately, it landed him the chair in ethnology at Utrecht.

For Kohlbrugge, *guna-guna* works by subconscious projection and suggestion. He offers a lengthy analysis of how these operate in Javanese subjects, centered on culturally meaningful signs that allow a victim to infer that she is the target of a spurned suitor's magical attack; convinced that *guna-guna*

works, she succumbs. Here *guna-guna* is ensconced safely in the sphere of (false) native beliefs.

But Kohlbrugge acknowledges that *guna-guna* is not only a native concern. Noting the numerous anecdotes concerning European men in popular literature, he observes that anxieties over revenge by abandoned *nyai* are widespread; in fact, he has treated many men who feared their mistresses caused their ailments. This he rejects: in no such case can one find any evidence of poisoning. Instead, suggestion is again the culprit, operating via coincidence and bad conscience: "The feeling of not having acted in harmony with their own moral concepts, thus the sense of guilt, suppresses cool thinking and suggests to them belief in *guna-guna* and poison" (1907: 18–19). Moral scruples lead men suffering from an ordinary disease to find gossip about *guna-guna* newly credible and relevant. As for those who blame *guna-guna* for their attraction to unsuitable women, Kohlbrugge prefers psychopathology: Javanese masochism attracts men with unconscious sadistic tendencies. Like Vorderman, then, Kohlbrugge subjects *guna-guna* to specific, albeit different purifications. He both distinguishes how it works in Javanese and Europeans and reduces it to abnormal psychology.

Kohlbrugge does not limit his diagnostic skills to his patients, however. He also addresses figures circulating claims about *guna-guna* in public, targeting specifically the ever-popular Van Hien. After quoting Van Hien on European victims of *guna-guna*, Kohlbrugge asserts: "See, a European can only write so who is already strongly Indicized, who has experienced the suggestive influence of animism" (1907: 19). To be suggestible is to be easily convinced that something is true, reflecting an insufficiency of critical thought and a taste for excitement. Kohlbrugge implies that to pass along reports of *guna-guna* without qualification was to prove oneself fundamentally affected by life in the Indies, a deficient European whose mental processes had come to resemble those indigenous to the archipelago. These Kohlbrugge analyzes as based in animism, a favorite category of Dutch colonial ethnology, thus suturing colonial fears of going native to ethnological hierarchies and temporalities.

Kohlbrugge contributes here to ongoing discussions of the apparent mutability of European psyches in the tropics, a topic of considerable concern to colonial states.[10] Some experts argued that Europeans became more volatile in the Indies, showing an increased tendency to react to stimuli (Kerremans 1923; Hermans 1925). In extreme cases, these tendencies could erupt into nervous disorders (such as tropical neurasthenia), characterized by irritability, overexcitement, or excessive anxiety. While some attributed such syndromes to the debilitating effects of nature, others contended that society was more at issue, noting the stresses generated by isolation from racial and status peers,

[10] In the Indies such anxieties appear by the mid-nineteenth century (Stoler 1995: 104).

homesickness, absence of a normal family life, even "the entire complex of atmospheric nuances that we call the *mystical* East" (Van Wulfften Palthe 1936: 358).[11] Such judgments percolated into popular wisdom—as in Muller's complaint that spending so much time surrounded by "brown faces" was enough to drive one mad. Doctors held that these disorders would "not travel over water": returning to Europe would effect a cure. Indeed, more than half of those repatriating from the Indies for medical conditions in 1915–1925 were diagnosed with tropical neurasthenia (Van Wulfften Palthe 1936: 356).[12]

Kohlbrugge is not claiming that Van Hien suffered from a mental illness; even those who apparently functioned well could be altered by life in the Indies. Kohlbrugge's position was fairly radical; he maintained, for instance, that no one raised in the Indies could remain European, even if both parents were *totok*s. Moreover, "their descendants … shall be still less [European]; they metamorphose, if slowly, then nonetheless surely, into Indos, and finally into Javanese" (1907: 112).[13] Van Hien's lapse from cool reason suggested he was heading in that direction. But how does Kohlbrugge account for such transformations? Like others, he highlights not only climate but also social life, including interactions with natives. He agrees, for instance, with those who cautioned that too much contact with native servants could make children fearful and superstitious.[14] Kohlbrugge insinuates that affairs with native women could incite similar results. Europeans in such intimate associations risked a kind of cultural contagion: belief in magic could be a sexually transmitted disease.

Guna-guna, then, had to be purified to be dealt with scientifically. It also required border work to render colonizers distinct from those they colonized. Neither Vorderman nor Kohlbrugge fully elucidates *guna-guna*, however. Vorderman shows it involves a psychogenic substance, but does not account for its highly specific effects: how, for instance, it might make a particular person attractive, or produce remarkably precise hallucinations such as Muller's. In noting its "toxic" effects, Vorderman implies these should be universal.

[11] Van Wulften Palthe was the major authority; others cite and develop his ideas (e.g., Winckel 1938; Raptschinsky 1941). Hermans (1925) argues that nervous disorders mainly threatened those with a family history of such ailments. By contrast, Kohlbrugge insists that the incompatibility between European work-culture and the tropical milieu rendered even Javanese civil servants susceptible to neurasthenia.

[12] Apart from repatriation, physicians recommended hard physical labor, sexual moderation, and a European family life, drawing on an emerging "bourgeois ethic of morality and work" (Stoler 1989: 646).

[13] Kohlbrugge's conclusions may in part explain the scathing review of his book by famed Indologist Snouck Hurgronje (1908). As a prominent advocate of the Ethical Policy, Snouck could hardly have accepted Kohlbrugge's pessimistic conclusions about the tropics or his skepticism about the possibility or desirability of trying to turn Indonesians into modern, rational thinkers.

[14] For example, Hermans 1925; for discussions, Stoler 1995, and Locher-Scholten 1994. See Bastiaans (1971) for memories of such exposure and a range of retrospective responses.

But accounts of *Datura* from other parts of the world show they are not. Its biological activity is locally mediated. For Kohlbrugge, *guna-guna* is all in the mind, an effect of the extraordinary power of suggestion. Only minimal material supports appear necessary for suggestion to function, although Kohlbrugge does acknowledge that European minds may be made amenable by exposure to superstitious Indonesians under tropical conditions. Precisely how suggestion operates, the source of its power, remains vague. Oddly, suggestibility itself resembles the mental state that *guna-guna* aimed to induce.

Whatever their limitations, poisoning and suggestion nonetheless materialized as the default explanations for those who felt compelled to offer one (see below, and Van Wesmeskerken 1922). Not only those speaking for science but ordinary *totok*s found such resources convenient in responding to Indies talk. For the only apparent alternative seemed impossible, as the character Henk Daemen reflects when the specter of *guna-guna* appears to explain his friend's baffling illness:

> Goena-goena . . . was a word that people used much and much too much and too easily. People who were in the Indies three or four days knew the word, without knowing its full significance.
>
> For goena-goena did not exist. It cannot exist, because magic did not exist and what is the Dutch translation of goena-goena other than pure: magic [*toverij*]?
>
> No . . . when you wanted to classify Native poisons under the heading goena-goena . . . yes, all right . . . then you could speak of goena-goena, because Natives knew many queer poisons and almost every Native is a born toxicologist . . . (Kijdsmeir 1930: 81).

Like Kohlbrugge, popular culture also mapped attitudes toward *guna-guna* onto racial identities. Such mapping became routine in Indies novels, which commonly feature a Dutchman disdainful of *guna-guna* stories who is characterized as *nuchter*, sensible or level headed (e.g., Van Wermeskerken 1922). Other characters presume *totok* skepticism, either because it marks a European rationality (the *totok* view) or an ignorance of Indies circumstances. By contrast, Indies people and Europeans who have lived for some time in the Indies find *guna-guna* credible. We see here echoes of Kohlbrugge. But novels suggest Kohlbrugge is shortsighted. To a greater or lesser degree the main character comes to change his mind. Sometimes Europeans with greater experience in the Indies challenge his limited understanding; often a personal disaster occurs. Of course novelists did not have to come down on one side of the issue; in novels multiple positions can speak to each other (Bakhtin 1981).

Clearly, for authorities *guna-guna* tales could highlight the dangers lurking in transgressive border zones where Europeans might go native, and provide evidence of colonialism's failure to stabilize the hierarchies of rationality that justified Dutch rule. Invoking race constituted an attempt to buttress and secure distinctions.

"NOW DON'T SNEER": DEFENSE AND DESIRE

If turn-of-the-century science sought to dissolve *guna-guna* by purifying or ignoring it, in the late colonial period two groups—Indos and Indies people on the one hand, casual travelers on the other—worked to solidify its reality. While not recognizing each other as allies (tourists often represented Eurasians in less than flattering terms), both articulated *guna-guna* with existing or emerging networks beyond the Indies. And both used the term "magic" to do so.

Eurasians could hardly avoid tackling *guna-guna*, and not only because some (including tourists) represented them as its instigators. As political developments drew the lines between European and native more starkly, Indos and Indies people found themselves on the defensive. Caught between their desire to identify as European and their intimate local knowledge, Eurasians worked hard at mediation, testifying to their own experiences and those of acquaintances while addressing *totok* incredulity and derision.

Indies authors bear witness to both the application and effects of *guna-guna*. Contrary to Kohlbrugge, they insist that *guna-guna* was not a white mythology, a product of febrile European imaginations. Consider the following testimony by a Eurasian who followed her Dutch husband to Holland after Indonesian independence: "Many Dutch boys and men were subjected to *guna-guna*. Now don't sneer! The men were made groggy by the constant use of herbs and sometimes excrements of the women's body mixed with their food or drink. This is no story. It is something very important—even though many sneer about it—in breaking down and confusing will power. It absolutely, to put it bluntly, forces the person in such a violent way to continue intercourse that, combined with all that guna-guna, he is spiritually broken for the time being. I saw it used much by *muntjies*, the wives of regular soldiers" (quoted by Van der Veur 1969: 76). As this passage makes clear, the speaker anticipates disdain. Nonetheless, she persists, even positing herself as a witness to the use of *guna-guna* (here involving a particularly transgressive substance).

Indo testimony repeatedly registers sensitivity to *totok* sneers. Anyone seeking to speak to experience on this topic had to situate himself, at least initially, as a skeptic. Schenkhuizen sets the stage this way: "Strangely, we Indos who grew up with black magic, called *guna-guna* in Indonesia, were kind of skeptical about it and had the idea or the feeling, 'Well, that won't happen to me. That can only happen when you're afraid of it, or believe in it'" (1993: 138). Having signaled her reliability, she can recount the events that changed her mind. Chief among them was a diagnosis of an otherwise unexplained illness by a "doctor" with "psychic powers," who discovered in her home a pillow sewn shut with black thread. After her fiancé opened it, and the doctor disposed of the object within, her symptoms vanished. Schenkhuizen, like the anonymous Indo above, betrays a constant awareness that interlocutors might be dubious, or regard her as a native. To establish her

European credentials she adds that her strong Christian faith no doubt protected her from even worse effects. She also calls on allies beyond the specific racial problematic of Indies life: "You can read for yourself that such dark powers, sometimes called voodoo and sometimes by another name, are found all over the world, no country excepted" (1993: 139).

Other Indies people critiqued the certitudes of medical science. Most maintained that doctors could neither diagnose nor cure illnesses caused by sorcery. A more complex move involved translating between European and Javanese etiologies—reversing the explanatory direction of official analyses—by submitting that magic might be at the root of tropical mental disorders. In an autobiographical novel, Du Perron explicitly articulates "black magic" (not, specifically, *guna-guna*) with neurasthenia:

> . . . every night, at exactly two o'clock, [my father] would wake up frightened, as if he had been called. He thought he would go insane; nothing could interest him. In short, he seemed to be going through an early stage of the later neurasthenia which baffled all his European doctors and which they couldn't even diagnose. At the time a village chief in Tjitjurug sent my mother a *hadji* woman who was famous for her powers against black magic. She prayed over a bowl of water in which seven kinds of flowers were floating, and she walked through the garden looking for the evil. Under the *bungur* tree she found a little doll buried, rusty pins stuck through its head . . . . The voodoo doll was used to drive him mad. Perhaps it was the power of counter-suggestion, but the *hadji* woman achieved her goal. After he had seen the little doll unearthed, my father slept quietly again and the neurasthenia disappeared (1984 [1935]: 81).

Friction is evident in the shifts between the narrator's matter-of-fact statements of magical cause and cure and his conjuring of scientific labels and explanations ("counter-suggestion"). Nonetheless, the translation is there. Certainly the "breaking down of will power" induced through *guna-guna* bears an intriguing resemblance to symptoms of tropical nervous disorders. Are these two names for the same object? Although located in different networks, magic and mental illness at least partly overlap. Learned efforts to translate magic into the language of psychiatry leave out elements highlighted by those working the translation from the other side. If science connected *guna-guna* to disease through suggestion, guilt, mental disorders, and 'going native,' Indies narrators articulated them through *dukun*s, enmity, and "voodoo" dolls.

Both Du Perron and Schenkhuizen refuse to limit *guna-guna* to either poisoning or suggestion. While they emphasize *guna-guna*'s materiality, the entities they highlight are not ingested; rather, they are buried or hidden in proximity to their target. And, contrary to arguments about suggestion, only with the discovery of such objects *following* the appearance of symptoms do the sufferers acknowledge themselves a victim of magic.

A particularly detailed and sophisticated defense of *guna-guna* appears in an extraordinary series of articles by an author calling himself Hitzka (1930). Explicitly translating *guna-guna* as "magic," Hitzka argued that it involved genuine facts about the natural world, however unfamiliar to Western

science. To make his case, he not only drew on local knowledge and anecdotes about the Indies, including the works of Van Hien, but crossed time and space to establish magic's reality. Indeed, most of the first two installments say virtually nothing about the Indies. Instead, they demonstrate the global spread of certain practices despite local variations in materials, while reframing the usual (ethnological) explanations offered for such ubiquity (superstition as a feature of a low stage of cultural development). Hitzka displays considerable erudition, quoting from sources in Latin, French, and German, and from scholarly and quasi-scholarly materials (including contemporary occultist investigations). In short, he seeks to solidify *guna-guna* as an Indies variant of a universal phenomenon.[15]

Hitzka also treats *guna-guna* as more omnipresent and ominous in everyday life than usually recognized. After lauding science, and refusing to blame doctors for their ignorance (how could experts trained in the Netherlands be expected to recognize and treat illnesses generated by local knowledges?), he takes *guna-guna* beyond the vicissitudes of amorous relationships, intractable illness, and inexplicable deaths to such timely matters as bankruptcy, loss of employment, and stalled careers. *Guna-guna* in fact extended well beyond personal welfare, seeping into the consequential domains of government and law. Because magic was invisible to the colonial state, with no risk to themselves its agents could come underneath the politically sensitive radar of authorities obsessed with their control over colonized populations. Since the regime did not prosecute practitioners or take their abilities seriously, why not try to affect the outcomes of trials, remove interfering administrators, and commit felonies?[16] Thus through their ignorance the *totok*s running the colonial state not only promoted malfeasance but failed to properly protect its subjects.

Different interests spurred tourist accounts of *guna-guna*, which is not always mentioned by name and invariably is rendered as "magic." Many of the Europeans and Americans who made use of the growing infrastructure of transportation, hotels, guides, and travel agents developed by both private and government enterprises between the wars came to the Indies in search of the exotic. Following the Great War a new restlessness seized hold of metropolitan middle and upper classes; many declared bourgeois conventions stifling and avidly sought novel experiences (Fussell 1980). Reason had lost its luster, stimulating an interest in its supposed opposites. Little wonder that writers traveling to the Indies found *guna-guna* riveting. And unlike Europeans

[15] Not surprisingly, educated Eurasians, all too aware that *totoks* associated magic with backward natives, responded enthusiastically to Hitzka's articles, which appeared in *Our Voice*, the journal of the Eurasian League (Van der Veur 1969: 77).

[16] Similarly, in *Rumah Angker* a *totok* lawyer hears rumors of *guna-guna*'s use in witness tampering (Van Wermeskerken 1922). See also Lesquellier (1934: 138), a student of adat law who recommended making sorcery punishable in the colonial penal code on the grounds that failure to do so had increased criminality among natives immeasurably.

living and working in the colonies, it never put their status or welfare at risk. On the contrary: they engaged it to make their reputations, by producing books with a wide appeal.

Many travel books refer to *guna-guna* in passing, in brief anecdotes that spice texts with local color.[17] Some merely present *guna-guna* as an ethnographic curiosity, an instance of peculiar native beliefs (Childers 1933). Others use it to attest to Eastern mystery: to insist that "even Europeans" tell "odd stories" of the power of Javanese *dukun*s (Ponder 1990 [1942]: 109). Mostly, however, they put Indies tales of seduction and revenge into wider circulation, albeit with some new elements.

For example, De Leeuw arrives at *guna-guna* ("a sinister side of native and European superstition") via a discussion of Eurasian "half-castes," whom he characterizes as volatile and vindictive. Initially he makes familiar claims, although he introduces some novel technologies that also receive mention in other travel books:

> Debilitating drugs are concocted for use on the beloved, making him weak, physically and morally, and thus open to mental and imaginative suggestion.
>
> These actually do work, and produce of course not love, but simple animal passion. But *guna guna* goes much further than this. Ground glass, tiger's whiskers, shredded bamboo fibre, and similar devices are used to cause slow agonizing death, puncturing the internal organs. Such is the skill in the use of these delightful weapons that they can be administered unnoticed, and may be timed to take just so long to produce the desired effect (1931: 137–38).

Yet then he changes course, introducing two tales of Europeans whose abandonment of their Eurasian lovers proved fatal with the words: "Superstition? Perhaps, but . . . ." The first concerns a German-American living next door to De Leeuw at Batavia's famous Hotel des Indes, who told his Eurasian mistress of his plans to bring his fiancée to the Indies and marry her. As the wedding drew near he became increasingly haggard and anxious. Still, he married on schedule, and the newlyweds set out on a steamer to Singapore for a honeymoon. Then word came of their tragic double suicide, induced by *guna-guna*. Acknowledging his readers will find this incredible, De Leeuw moves to a doctor who decided to return to Britain. His mistress "warned him that if he left without her he would not live beyond the Suez Canal. We later learned that he died while his ship was passing through the Suez. Possibly a tiger hair or ground glass" (1931: 139). As in Muller's story, the words of a woman scorned become literally true. The final remarks ironically undermine De Leeuw's earlier authoritative assurance. And, as with Muller, *guna-guna* follows its victim beyond the Indies.

[17] The term *guna-guna* also became associated with Bali, due to a film of that title about witchcraft among Balinese. However, *guna-guna* stories mainly came from Java, which had the largest European and Eurasian populations and the most fraught relationships. In a novel set in Bali, a European who suspects his Balinese mistress of *guna-guna* grew up on Java (Fabricius 1948).

Writing for audiences increasingly enthralled by tales of magic, especially in colonial settings, such travelers (with their readers) produced magic as an object of pleasurable fascination. Not only did magic's associations with the low and forbidden energize it with appealing transgressive possibilities, but they could also draw on familiar genre conventions. In addition, travelers could articulate exotic magics with the tentative networks under construction in metropolitan occultist circles, which sought to establish a respectable science by bringing together parapsychology and hypnosis, contemporary physics (with its startling revelations about matter and energy), and the mystical wisdom of ancient and Oriental civilizations.

Gorer offers an exemplary picture of such translation practices. In recounting Muller's story, he makes full use of the plot devices and narrative strategies (the meeting with a mysterious stranger; the ambiguous ending) of tales of magic. He offers no explanations, no comfortable reversals of weirdness, but relates Muller's tale without comment. Its testimonial structure—the victim speaks to a trustworthy interlocutor who then submits his tale to a wider audience—not only buttresses credibility but draws on famous masters of imperial literature: as the tolerantly cosmopolitan, no-nonsense Englishman, lending an ear to a younger, more volatile Continental enmeshed in a seductive and menacing native world, Gorer resembles Conrad's narrative alter ego Marlowe or the (unnamed) narrator in Kipling stories such as "Mark of the Beast." Such a narrative persona transports the eerie events befalling the main character into the commonsense world of readers.

Apart from a style that imposes no judgments regarding plausibility, Gorer offers a more direct challenge to Euro-American "reality principles" in a long digression to the account of his visit to Bali that precedes this anecdote.[18] There he proposes a theory about something he calls "M. E." or "mental energy," which, he notes, could equally be termed "magical" or "mystical" energy. For the past three hundred years, he opines, Europeans have specialized in mastery over the material world, and took that world to be identical with reality. But elsewhere (e.g., Bali, West Africa, Tibet) people have perfected techniques that allow them to use mind as a source of energy. Such energy can be used to affect objects at a distance or to make the creations of one's mind visible and apparently real to others (Gorer 1936: 87–94). Here, in an

[18] Gorer presents himself as a neutral recorder. Once Muller begins his tale, for example, Gorer removes himself from the scene, bracketing Muller's remarks by quotation marks. But by letting Muller speak for himself, Gorer also establishes his distance. While Muller assumes a sympathetic listener—both on the grounds of shared culture (as fellow modern Europeans) and shared gender (as "fellows")—Gorer's comments elsewhere in his book show this to be false. Thus Gorer regrets he had little contact with natives, and notes that whenever possible he spoke at length to chauffeurs and servants, as the most interesting people around. Moreover, the tale follows immediately after Gorer's extremely positive comments about the Balinese—and even the distinctions Gorer draws among archipelago populations make Muller's claims about "Malays" as a *race* suspect. Finally, Gorer is highly critical of the Nazis, whose racial attitudes resemble Muller's.

implicit explanation of what happened to Muller (or, given the order in which they appear in the book, is Muller's tale a confirmation of Gorer's theories?), Gorer asserts magic's reality while rejecting, in good bohemian fashion, small-minded Euro-American materialism: magic serves as cultural critique. At the same time, however, Gorer reproduces foundational distinctions between mental and material and East and West. And like others insisting on the (possibly occult) skills or knowledges of non-Westerners, he is uninterested in indigenous explanations. Instead, a scientific meta-language draws local phenomena into networks being globalized through colonial rule.

Gorer's bohemian position intersects with anthropological attitudes. Drawing on comparative material from across the globe formed a staple of ethnology, although no implicit developmental schema tinges Gorer's use of such material. In this he resembles the cultural relativism being promoted by Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, whose works were widely read. So do his efforts to speak for non-European knowledges while highlighting the limitations of an unquestioned habitus.

Clearly reports by travelers and Indies people partly coalesced. Both groups translated *guna-guna* beyond the borders of colonial Indonesia. Treating it as a species of magic, and in this respect following tracks already laid down by ethnologists, they simultaneously insisted on magic's reality and relevance to contemporary life. Testimony played a significant role in this. So did efforts to affix *guna-guna* in particular and magic in general to natural/cultural networks under construction in the metropole. Such work challenged colonial divisions between colonizer and colonized, between a European science that reveals a universal nature and a native belief bounded by culture (at best) or ignorance (at worst), even as the alliances forged involved other compromises.

INTO THE TWILIGHT ZONE

I have argued that totokization produced a congenial ground for the growth of both *guna-guna* and *guna-guna* stories, and that these gained further purchase in the 1930s. Changing colonial policies created conditions that led more parties to employ *guna-guna* in its seductive or vengeful versions. (Ultimately, of course, people turned to *guna-guna* because many European men refused to treat Indo or Javanese women as more than casual conveniences.) For *totok*s, rumors about *guna-guna* formed a striking feature of the strange colonial society that had developed in the Indies. For some *guna-guna* marked the risks of too much intimacy with local populations; liaisons with Indonesians produced dangerous and troubling effects, not only in the form of mixed-race children and loss of colonizer prestige, but also in the peculiar ideas and anxieties to which they seemed to give rise. For others, *guna-guna* demonstrated that Western science could not, after all, understand everything; there were limits to its insistent universalizing. In short, *guna-guna* tales did a lot of work: they

helped to domesticate immigrants, contributed to fantasies of the mysterious East and the rational West, and contested and ramified knowledge formations.

But Muller's is not just your average *guna-guna* tale, any more than Gorer is your average narrator. This anecdote strains beyond the social history of a long-forgotten empire.[19]

Whenever I tell Muller's story (and I have, many times) and end with Gorer striking his match, I imagine Rod Serling, his Lincolnesque face solemn, stepping out of the shadows to intone its moral, accompanied by the eight notes of *The Twilight Zone*. For this *guna-guna* story, in contrast to many others, definitely yields a moral.

Consider, for instance, Muller's fate. In contrast to other victims, Muller does not contract a ghastly illness and die a lingering death: no ground glass here. Its most striking feature is its surgical precision, which vividly engages the racial problematic permeating the narrative. (Muller's all-too-familiar racism—including his shabby treatment of Anna—in part accounts for why this story speaks to us even without all of the rigmarole of historical contextualization.) Fittingly, what has been done to Muller transforms the way things *look*. Since all Muller could see of Anna was her "color," what could be more apt than a form of revenge that interferes with his vision? Or more gratifying than condemning him to see all women as Anna, a kind of nightmare version of the lover's sweet obsession?

With his spell, Anna's uncle simultaneously strikes a blow to the heart of a racist social order in obliterating the possibility of making the discriminations that such systems require. Muller no longer can "see white": he neither can see whites—who all look like Anna and her uncle—nor see *like* a white, able to differentiate among human types. Clearly Muller had to leave the Indies: what place could there be for a colonizer no longer capable of such elementary distinctions? But it is by no means clear what faces Muller once back home, what a man who cannot recognize an Aryan might do in Nazi Germany.

But Muller's story does more than moralize. It makes it clear that for Europeans to admit that natives might be able to affect them would be to lose control of white reality. Muller himself evokes familiar metropolitan geographies and chronologies of magic—that magic belongs far away (over un-crossable oceans) and long ago (it has no place in modern life)—only to show that material relations in the colonies short-circuit such comforting certainties. And while authorities insist that magic only works on those who believe in it, Muller is hardly credulous. What in effect undoes him is the gap between his wholehearted embrace of a disenchanted modernity and what happens to him. The very skepticism taken as a mark of reason is revealed

[19] *Guna-guna* tales still circulate: a recent book on supernatural events in Indonesia devotes a chapter to the topic (Van Zoest and Heryati 1992).

as itself a kind of faith, a belief in non-magic as resistant to the evidence of experience as the belief it mocks in others.

In fact, it is in itself rather magical. Take Muller's recourse to the counter-spells of reason as he tries to prevent his world from unraveling. Desperate, Muller finally consults a *dukun*. But to follow his advice not only would require further intimacy with Anna; it would entail moving further into the reality such practices produce. He evokes the temporal magic of narratives of progress to ward off this unnerving possibility: "we're in the twentieth century." But platitudes about modernity do not exorcise his demons.

The more I think about Muller, the more useful I find the figure of the "twilight zone." As a time when the gathering dark makes it hard to distinguish colors and shapes, "twilight" appears a fitting characterization of Muller's condition. And the ominous overtones mesh with Indonesian experiences of twilight as a dangerous time, when spirits roam and misadventures can occur. But the phrase "twilight *zone*" speaks to more than a transitional moment. Twilight zones are perpetually gray areas that resist efforts to resolve their ambiguities and refuse reductive resolution. In such zones, familiar distinctions—modern and backwards; white and native; imaginary and real—provide no guidance. Explanations reveal themselves to be based in habits and ideologies; refusals to acknowledge limits to understanding cannot be sustained, and the messiness of the world as it actually exists demands recognition.

In *Witchcraft*, Evans-Pritchard takes great pains to demonstrate that for Azande witchcraft was not at all uncanny; mainly, it was a nuisance. Such insistence speaks to an awareness of what witchcraft—especially African witchcraft—might have meant to his readers. Evans-Pritchard set out to challenge the connotations of a term that he inherited from colonial law, which translated a host of African phrases through the historically laden English word "witchcraft." But he simultaneously contests the spooky tales of African witchcraft cycling through popular culture. In the paragraph that opened this article, we see him borrowing and then trying to override the language of such stories, by subordinating them to causalities acceptable to academic reason.

Evans-Pritchard is unwilling to remain in twilight; he must move from darkness to light. But in doing so, he merely asserts his own pre-existing convictions. His discursive shift reveals the limits to rational inquiry, the a priori faiths as resistant to contradiction as the magic he identifies in others. While Evans-Pritchard investigates what practices ground Azande in their assumptions about witches he does not correspondingly consider what anchors his own. And in this way he shows the limits of his ability to follow how things become real, which is why his effort to account for what he witnessed one night in Africa remains so unconvincing.

Popular accounts of *guna-guna* suggest that practices labeled "magic" cannot simply be described as real (a purportedly native claim) or not (the presumed scientific position). Rather, as any *dukun* would insist, they require

specific conditions: not only a skilled *dukun*, but intermediaries willing to add powders to people's food and collect nail and hair clippings; particular flora and fauna; yearnings and indifference. The question for the *dukun* is how far they may extend. Muller's story provides an answer. When harried parties seeking safe harbors beyond the reach of magic tell their tales to sympathetic interlocutors, they run a risk. Inscribed in books, they establish a foothold wherever there are libraries, bookstores, and readers. It may be comforting, reading anthropological texts, to think that magic can be easily contained "over there," that analytic distance can break its spell. But as Muller found to his dismay, under the right conditions it travels.

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