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Race, class and the deserving poor: Charities and the 1930s Depression in Java

John Ingleson

The 1930s Depression caused an enormous growth in urban poverty in colonial Java. Informal neighbourhood networks could no longer cope with the unemployed, the homeless and the destitute. Politically conscious Indonesians were convinced that the colonial state was concerned only with poverty among Europeans. They responded by creating new charities focused on the Indonesian lower classes. Many provided middle-class women with opportunities for leadership denied them in the political and labour movements. However, those who managed the charities had no concept of empowering the poor. In dispensing support they made a clear distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor. Nevertheless their charitable work enabled thousands of Indonesians to survive the Depression years.

There was little state-provided social security in colonial Indonesia. The state confined itself to subsidising the services of churches and charities, with most of the subsidies going to organisations that supported impoverished Europeans. The 1930s Depression put enormous pressure on social security networks, both European and Indonesian. It was a particularly difficult decade for many Indonesians living in the towns and cities of Java. The colonial government believed that those who lost their jobs would return to their villages of origin, where they would be supported by extended families and traditional mutual support structures. Some did retreat to the villages, and many circular migrants stayed there because seasonal work in the towns was no longer available. However, by the 1930s increasing numbers of urban people no longer had strong connections with the village world: indeed, about half of the population of the three largest cities of Batavia, Surabaya and Bandung had been born there. Many others were aware that the villages of Java could no longer offer much support. Some who did leave the towns and cities quickly experienced the poverty of rural Java and drifted back. The informal social security networks, which had struggled to cope with the rapid growth of urban Java since the late nineteenth century, were overwhelmed by the tens of thousands

John Ingleson is Emeritus Professor of History at the University of New South Wales. Correspondence in connection with this article should be addressed to: j.ingleson@unsw.edu.au. The author would like to thank Susan Blackburn, Anne O'Brien, Jean Taylor and two anonymous readers for their comments on earlier versions of the article.

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who lost their jobs and the thousands of others who sought refuge from rural poverty.[1]

Existing organisations continued to reach deep into local communities. For many urban Indonesians Islamic charitable organisations and local mosques were important sources of support. The history of Islamic philanthropy in Indonesia has recently been the subject of an extended study, including a discussion of the welfare arms of Muhammadiyah, the modernist Islamic organisation founded in 1912. Muhammadiyah was the largest Indonesian-managed social welfare organisation in the colony, operating schools, orphanages, polyclinics and poorhouses, motivated by a belief in the duty of Muslims to help the poor and the needy, and influenced by the importance of welfare and educational arms for the expansion of the Catholic Church in Indonesia.[2]

Faith-based charities, such as those created by Muhammadiyah or the Catholic and Protestant Churches, expanded their work among the urban poor during the Depression years. They were joined by a growing number of secular charities. Begun in a small way in the late 1920s as part of the nationalist agenda to create a stronger civil society, secular charities quickly expanded in the 1930s as middle-class Indonesians became increasingly aware of urban poverty. In a letter to her former Dutch head teacher in 1932, for example, a young Javanese woman from a middle-class family in Tegal, Central Java, noted that 'poverty-stricken people still bother us by coming to the house every day to ask for alms. Especially before and during *lebaran* the number of beggars overwhelmed us.'[3] A few years later, in 1935, an Indonesian member of the Provincial Council of East Java spoke of 'a flood of beggars in the towns'.[4] Dutch and Indonesian-language newspapers in the 1930s frequently used the metaphor of 'floods' hitting the towns and cities of Java: floods of vagabonds, floods of unemployed, floods of labourers returned to Java from the Sumatran plantations, floods of rural poor, floods of prostitutes.[5]

The histories of Indonesian charities in the 1930s have received little attention. This is partly explained by the paucity of official sources and the absence of records from the organisations themselves. Recovering their histories entails a heavy reliance on scattered reports in the Indonesian and Dutch language press. These sources provide only a limited view of the extent of their activities and inevitably bias the story towards the larger organisations led by prominent people that attracted the attention of the press. As Frank Prochaska has reminded us in discussing philanthropy in

1 There is a growing literature on the impact of the Depression on Indonesia. See, for example, *Weathering the storm: The economies of Southeast Asia in the 1930s Depression*, ed. Peter Boomgaard and Ian Brown (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2000); Anne Booth, 'Living standards and the distribution of income in colonial Indonesia: A review of the evidence', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 19, 2 (1988): 292–309; John Ingleson, 'Fear of the kampung, fear of unrest: Urban unemployment and colonial policy in 1930s Java', *Modern Asian Studies* 46, 6 (2012): 1633–71.

2 Amelia Fauzia, *Faith and the state: A history of Islamic philanthropy in Indonesia* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 99–172.

3 Quoted in Frances Gouda, *Dutch culture overseas: Colonial practice in the Netherlands Indies 1900–1942* (Jakarta: Equinox Publishing, 2008), p. 114.

4 Quoted in *Soeara Oemoem*, 9 Nov. 1935.

5 A report in the Dutch-language newspaper *De Indische Courant* stated that 'Many women are drawn to the town in search of work, but frequently are deeply disillusioned. It is also a fact that one can speak of an invasion of beggars, vagabonds and similar people.' *De Indische Courant*, 31 July 1930.

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nineteenth and twentieth-century Britain, many small local organisations quietly went about their work, their relief efforts known only to those who volunteered and those who were helped.[6] The hundreds of Indonesian charities that emerged in the 1930s to help the poor and the unemployed were an important part both of the development of a stronger civil society and the broader national movement.

Perceptions of the poor

The European community in colonial Java viewed the poor through lenses shaped by the intertwining of morality and race. This was particularly evident in discourse about the European poor. The European poor (predominantly Eurasian by the 1930s) were not just an affront to middle-class sensibilities but also a threat to carefully nurtured images of European superiority.[7] The Indonesian poor were less confronting to the European community because they were believed to have fewer material needs, with lower standards of hygiene and housing. There was also a strong belief that Indonesians were inherently lazy, undisciplined and lacked the work ethic.[8]

The Indonesian discourse on poverty was deeply influenced by the race and class-based structure of society as well as by the nationalist critique of colonialism. Indonesian-language newspapers, labour union magazines and political party publications — the voices of the Western-educated Indonesian middle class — relentlessly attacked the exploitation of resources and people by foreign capital protected by an oppressive colonial government. The Dutch colonial rulers were accused of being content that Indonesia was an extractive economy with an abundance of cheap labour. The regime of penal sanctions for 'Deli coolies' — desperately poor people from rural Java coerced to work on the Sumatran estates — was seen as symptomatic of a colonial government indifferent to the plight of Indonesians.[9]

While middle-class Indonesians saw the structural poverty of their country as a consequence of colonial exploitation, they were more ambivalent about the individual poor. Anti-colonial convictions could not overcome class sensibilities. The Indonesian middle class viewed manual workers and those who worked in the informal sector as *kasar* (rough), often describing them as *masih bodoh* (still stupid).[10] Physical labour was anathema to them. Few middle-class Indonesians had personal contact with ordinary workers or the poor, other than with the domestic workers on whom

6 F.K. Prochaska, *Women and philanthropy in nineteenth-century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) and *The voluntary impulse: Philanthropy in modern Britain* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988).

7 The European press was full of comments on the impact the sight of unemployed Europeans was having on the image of their community in the colony. Early in 1932, for example, a correspondent for the relatively liberal Surabaya newspaper *De Indische Courant* spoke of walking through a kampung and seeing impoverished Europeans, probably Eurasians: 'Even the western pauper needs to maintain a certain standing in a European environment. If he can no longer do so then he will not longer be considered as being one of us!' Quoted in *De Telegraaf*, 3 Mar. 1932. Sneevliet Collection 585, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam (IISG). By the 1930s Eurasians were probably 80 per cent of the people legally classified as Europeans. See Ingleson, 'Fear of the kampung, fear of unrest': 1633–7.

8 See Ingleson, 'Fear of the kampung, fear of unrest'.

9 See Jan Breman, *Taming the coolie beast: Plantation society and the colonial order in Southeast Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989) and Ann Laura Stoler, *Capitalism and confrontation in Sumatra's plantation belt, 1870–1979* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2nd ed., 1995).

10 I have discussed this at length in John Ingleson, *Workers, unions and politics: Indonesia in the 1920s and 1930s* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), especially pp. 41–69.

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their relatively comfortable lifestyles depended.[11] These relationships were at best paternalistic.

The Western-educated middle class believed that they had a duty not just to lead the modernisation of the country, but also to bring about the social and moral improvement of ordinary people.[12] The obligation they felt to care for the urban poor was accompanied by a conviction that the poor needed firm guidance. In their minds, as in the minds of the middle class in Western countries, there was a clear distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor. Campaigns against the irresponsible use of money in gambling, alcohol and prostitution were common, as were admonitions for ordinary people to become more self-disciplined. As one prominent Indonesian newspaper argued in 1936, while it was right to help those who through no fault of their own were unemployed, there were also parasites that must be identified and denied support.[13]

Perhaps it was this ambivalent attitude towards the poor that moved a correspondent to the Surabaya nationalist newspaper *Soeara Oemoem* in November 1933 to make a plea for the Indonesian middle class to open their eyes and pockets to those in distress. He wrote that while walking along a Surabaya street he had come across a policeman attending a man lying unconscious at the side of the road. The man was painfully thin, as if he had eaten little for weeks. His clothes were old and tattered. He was clearly very ill. A few days later he read a police report that an ambulance had taken the man to the Surabaya Central Hospital, but that a short time later he had died. Shocked by what he had seen, the correspondent reminded readers that they often saw billboards in railway stations, post offices and other public places imploring them to save birds and treat animals with tenderness. How much greater, he said, was their responsibility to their fellow human beings in this time of desperate need. The story ended with a call for a change in attitudes to the poor:

> 'Help yourself!' A slogan that is good to hear. But how much better and sweeter it would be to hear the slogan: 'Help your poor fellow human beings!'[14]

Charities and the Depression

Life was fraught with uncertainty for most people in the towns and cities of late colonial Java. Sickness, old age and unemployment were constant worries. Some had regular better paid jobs in the bureaucracy or government agencies, but most were in low paid day-wage or temporary jobs. The majority of men, women and children worked in the informal sector, where incomes were even more precarious. It was

11 Susan Blackburn has argued that women's organisations in the 1920s and 1930s paid little attention to the plight of female wage-earners because they were led by middle-class women who, apart from daily contact with domestic workers, had little understanding of the plight of women in factories and workshops. Susan Blackburn, *Women and the state in modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 170–75.

12 Nandini Gooptu has written about 'the mission of social and economic reform … of the Indian elite to what they identified as the poor and lower classes', in *The politics of the urban poor in early twentieth-century India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 14. There are strong similarities in the attitudes of the Indian and Indonesian elites towards the poor.

13 *Soeara Oemoem*, 15 Feb. 1936.

14 Nawi Husin, 'Tolonglah sesama manoesiamoe!', *Soeara Oemoem*, 1 Dec. 1933.

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common for people to have more than one job and those with a regular wage often had other jobs in the informal sector. For most people life was a day-to-day struggle. Local shopkeepers and stallholders were a source of revolving credit as were state-owned pawnshops. In times of need people first turned to families, neighbours and small, loosely organised, neighbourhood mutual help groups such as savings and loans societies or death benefit funds.[15] Moneylenders were the final resort, with usurious interest rates keeping borrowers in a constant cycle of debt.[16]

Charities managed by Europeans, the largest of which were those of the Salvation Army and the Catholic Church, had long supported the sick and the poor, but predominantly focused on the European and Indonesian Christian communities. Many municipal councils had also established poor relief agencies. Initially concerned solely with poverty-stricken Europeans, by the 1920s these poor relief agencies had extended their remit to provide some support to impoverished Indonesians. Subsidised by the colonial government, but largely dependent on municipal taxes and private donations, they were only able to provide minimal support to the destitute.[17]

European charities expanded their activities during the Depression years as they became increasingly aware not just of European/Eurasian poverty, but also of the impact of the Depression on Indonesians. Indeed, the largest private charity devoted solely to supporting Indonesians was a project of the European elite. The Algemeene Steunfonds voor Inheemsche Behoeftigen (ASIB; General Support Fund for Destitute Natives) was founded in 1935. The chair of the Batavia central committee was Mrs de Jonge, the wife of the governor-general. Members were mostly wives of leading colonial officials. Subcommittees at the provincial and residency level were invariably chaired by wives of governors and regents, supported by wives of prominent civil servants. The Batavian central committee of 64 women included only 5 Indonesians: Mrs Sutardjo, Mrs Thamrin, Mrs Kusumo Utoyo, Mrs Djadjadiningrat and Mrs Notosutardjo. All were wives of members of the colonial advisory council, the Volksraad.[18] The creation of the ASIB reflected the idealism still evident within the European colonial elite in the face of the relentless growth of urban poverty. A circular urging Europeans to support the ASIB appealed in moral terms: 'Help our destitute Natives. Let us put love into action.'[19]

In 1939, with the colony recovering from the Depression, the ASIB began to wind down its activities. In five years it had raised tens of thousands of guilders through

15 The Gang Tengah kampung in Batavia was probably typical. In 1932 it was reported as having at least six support groups, including a cooperative, a savings and loans body and a death benefits fund. *Siang Po*, 3 June 1932.

16 For a discussion of the evolution of mutual benefit societies see Marcel van der Linden, ed., *Social security mutualism: The comparative history of mutual benefit societies* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1996), especially the introduction (Van der Linden) and chapters on Indonesia (Ingleson), India (Das Gupta) and China (Ownby).

17 For discussion of European pauperism in colonial Indonesia see Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal knowledge and imperial power: Race and the intimate in colonial rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), especially pp. 34–8, and Ulbe Bosma and Remco Raben, *Being 'Dutch' in the Indies: A history of creolisation and empire, 1500–1920* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008).

18 *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 25 July 1935.

19 Ibid.

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fancy fairs and direct donations as well as through society events such as concerts, dinners, and cocktail parties hosted by the governor-general, provincial governors and other prominent Europeans. An ASIB committee established in the Netherlands by retired colonial officials raised over 17,000 guilders by mid-1937.[20] The ASIB received significant support from the Batavian government, provincial governments and municipal councils.

The extent of ASIB's work among the urban poor is illustrated by a report on its activities in the second half of 1937. It was operating soup kitchens in Batavia, Semarang and Surabaya, poorhouses in Central and West Java, polyclinics in Bandung, Ciamis and Tasikmalaya, as well as providing financial support to the White Cross colony for poor people in Salatiga. It had purchased a lodging house in Semarang for destitute women and another in Batavia for unemployed men.[21] ASIB raised funds for its own work, but, acknowledging that Indonesian charities reached deeper into urban society, also donated money to the charitable arms of Indonesian organisations. In 1935, for example, its Batavia branch provided 75 guilders of rice to the local branch of the nationalist party Budi Utomo to enable it to support 26 families, 300 guilders of rice to a group supporting impoverished unemployed, and 200 guilders in cash to the Batavian women's organisation Kemajuan Isteri for infant care. Some of the profits from a cultural evening in Yogyakarta in 1936 were donated to an Indonesian poorhouse; and a charity show in Batavia in 1937 donated some of its profits to a polyclinic run by Kemajuan Isteri.[22]

The creation of ASIB was welcomed by the Indonesian elite, which recognised the contribution it could make to the relief of poverty among urban Indonesians. However, for all its goodwill and practical support, it was a European-managed charity firmly located in the colonial relationship of white rulers and native ruled. It provided no space for Indonesian leadership or initiative at a time when nationalist feelings and a belief in 'self-help' were strong. The Indonesian middle-class also believed that they were better able to understand the needs of the Indonesian urban poor than Europeans, that the poor trusted them more than they trusted Europeans, and that they were able to reach far deeper into the urban kampung. When in 1940 Mrs Sudirman, one of the first women elected to a municipal council, criticised the inadequacy of the Surabaya poor relief budget, she was particularly critical of the fact that only Europeans visited poor Indonesians in order to decide whether or not they should be supported. Indonesians should do this work, she argued, because they had a greater 'feel' for the situation of poor Indonesians and a deeper understanding of their needs.[23]

Middle-class Indonesians responded by creating new organisations to support the unemployed, protect women and children, assist the elderly and the sick and provide

20 *De Indische Courant*, 28 Aug. 1937; *Bataviaasche Nieuwsblad*, 13 Oct. and 27 June 1937; *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 18 Sep. 1936.

21 *Soeara Oemoem*, 7 Jan. 1938, and 'Report of the General Support Committee for Destitute Natives for the 3rd quarter of 1936', Sneevliet Collection 587, IISG.

22 *Bataviaasche Nieuwsblad*, 14 Dec. 1935 and 13 Oct. 1937; *De Indische Courant*, 8 May 1938. Kemajuan Isteri was founded in Bogor in 1926. See Susan Blackburn, 'The 1928 Women's Congress revisited', in *The First Indonesian Women's Congress of 1928*, trans. and ed. Susan Blackburn (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2008), p. 6.

23 *Soeara Oemoem*, 7 Mar. 1940.

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basic health services. Coordinating bodies were created in the major cities. At the end of 1931, for example, 30 local charities in Batavia formed themselves into a Comite Penolong Kelaparan (Committee for the Support of the Hungry) to coordinate the provision of food to the unemployed.[24] Twenty organisations in Semarang came together in March 1932 to support the welfare organisation Gotong Royong, which had been established on the eve of the Depression.[25] In Surabaya, the Indonesian Study Club, a major provider of social services in that city, coordinated a range of welfare and cooperative organisations.

The expansion of Indonesian charities was part of a broader expansion of Indonesian social and economic organisations in the 1930s. In a decade when overt political opposition to colonial rule was routinely quashed, socioeconomic activity was an important way of expressing nationalist commitment. This was particular so for Indonesian women. Indonesian charities were heavily dependent on the work of women. Many of the organisers were wives of leaders of political parties or labour unions. Others were wives of prominent officials. Some were members of women's organisations such as Isteri Sedar, or, more frequently, the women's auxiliaries of political parties.[26] The charities ranged from small local groups to large organisations that handled significant amounts of money. They provided opportunities for middle-class Indonesian women to exercise leadership and organisational skills denied them in the male-dominated political parties and labour unions.[27]

Poor relief

The major East Java commercial and industrial city of Surabaya was badly affected by the Depression. The collapse of the sugar industry reduced the demand for labour in the harbour, on the railways, as well as in the workshops which serviced the inland sugar mills and the railways. The impact of the Depression was exacerbated by the large number of contract labourers repatriated to Java after the collapse of the plantation economy in Sumatra. Tens of thousands returned to their villages of origin in East Java, but after exhausting what little savings they had and unable to get work in the villages, many quickly drifted into Surabaya, where they lived on the streets or in slums along riverbanks and railway tracks.

The Indonesian Study Club, founded in 1924, was the pre-eminent forum in Surabaya for Indonesians to discuss social and economic issues as well as politics. Its members were predominantly independent professionals, such as doctors, lawyers or journalists, or employees of government organisations. By the late 1920s its activities ranged from labour unions to cooperatives, a bank, schools and a women's refuge. In 1931 it transformed itself into Persatuan Bangsa Indonesia (PBI; Union of the

24 *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 12 Nov. 1931, Sneevliet Collection 587, IISG and *Locomotief*, 18 Mar. 1932.

25 *Locomotief*, 18 Mar. 1932. The executive of the coordinating body included representatives from Budi Utomo, Partai Indonesia, Persatuan Bangsa Indonesia and the pawnshop workers' union.

26 On Isteri Sedar, see Blackburn, *Women and the state in modern Indonesia*.

27 A recent history of colonial Vietnam has argued that 'For women, charity offered not only an opportunity to discuss national concerns, but also an opportunity to challenge their lack of access to the public sphere.' Van Nguyen-Marshall, *In search of moral authority: The discourse on poverty, poor relief and charity in French colonial Vietnam* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 59.

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Indonesian Nation) and expanded its socioeconomic activities into charitable relief for those in Surabaya most badly affected by the Depression.[28]

Shortly after its formation, the PBI established a new group, Dharma Usodho, to provide support to poor people who were too frightened to go to hospital because they couldn't afford medical care and because hospitals and doctors were alienating places for the poor.[29] Its executive was chaired by Mrs Sardjono, the wife of Dr Sardjono, a well-known Surabaya doctor who at one time had led the health service of Muhammadiyah in Surabaya. Mrs Sardjono was also an executive member of the poor relief agency of the Surabaya Municipal Council.[30] Other members of the executive included Mrs Siti Sudari Sudirman, who was active in a number of educational and welfare organisations in Surabaya and a leading organiser of charities associated with the Indonesian Study Club, especially its women's hostel and its orphanage, and in Putri Budi Sejati, the schools arm of the Study Club.[31]

In the 1930s Dharma Usodho supported thousands of poor people in Surabaya. It focused on women and children. If a member of the Dharma Usodho executive heard that a pregnant poor woman was about to give birth, she negotiated with the hospital to admit the woman free of charge. If the woman did not want to go to the hospital she arranged for a midwife to go to her home. Dharma Usodho worked closely with other social groups in Surabaya, such as the Mardi Santoso, the social welfare arm of Perhimpunan Kaum Verplegers (sters) dan Vroedvrouwen Indonesia (Union of Indonesian Nurses and Midwives).[32]

In March 1931, just two months after creating Dharma Usodho, the PBI established a larger organisation, Penolong Kemiskinan Indonesia (Aid for Destitute Indonesians), to support the urban poor.[33] Members of its executive were wives of prominent PBI members, with Mrs Sardjono again its chair.[34] Throughout the 1930s, the Penolong Kemiskinan Indonesia supported the poorest of the poor in Surabaya, especially the elderly and those too sick to work.

The social and material gap between benefactors and mendicants was immense. Each Wednesday morning as many as a hundred people came to the headquarters of the Indonesian Study Club seeking help.[35] A contemporary photograph shows well-dressed leaders of the Penolong Kemiskinan Indonesia sitting behind a table on the verandah, with the poor sitting on the ground in front of them waiting to plead

28 See John Ingleson, 'Sutomo, the Indonesian Study Club and organised labour in late colonial Surabaya', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 39, 1 (2008): 31–57.

29 *Soeara Oemoem*, 30 Jan. 1932, 26 Dec. 1933, 19 Dec. 1935.

30 For an extensive interview with Mrs Sardjono see, 'Pertjakapan dengan pemimpin Armenszorg, njonja Sardjono', *Soeara Oemoem*, 14 Dec. 1934. She was active in women's sport as well as in most of the charities established by the Indonesian Study Club during the Depression.

31 See, *Soeara Oemoem*, 28 Feb. and 7 Mar. 1940, and *Orang Indonesia jang Terkemoeka di Djawa* (Jakarta: Gunseikanbu, 1944), p. 478. See also Blackburn, 'The 1928 Women's Congress revisited', pp. 4, 13. Mrs Sudirman was married to Raden Sudirman, a prominent member of the Indonesian Study Club and the PBI.

32 For a discussion of the welfare work of the nurses' union, see Ingleson, *Workers, unions and politics*, pp. 288–94.

33 *Soeara Oemoem*, 14 Dec. 1934.

34 In addition to Mrs Sardjono, the membership of the executive included Mrs Tukul, Mrs Sujono, Mrs Gondokusumo, Mrs Sugiman and Mrs Sudarmo. *Soeara Oemoem*, 15 Apr. 1932.

35 Ibid.

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their cases.[36] While deeply moved by the poverty caused by the Depression, leaders of Penolong Kemiskinan Indonesia shared the concern of middle-class Indonesians and Dutch alike that charity should only be provided to those who were unable to help themselves and who had no family or other support structures. The personal situations of the people who came for help each Wednesday were carefully investigated by two members of the executive with visits to their homes.

In its first year of operation the Penolong Kemiskinan Indonesia supported 507 people, of which 233 were long-term poor and 274 impoverished as a result of the Depression.[37] In 1932, for example, it supported a 70-year-old woman who had spent a year in a Salvation Army hospital before being found wandering around Surabaya. It found a room for her in a boarding house and gave her a small amount of money for food.[38] Many other people in desperate straits were provided with food such as eggs and vegetables. It also arranged free places at the unsubsidised private schools operated by Taman Siswa and Suparnadi in Surabaya for the children of those they supported.

Penolong Kemiskinan Indonesia not only provided food and clothing but also organised medical care. Indonesian doctors provided their services without charge and pharmacists provided medicines. Local shops supplied basic items free of charge or at low cost. Support came from Indonesian Study Club/PBI members and others who read the daily newspaper, *Soeara Oemoem*. Regular calls were made for donations of money, rice, sugar, coffee and clothing. In the weeks leading to Lebaran, the celebrations to mark the end of the Ramadan fasting month, special food and clothing parcels were prepared for distribution to those registered with the society.[39] In Mrs Sardjono's words, Lebaran parcels helped the poor to feel a little bit better about life.[40]

In November 1933, *Soeara Oemoem* drew its readers' attention to the shocking contrasts of life in the city and called on them to be generous in their support of poor relief. In the midst of what it described as a large and beautiful city, with many fine homes, cars, taxis, sealed roads, shopping centres and cinemas, there were neighbourhoods where people lived in abject poverty. It described a visit into some of the poorest areas by Mrs Sardjono, representing the Penolong Kemiskinan Indonesia, and Mrs van Koestveld, representing the municipal poor relief. During their rounds they met an elderly couple willing to work but unable to find any and thus forced to depend on neighbours for their survival. They had one son, a tailor, but he was married with a family, struggling to survive the Depression and unable to support his parents. They also met families with young children, undernourished and sometimes sick with malaria, living in desperate straits because neither parent could find work. The needs of the poor, readers were told, were enormous. But they were reassured that inspections such as the one by Mrs Sardjono and Mrs van Koestveld ensured that only the deserving poor were supported.[41]

36 *Soeara Oemoem*, 15 Apr. 1932.
37 *Soeara Oemoem*, 8 Nov. 1932.
38 'Pertjakapan dengan pemimpin Armenzorg, njonja Sardjono'.
39 *Soeara Oemoem*, 3 Feb. and 15 Apr. 1932.
40 'Pertjakapan dengan pemimpin Armenzorg, njonja Sardjono'.
41 'Pertolongan kepada si miskin', *Soeara Oemoem*, 22 Nov. 1933.

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Most towns and cities in Java had poor relief organisations, though much less is known about their activities. In Batavia, the significant support provided by Indonesian poor relief groups is illustrated by a report on the Batavian suburb of Meester Cornelis in 1935. In that year seven poor relief groups in the area distributed a total of 3,547 guilders in cash and rice. They raised almost all of the money and material support themselves, receiving only 500 guilders in subsidies from the local council. They were managed by women who moved through the poor neighbourhoods searching for those in desperate need: the Pasar Minggu group supported 478 people in 1935, the Kebayoran group 1,570 and the Meester Cornelis group 258.[42]

The Batavian and Bogor branches of Parindra also had a poor relief arm. The Batavia group was established in March 1935 by wives of prominent members of Budi Utomo. It became part of Parindra after Budi Utomo merged with the PBI. In 1937 it supported 360 people, including 208 elderly people and 16 children. It provided rice and a little money for those in need and space in a rented house for people who had nowhere to live. It had about 100 regular donors, though it relied on a subsidy from the Batavia Municipal Council for around 70 per cent of its costs.[43]

Women's refuges

The colonial government had long been concerned about the trafficking of women and children into prostitution and since the 1910s had taken measures to try to stem the practice.[44] The National Committee for Combatting Trafficking in Women and Children, established in the Netherlands in 1900, was an important pressure group on both the home and colonial governments. Indonesian women's organisations and the women's auxiliaries of nationalist political parties added to the pressure with ongoing campaigns, including keeping the issue at the forefront of annual congresses. Refuges operated by the Catholic and Protestant churches since the latter half of the nineteenth century, and by Muhammadijah and municipal councils since the early twentieth century, were part of the effort to support homeless women and prevent them becoming victims of traffickers.

The Depression saw thousands of women in the towns and cities of Java lose their jobs and the impoverishment of rural Java also forced more than the usual numbers of women into urban areas in search of work. The plight of women and children wandering the streets heightened fears of an increase in trafficking. Indonesian nationalist parties and socioeconomic organisations believed that the needs of the rapidly increasing number of homeless women and children could only be met by expanding Indonesian-managed refuges. They were convinced that these were better adapted to the needs of Indonesian women. The Surabaya newspaper *Soeara Oemoem* went so far as to compare the failure of a refuge in Surabaya run by the Salvation Army to attract Indonesian women with the overflowing numbers at one managed by the PBI.[45]

42 'Pendirian Armenszorg', *Soeara Oemoem*, 14 May 1936. See also *Soeara Oemoem*, 21 Jan. 1938.
43 *Soeara Oemoem*, 2 Apr. 1938. In 1937 it received 2,353 guilders from all sources. 70 per cent came from the Batavia Municipal Council and 10 per cent from other Indonesian organisations such as Isteri Indonesia and Rumah Pintu Muslimin.
44 There is an extensive file on the trafficking of women and children in the colony in the National Archives of the Netherlands, The Hague, Ministry of Colonies, Inventory Number 802.
45 *Soeara Oemoem*, 17 Feb. 1933.

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While middle-class Indonesians staunchly opposed the exploitation of women in prostitution, they were largely non-judgemental towards the women who did turn to prostitution in order to survive the Depression. They took the view that these women needed help rather than condemnation. In Batavia in 1933, for example, the Meester Cornelis branch of Pasundan Isteri, the women's auxiliary of the Sundanese political party Pasundan, interviewed ten women earning a living as prostitutes. It reported that only one of the ten was of 'bad character', the other nine had turned to prostitution only in desperation.[46]

As a result of the survey, Pasundan Isteri created a Penolong Pengangguran Kaum Ibu (Unemployed Women's Aid) to provide housing and work and teach new skills such as handicraft and cooking. Literacy and religious education classes were also offered. The organisers used their personal networks to find some of the women jobs as cooks, seamstresses or domestic workers. In trying to raise at least 45 guilders a month to cover the cost of looking after about ten women each day, organisers lamented that many originated from outside Batavia and wandered around the city streets in the depths of despair and humiliation.[47] The middle class was urged to dig deep to support people in desperate straits through no fault of their own. The organisers had no time, though, for women who came to the refuge but were disruptive or refused work when it was offered. They were reported to the local police with a request that they be forcibly returned to their villages of origin.[48]

When Mrs de Jonge, the wife of the governor-general, toured Batavian charitable institutions in August 1932, she visited six Indonesian refuges for women. All had been established by wives of senior Indonesian officials or nationalist leaders who were active in the women's movement or in women's auxiliaries of nationalist parties. The refuges provided simple accommodation in houses scattered across the city. They were one part of the work of a Batavian committee to combat trafficking in women and children, chaired by the prominent social activist Mrs Tumenggung.[49]

In Surabaya, the Indonesian Study Club had established a refuge for women in November 1927 as a means of combatting prostitution.[50] As Dr Sutomo, the chairman of the Indonesian Study Club, told a visiting delegation from the League of Nations in August 1931, 'we are trying here to bring fallen Indonesian women onto a good path again'.[51] Unlike most Indonesian refuges, its seven-member executive committee was dominated by men. There were only two women, one of whom was Mrs Sudirman, its treasurer. Its chairman was J.F. Tuwanakotta, probably appointed because as a member of the Surabaya Municipal Council he could be a strong advocate for subsidies for charities managed by the Indonesian Study Club.[52]

46 *Pemandangan*, 24 Nov. 1933.
47 See 'Kaum pengangguran perempuan: Prostitutie dengan vrouwenhuis', in *Pemandangan*, 17 Oct. 1933 and 'Penolong Penganggoeran Kaoem Iboe', *Pandji Poestaka*, 13 Nov. 1934, p. 1711. See also *Soeara Oemoem*, 25 Feb. 1936 and *Pemandangan*, 28 and 30 Nov. 1933.
48 *Pemandangan*, 17 Oct. and 24 Nov. 1933; *Soeara Oemoem*, 25 Feb. 1936.
49 There are reports on the visit by Mrs de Jonge in *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 12 Aug. 1932 and *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 15 Aug. 1932.
50 See the extract from its constitution in a summary of its 1935 annual report in *De Indische Courant*, 26 Aug. 1936.
51 Quoted in *De Indische Courant*, 26 Aug. 1931.
52 *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 24 June 1932.

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The refuge not only provided lodgings and food, but also taught domestic skills, such as cooking, cleaning and dressmaking, and provided literacy classes in Javanese and Malay.[53] In 1929, a total of 47 women came to the refuge, staying on average for twenty days. Most had come to Surabaya seeking work, but were unable to find any and struggled to survive. The refuge was proud of the fact that it had found work for 23 of these women as domestic servants, 4 as cooks and 4 as seamstresses. Another 15 were persuaded to return to their families in rural Java.[54] As the Depression hit Java, demand for places increased substantially. The refuge supported 275 women in 1934 and 171 the following year.[55]

Most Indonesian-managed refuges for women and children received subsidies from municipal councils and some also received subsidies from the colonial state. European officials supported the socioeconomic activities of Indonesian organisations, acknowledging that they could reach far more deeply into urban kampung than organisations managed by Europeans. The colonial government's respect for the Indonesian Study Club's charity work was evident when the Central Unemployed Support Committee provided 5,603 guilders in 1930 towards the capital cost of extending its refuge.[56] Municipal councils were also generally supportive, though they had limited funds. Indonesian councillors, elected from a very restricted electorate, were vocal advocates in the 1930s for municipal services to be directed to the Indonesian community.[57] Charities were careful to assure private donors, municipal councils and Batavia that the money was being used properly. Careful financial records were kept and annual reports published.

More is known about the finances of the Indonesian Study Club refuge in Surabaya, but the pattern was probably similar elsewhere. In 1935 the operating cost of the women's refuge and orphans' school (in the same complex) was 3,615 guilders, of which 800 guilders came from the Surabaya Municipal Council. The National Night Market in Surabaya (discussed at length below) donated 112 guilders and 806 guilders was earned from the sale of textiles made by the women and children. The remainder came from individual donations and donations from Chinese as well as Indonesian businesses in Surabaya.[58]

53 *De Indische Courant,* 26 Aug. 1936.

54 *De Indische Courant*, 4 June and 31 July 1930. While sympathetic to its work, readers were nevertheless reminded that 'The refuge functions more or less as a recruiting office for domestic workers, and in the one year of its existence has received numerous requests for workers, from Natives as well as from Europeans and Chinese'. *De Indische Courant*, 31 July 1930.

55 *Soeara Oemoem*, 1 Sept. 1936. The Indonesian Study Club established a small textile school alongside the women's refuge. Women reportedly came to the school not only from Surabaya itself, but also from nearby towns and villages hoping it would give them a chance to gain a skill and get work. In its first year 18 of these women passed its examination. Its annual report for 1929 expressed the hope that in the following year it would teach another 100 poor women to be textile workers. *Soeara Oemoem*, 27 Jan. 1933.

56 *De Indische Courant*, 4 June 1930.

57 In 1925 the franchise for Municipal Councils was extended to males who were at least 21 years of age, literate in any language, and had an annual taxable income of at least 300 guilders. Women were permitted to stand for election from 1938 but were not given the right to vote until 1941. The electorate for the Batavia Municipal Council in 1938 consisted of 8,563 Europeans, 3,468 Indonesians and 718 Chinese, at a time when the total population of the city was in excess of 600,000. See *Verslag van de Commissie tot Bestudeering van Staatsrechtelijke Hervormingen* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1941), Part 1, pp. 143–4 and Susan Abeyasekere, *Jakarta: A history* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 118.

58 This information comes from the annual report of the Surabaya refuge for 1934/1935, summarised in *De Indische Courant*, 26 Aug. 1936.

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By the mid-1930s there were dozens of refuges for Indonesian women in Java's towns and cities. Almost all were managed by middle-class women. They used their personal networks to raise the money needed to keep the refuges open, persuading individuals and businesses to provide free services, food, clothing and medicine. There was a strong belief in the importance of getting the women back to work and a determination to filter out the work-shy. An advertisement appealing for support for the PBI women's refuge in Surabaya assured readers that the women were deserving of their support because they were taught to cook, clean and do other domestic chores, with organisers helping them find jobs.[59]

The work of Indonesian charities among unemployed women included supporting their children. Some of the women's refuges established schools to teach literacy and basic skills. Others paid for children to attend local Indonesian-managed schools. A major concern was the growth of neglected, orphaned or abandoned children. They could be seen each day on the city streets trying to survive by selling odds and ends, begging or resorting to stealing. The charities feared that they would fall into the hands of child traffickers and end up as criminals or prostitutes.

The state had little provision for orphans or abandoned children. In the late 1910s and the 1920s it built a few reformatories, but for financial reasons largely relied on private charities to provide orphanages and re-education centres for Indonesian children convicted by the courts. The largest reformatories were operated by the European-managed Pro Juventute organisation. The Catholic and Protestant Churches and the Salvation Army also operated state-subsidised orphanages.[60] With the growth of the Indonesian nationalist movement and the drive for 'self-help', Indonesians began to establish their own orphanages in the larger towns and cities. The Depression accelerated their growth. Some of the new refuges for orphans and neglected children emerged from the refuges for women. Others were created by Aisjiah, the women's auxiliary of Muhammadiyah.

In Surabaya, the Perkumpulan Pemiliharaan Anak Jatim (PPAJ; East Java Children's Protection Association) was yet another institution created by women in the PBI. It began in March 1932 inside the women's refuge, but by July was looking after 32 childen, forcing it to relocate to a larger building nearby. In its first two years the PPAJ accepted 72 children. Some were children of beggars, others orphans, and a few sent by parents because they were deemed uncontrollable.

Many of the Indonesian orphanages were subsidised by local governments. The PPAJ received an annual subsidy from the Surabaya Municipal Council: 250 guilders in 1932, increasing to 800 guilders in 1935, reflecting the deepening of the Depression.[61] But they were largely reliant on donations from supporters and local businesses. In 1936 the PPAJ reported that one Surabaya shop had donated two girl's hats, another, two dozen pencils, while a chemist had donated medicines.

59 *Soeara Oemoem*, 27 Jan. 1933.

60 For a discussion of Dutch organisations working with orphans and children sentenced by the Courts see Annelieke Dirks, 'For the youth: Juvenile delinquency, colonial civil society and the late colonial state in the Netherlands Indies, 1872–1942' (Ph.D. diss., University of Leiden, 2010).

61 *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 24 June 1932 and 22 July 1935.

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A local doctor and a local dentist came regularly to attend to the children.[62] While dependent on well connected middle-class women for fund-raising, they employed women to cook, clean and organise the children's lives.

Supporting the unemployed

Many middle-class Indonesians viewed the growing army of urban unemployed as a physical and moral danger to society. Common labourers in particular were singled out. In mid-1932, for example, the Central Java newspaper, *Darmo Kondo*, accused the government of not providing support to the 'rough' workers, urging it to do so in order to protect public order.[63] The Javanese aristocrat and member of the Council of the Indies, Djajadiningrat, spoke of the danger posed by the unemployed to society and the inability of overextended social structures to support them.[64] European and Indonesian newspapers published alarmist reports about a rise in crime, young men wandering the streets in gangs, and fears of serious unrest. In 1932, the Surabaya Committee for the Support of the Unemployed, which was largely composed of European and Indonesian officials, went so far as to urge the local army commander to help control the unemployed, who, it argued, were disturbing middle-class neighbourhoods:

> this committee requests that a more robust approach be taken to the dozens of unemployed natives who terrorise the Kemajoran neighbourhood. In order to reduce criminality, it is hoped that they will be removed from the streets to the Grise Road barracks.[65]

The fears of middle-class Europeans and Indonesians about an explosion of criminality were greatly exaggerated. There was an increase in petty crime in Surabaya, which may have been typical of the other major cities, but fears of widespread criminality and urban gangs were far-fetched.[66] As well, the belief that large numbers of people were 'work-shy' was a myth. Officials repeatedly stated that when they interviewed the unemployed almost all were desperate to get work of any kind. The Cilacap Municipal Council, on the Central Java coast, supported a beggars' colony of around a hundred men in 1936. When it offered work sweeping the streets it had no difficulty getting men from the colony to accept. The street sweepers were paid only 20 cents a day, nevertheless many people from the town also sought the work.[67]

Indonesian-managed charities to support the unemployed were established in the major cities and towns. In contrast to most of the charities for women, orphans or the

62 Information on the Indonesian orphanages is scattered and minimal. See: *Soeara Oemoem,* 11 Dec. 1934, 14 Apr. and 23 Mar. 1936, 16 Feb. and 11 Mar. 1940.
63 Quoted in *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 23 June 1932, Sneevliet Collection 587, IISG.
64 Interview with Djajadiningrat in *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 29 Jan. 1931.
65 *De Indische Courant*, 8 Apr. 1932.
66 Petty theft in Surabaya in 1932 was about 50 per cent higher than in 1930. In 1933 total reported crime in the city was 10 per cent higher than the previous year, with 1,765 major and 2,554 minor crimes. See *Soeara Oemoem*, 15 Nov. 1932 and 4 Jan. 1934. For a discussion of crime in the Batavia area during the Depression see Margreet van Till, *Banditry in West Java 1869–1942* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2011).
67 *Soeara Oemoem*, 22 Jan. and 6 Mar. 1936. When an official from the Labour Office visited Surabaya in mid-1936 he was reported as saying that he had yet to meet an unemployed person who did not want to work. *Soeara Oemoem*, 8 Aug. 1936.

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poor, charities for the unemployed were managed by men, probably in part because they focused almost exclusively on unemployed males. Women were involved, usually as investigators of claimants' suitability for help or as teachers of the wives and children of the unemployed, but they played a supporting rather than an initiating role.

The charities for the unemployed were determined only to help the deserving poor who had lost their jobs as a result of the Depression, had no family support and were genuinely seeking work. Committees investigated every case before providing support. They were constantly on guard against those who might take advantage of them, such as people who had not had a job before the Depression, people who had lost their job because of bad behaviour or criminality, and people who saw charitable relief as a way of avoiding work. A willingness to take whatever work was offered was a precondition for charitable support of food, shelter or clothing.

In Batavia a Perkumpulan Penolong Pengangguran Bangsa Indonesia Jakarta (Jakarta Association to Support Indonesian Unemployed) was established in mid-1932. Within 18 months it had a membership of 1,400, organised into 12 district groups.[68] It aimed not just to provide the unemployed with food and clothing, but also to try to find them work.[69] Members moved around the city, quickly registering over 1,000 unemployed, many of whom were young people with school diplomas. It utilised personal networks to try to get them work, with only limited success because so little work was available. It established a barber shop in front of the Kemayoran railway station and a laundry to provide work for a few and also raised enough money to acquire a number of boarding houses in a poor Kemayoran neighbourhood for those who had nowhere to live but the streets.[70]

Other charities for the unemployed established cooperatively-owned factories and workshops. In Blitar, East Java, Indonesian and Chinese unemployed support committees established a shoe and bicycle repair shop.[71] In Malang, East Java, in December 1935 a local group was supporting 84 unemployed young people and providing casual work for some of them at a barber's, a blacksmith's, a laundry, a soap-making facility and a furniture workshop. Others were found work in nearby fields.[72] In Lumajong, East Java, 100 donors provided 50 guilders a month to a poor relief group which supported 15 children, including paying the fees for them to attend a government school.[73] The Semarang committee for Indonesian unemployed not only provided food and money to the unemployed, but in mid-1933 established a cigarette factory that provided employment to 60 people. The capital for the venture was raised by local organisations, but by March 1936 it had collapsed with over 6,000 guilders of unsold cigarettes.[74]

In the Central Java city of Yogyakarta in 1932, the official unemployed support committee was supporting 53 Europeans, 23 Chinese and 29 Indonesians. Its subcommittee for unemployed Indonesians was managed by Indonesians and raised funds

68 *Pemandangan*, 10 and 18 Oct. 1933.
69 *Soeara Oemoem*, 30 Sept. 1933.
70 Ibid.; *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 4 Oct. 1933; *Pemandangan*, 10 Oct. 1933; and *Berdjoang*, 11 Oct. 1933.
71 *Locomotief*, 4 May 1933.
72 *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 25 Oct. 1933; *Soeara Oemoem*, 7 Dec. 1935.
73 *Soeara Oemoem*, 23 Apr. 1936.
74 *Locomotief*, 15 July 1933; *Soeara Oemoem*, 3 Mar. 1936.

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from the Indonesian community. It could only provide the unemployed with 3 to 5 guilders a month, which it acknowledged was barely enough to cover the cost of food for one person. It had a subgroup consisting of representatives from local shops, restaurants and trading firms which organised a cooperative to supply cheap food, clothing and other essential items to the unemployed. As with poor relief charities in other cities, the Yogyakarta committee investigated each case before granting support, in order to ensure that malingerers were not taking advantage of it.[75] Another group in Yogyakarta focused on unemployed youth who had graduated from trade and technical schools. It was reported to have marshalled 100 people to work on a project to build simple houses.[76] In Bandung in mid-1933 a group of Indonesian engineers, doctors and lawyers created an organisation to provide relief to Indonesians who had completed a Western lower school education and who, in the words of a newspaper reporter, 'because of the Depression had nothing to do, and could therefore become a threat to the peace and order of society'.[77]

Surabaya unemployed support

In 1937 the Pembrantas Pengangguran Indonesia (PPI; Combatting Indonesian Unemployment), established by the PBI in Surabaya to support the unemployed, published a brochure to mark its first five years. The language and tone of the brochure reflected deeply held nationalist convictions about the oppressive impact of colonialism. Intended to persuade middle-class Surabayans to continue supporting the PPI, readers were informed not just about support for the material needs of the unemployed, but also about the moral guidance provided in order to try to improve the way they lived. The brochure provides a unique insight into what was probably the single largest Indonesian-managed charity for the unemployed. Its chairman was Ruslan Wongsokusumo, a man who led many of the Indonesian Study Club/PBI activities ranging from labour unions to schools. The PPI drew on the considerable expertise of PBI members, quickly establishing subcommittees to manage investigations, housing, food and clothing, work placement and health.[78]

In reflecting on its first five years, the PPI stated that it agreed with the colonial government that Indonesian society had a remarkable absorptive capacity at times of economic and social stress. Nevertheless, there were limits to this absorptive capacity and in its view those limits had been reached during the height of the Depression. While many who lost their urban work had returned to their villages, they drifted back to Surabaya when the villages were no longer able to support them. Society, it argued, had a moral responsibility to provide assistance to victims of the Depression who were without work and had little prospect of gaining any in the near future.[79]

75 *Moestika*, 4 May 1931; *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 8, 16 and 22 Sept. 1932.
76 *Oetoesan Indonesia*, 20 Sept. 1932.
77 *Het Volk*, 25 June 1935, Sneevliet Collection 587, IISG.
78 *Gedenkboek Pembrantas Pengangguran Indonesia, 1932–1936* (Surabaya: PPI, 1937), p. 4. I have discussed the extensive political, social and economic activities of Ruslan Wongsokusuma in Surabaya in Ingleson, *Workers, unions and politics*.
79 Ingleson, *Workers, unions and politics*.

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Some of those who drifted back to Surabaya were former contract labourers from the Sumatran plantations. After being landed at Surabaya harbour, they returned to their villages, but most quickly exhausted their meagre savings. With villages in East Java under great stress, and little or no wage work available, many of them moved to Surabaya where they squatted in slums on vacant land. One such slum was the aptly named '*Kampung Melarat*' (Misery kampung). Located at the side of the main railway line into Surabaya, it was home to around seventy returned contract labourers who had first gone back to their villages before moving to Surabaya.[80]

Kampung Melarat quickly came to the attention of the PPI. As a temporary measure it moved the slum dwellers into the empty former headquarters of the Indonesian Study Club. The building soon proved too small. The PPI then obtained a cheap lease on a small plot of land from the municipality on the city's outskirts. Using members' political skills and networks, it persuaded the provincial government to give it an adjacent area, making a total land area under lease or control of around 150 hectares.

Over the next two years the PPI raised enough money to build three large boarding houses on the land, which eventually housed over 350 people from the streets of Surabaya, including those from Kampung Melarat. The initial capital of 800 guilders was provided by a transmigration committee established by PBI members in the hope that it might be able to recruit people from the boarding houses onto land it had acquired at Banyuwangi in East Java. The PPI boarding houses were basic sheds, divided into small rooms for each family, with a large space for the unmarried young men. Each boarding house had a communal kitchen, with the complex providing a separate area for sick residents, a prayer room and workshop space. A roster of Indonesian doctors came regularly to the complex, tending the sick and ensuring that the seriously ill were taken to the Surabaya Central Hospital.

The PPI spoke of the great difficulties under which it laboured and the struggle to get enough money for its work. Its funding came from Depression relief funds controlled by local, provincial and central governments, supplemented by donations from members of the Indonesian Study Club and money raised through Islamic charity donations and contribution lists taken around the more prosperous areas of Surabaya. The PPI was unique among charities in that the vast majority of its income came from central, provincial and municipal governments. It raised only 6,000 guilders out of an operating expenditure of 46,810 guilders in its first five years, though it also raised significant donations in kind and time. The PPI seems to have had a small number of paid employees, not surprisingly given the number of unemployed families it was supporting in its lodging houses. About 25 per cent of its total expenditure was on salaries for administrators, nurses and other helpers.[81]

The lodging houses were filled with people such as the former plantation labourers from Kampung Melarat, Surabaya men who had lost their jobs and people who had drifted into Surabaya from surrounding villages. They often brought their

80 A.G. Vreede, 'De werkloosheid in Nederlandsch-Indie in het tweede halfjaar 1931', *Koloniale Studien*, 1932, p. 204. For a discussion of Surabaya during the Depression years, see H.W. Dick, *Surabaya, city of work: A socioeconomic history, 1900–2000* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2002).
81 Detailed acounts for the first five years were published in *Gedenkboek Pembrantas Pengangguran Indonesia, 1932–1936,* p. 35.

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families with them. The cultural gap between the middle-class people who ran the PPI and the labourers was wide. While their material conditions were desperate the PPI did not have great expectations of them:

> The material with which the PPI works … is not the flower of society. It comes from a milieu where order, discipline and hygiene are foreign concepts. This is in no way to blame the unemployed: it is only to show how difficult it is for those living in lodging houses, such as those of the PPI, where the strict regulations on order, discipline and hygiene can be expected to create unhappiness.

The blame for the labourers' lifestyle was laid squarely on colonial exploitation that allowed the plantations to treat them so badly. Nevertheless, PPI leaders were initially greatly disappointed by the behaviour of many of the people in the boarding houses. Their response was to deal firmly with those who were disorderly and undisciplined. They were proud of what they called a 'moral victory' in achieving a more compliant attitude:

> As an illustration, it can be mentioned that in order to fulfil the hygiene regulations, each Saturday a general clean-up is held, with everybody required to participate.[82]

The PPI provided basic shelter and clothing donated by its supporters, but the labourers were expected to try to provide their own food. If they could not find enough casual work to buy food — and most could not — they were provided with rice and salted fish on the condition that they worked on the land around the boarding houses or participated in relief work organised by the PPI. Over a period of 16 months the PPI found work for around a hundred labourers each day on projects funded by the Surabaya Municipal Council — such as demolishing buildings and maintaining or expanding canals. The labourers were transported as a group from the unemployed settlement and brought back at the end of each day:

> The positive influence of the provision of work was clearly visible in the men. One no longer saw the dejected faces of earlier. The sadness that had hitherto weighed them down, seemed already to be forgotten. Fortunately, they still possessed a great deal of optimism, for the crisis had still not ended and they were still uncertain about their future.[83]

The unemployed settlement gradually developed some of the land around the boarding houses. It was not good quality land, but the PPI had few expectations about what could be achieved: 'the aim of the farming is not so much to make the land fertile as to protect the people against further demoralisation'.[84] People with some agricultural background were provided with small plots for their personal use with the requirement that part of the produce be given to the lodging houses. People with no agricultural background were required to work land under the direct management of the committee and in return for their labour were provided with food for themselves and their families.

82 Ibid., p. 11.
83 Ibid., p. 17.
84 Ibid., p. 13.

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The PPI prided itself on providing not just housing for unemployed labourers, but also providing educational and spiritual help to them and their families. A school to teach children basic literacy and practical skills was established, along with a prayer room. The PPI also established metalworking, woodworking, weaving and soap-making workshops. None were commercial ventures, but they satisfied the convictions of PPI organisers that meaningful work was crucial to improving the moral lives of the unemployed. The PPI was particularly concerned about women in the boarding houses being idle all day because, given the nature of the accommodation, they had few domestic tasks. The women were keen to get work, but little work was available to supplement their husbands' meagre incomes.

A second group supported by the PPI were redundant office workers and tradesmen who were permanent residents of Surabaya. Two members of the PPI management committee made personal assessments in order to decide whether or not to provide support. At just 4 guilders a month for a married man, plus an additional 50 cents for each child, the support provided was minimal. The PPI took a strongly moralistic view of how much support should be granted:

> The support is minimal and is in fact insufficient to meet the subsistence needs of those supported. The executive does this conscious that it is the only way to eliminate to a large extent the demoralising influence of being in receipt of relief. In the opinion of the executive, there is no more effective stimulus for those supported to seek work. Next to the moral pressure which this policy is intended to exert are other measures which also exert pressure, for example the requirement that they register for work with the Surabaya Labour Office.[85]

A third group supported by the PPI were people seeking a small amount of capital in order to set themselves up in small-scale trading or a cottage industry. The tone of the PPI brochure makes it clear that these people were considered far more promising than the other groups. Even so, each individual was carefully investigated. Those supported were mentored by Indonesian Study Club members and their ventures closely monitored. While many were successful — and the PPI took great pride in this — some were not and loans had to be written off.

Fund-raising

Indonesian charities were adept at raising money. Public appeals were made through newspapers, political parties, women's organisations and labour unions. Committee members took contribution lists around the wealthier areas of the cities. School children were encouraged to bring in a coin each week, lotteries were held, cultural performances and football matches were organised and donations were solicited from shops and companies. Local companies were generous in their support and Indonesian doctors, nurses, pharmacists and teachers donated their services. There were frequent calls for food and clothing as well as money, especially just before Lebaran when special appeals were made so that parcels could be prepared for the poor and the unemployed.[86]

85 Ibid., p. 9.

86 In 1933 the Indonesian Study Club called on its 1,700 members to each donate 5 katis (about 3 kilos)

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Many of the donations were small and from people who were far from wealthy. In February 1932 the Cepu, Central Java, branch of the taxi drivers' union, Sarekat Chauffeur Indonesia, raised 74 guilders from its members for the Penolong Kemiskinan Indonesia.[87] The Grise football club donated 23 guilders, one-third of its takings from a football match, and a cooperative bank in Pare donated 18 guilders to the PPAJ.[88] In July 1932, three people from a rural branch of the PBI turned up at the home of its chairman, Mrs Ruslan Wongsokusumo, just before Lebaran bringing three cows for the unemployed.[89] There were frequent acknowledgements in the press of donations as small as one or two guilders. Major appeals had a nationalist tinge. Indonesians were called on to support the poor not just because it was the right thing to do, but because the colonial government was neglecting its responsibilities to Indonesians. Supporters were continually assured, though, that donations were spent only on the deserving poor.

A major source of income was profits from night markets. Night markets in Indonesia were originally part of the Chinese New Year celebrations. Organised by Chinese businessmen and held in prominent locations, such as outside the Gambir railway station in Batavia, by the early twentieth century they were part of the life of towns throughout the Netherlands Indies. The first night market in Surabaya organised outside Chinese New Year seems to have been held in June 1905. The organising committee was led by European officials and included prominent members of the Chinese and Indonesian communities. An annual *Pasar Gambir* was started about the same time in Batavia as an official event to celebrate the Queen's birthday.[90] By the 1920s night markets were increasingly held during the dry season in May/June. They were significant enterprises, with profits donated to local European, Indonesian and Chinese organisations.[91]

In the 1930s night markets became part of the nationalist 'self-help' agenda. They were a celebration of being Indonesian as well as fund-raisers for Indonesian organisations. The largest was the so-called *Pasar Malam Nasional* (National Night Market) organised annually from 1930 in Surabaya by the Indonesian Study Club/PBI.[92] This was a major organisational task. Nearly a hundred thousand people, almost all of whom were Indonesians, attended the inaugural night market held between 31 May and 5 June 1930, paying 23,727 guilders for entrance tickets alone.[93] Even during the Depression years there were large attendances, with 96,619 people attending over ten nights in June 1932. Profits were distributed to the PBI charities and to

of rice for distribution to the needy for Lebaran through its welfare organisations. *Soeara Oemoem*, 5 Jan. 1933.

87 *Soeara Oemoem*, 27 July 1932.

88 *Soeara Oemoem*, 6 Feb. 1932 and 19 Jan. 1934.

89 *Soeara Oemoem*, 27 July 1932.

90 Abeyasekere, *Jakarta: A history*, p. 93.

91 See *De Sumatra Post*, 25 May 1935; *Algemeene Handelsblad*, 11 Feb. 1908; and *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 19 Aug. 1909.

92 There are detailed reports on the 1932 and the 1933 *Pasar Malam National* in *Soeara Oemoem*, 1–11 July 1932 and 1–18 July 1933.

93 *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 10 June 1930 and A.G. Vreede, 'De Omvang der werkloosheid in Nederlandsch-Indie over de periode December 1930/June 1931', *Koloniale Studien*, vol. 15, 1931, p. 525. The attendance figures are a reminder that the Depression years had little impact on the material lives of many Indonesians. The entrance fee of 20 cents was a full day's wage for many manual labourers.

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the maintenance of the Indonesian National Building in Surabaya.[94] Individual stallholders also made substantial profits which were used for charitable work.[95]

Night markets on the Surabaya model quickly spread to other towns and cities in Java. Organised by charities large and small, they were held in prominent locations, such as opposite transport hubs, next to regular markets or in public squares. In 1933 the night market in Bandung made a profit of around 10,000 guilders.[96] The Batavia night market in December 1933 was attended by over 25,174 Indonesians, 2,455 Chinese, and 310 Dutch; it turned a profit of 1,805 guilders.[97] Smaller night markets in 1936 in the Batavia suburbs of Kebayoran and Pasar Minggu made profits of 152 guilders and 278 guilders, respectively. In nearby Bekasi regency, the local night market made a profit of 494 guilders and the Cikarang night market a profit of 417 guilders.[98] Night markets and charity fairs remained an important source of funds for Indonesian charities to the end of the colonial era.

Despite all the fund-raising efforts, Indonesian charities never had enough money to meet the needs of the unemployed, the destitute, the homeless or the sick. Apart from money needed to give to the unemployed, they had to pay rent for lodging houses, refuges and orphanages, purchase food and pay wages to those who did some of the practical work. Throughout the 1930s they repeatedly complained that the municipal councils and the Batavian government discriminated against Indonesians affected by the Depression in favour of Europeans. In 1936, the executive of the Yogyakarta poor relief and unemployed committee publicly called on the Batavian government to impose a tax surcharge on the European population to support Indonesians in need.[99] This plea, along with similar pleas by Indonesian members of the municipal councils and the Volksraad, fell on deaf ears. In February 1940, the poor relief association in Jember, East Java, appealed for continued support by issuing what a leading Dutch-language newspaper called a '*cri de coeur*':

> It is difficult to provide an accurate picture of the deep poverty in which so many people in our city live. You see or hear little or nothing of it. If, as we have, every now and then you would glance at the hard life of the poor, then donations would stream in from all directions and be greater than they are now.[100]

Colonial politics also sometimes intervened. In 1938 the Bogor Municipal Council withdrew its support for the poor relief arm of the local Parindra branch on the grounds that the latter was a political party. Parindra was furious, stating that it was not Parindra which was impacted by this decision but the poor people in Bogor.[101] There was a particularly difficult relationship between the Surabaya Committee for the Support of the Unemployed and the PPI. In June 1932 the Surabaya Committee approached the PPI to take 58 unemployed Indonesians who were high school graduates (so-called 'chief

94 See the report on the Third *Pasar Malam Nasional* in *Soeara Oemoem*, 11 July 1932.
95 *Soeara Oemoem*, 1–18 July 1933.
96 *Soeara Oemoem*, 9 May 1933.
97 *Pemandangan*, 18 Oct. 1933 and 8 Jan. 1934.
98 'Pendirian Armenszorg'. See also *Soeara Oemoem,* 21 Jan. 1938.
99 *Soeara Oemoem*, 15 Feb. 1936.
100 *De Indische Courant*, 14 Feb. 1940.
101 *Soeara Oemoem*, 21 Jan. 1938.

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workers') off its books, stating that it did not really understand the needs of the Indonesian unemployed. The Committee was prepared to hand over the 700 guilders a month it curently paid the men. The PPI initially accepted the offer, but eventually rejected it once it became clear that it was conditional on accepting the Committee's supervision. The PPI angrily accused it of being happy to work with Indonesians — but only if they had a subservient role under white leadership and control.[102]

On the eve of the Japanese Occupation, Indonesian charities for the unemployed, the desperately poor and the sick were still very active. The number of chronically sick, long-term unemployed, and desperately poor people dependent on poor relief remained high. In 1940, for example, the Parindra poor relief charity in Bogor, West Java, was providing rice and a little money to 165 households at a cost of 120 guilders a month. It had to limit support to individual households to ensure that no-one went away empty-handed.[103] In September 1941, the Batavia poverty coordination group organised 150 Indonesian, Chinese and European scouts to collect clothing from middle-class homes for distribution by 18 charities across all three communities.[104]

Conclusion

The growth of Indonesian charities in the 1930s contributed to the development of a stronger civil society. Charities managed by the middle class, which channelled money from the better off into the poorer neighbourhoods, became a permanent part of the urban landscape. Their expansion reflected a growing recognition among the Indonesian middle class that they had a responsiblity towards the urban poor. But the charities aimed to alleviate urban poverty, not to challenge the structures of a class-based society. Their leaders had no concept of empowering poor people. The middle class could not imagine leadership coming from the ranks of ordinary people themselves. They decided who would be supported and under what conditions, in the process making a clear distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor. The former were to be treated with compassion, the latter denied support unless they reformed.

It is impossible to know how much money and material support was distributed by Indonesian charities during the Depression years. Scattered reports do not enable a clear picture of the full extent and range of their activities. It is clear, though, that they were of great importance for tens of thousands of urban people who fell on hard times. The limited welfare provided by the colonial state was directed primarily at the European community and at 'white collar' Indonesian workers. Municipal poor relief was also aimed primarily at Europeans. For the less skilled labourers, those who worked in the informal sector, the chronically sick, the elderly, and the destitute, Indonesian charities helped them survive the Depression years with a little more comfort and dignity than would otherwise have been the case.

102 'Attitudes like this are of course not uncommon among Europeans. They want to work cooperatively but the Native must always be subservient.' *Soeara Oemoem*, 5 Aug. 1932. See also *Soeara Oemoem*, 11 Aug. 1932.
103 *Kebangoenan*, 2 Apr. 1940.
104 *Bataviaasche Nieuwsblad*, 27 Sept. 1941.

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