

Coping with the Crises: Historical Comparison on Responses to the Crises in the Extreme Salient of Java

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ABSTRACT: *Did the people's response to the crisis change over time? Using three different crisis experiences in the 1930s, the 1940s, and the late 1990s, the article will examine how the local society of Besuki (residency) in East Java, responding to them. The three crises put a strong blow to the livelihoods of the local people. But the adversity of the impact was unevenly felt by different groups of people, depending on the nature of their material bases and the availability of alternative sources of income. It finds that there were similarities in the people's responses. During the three events, some sought to find a relief in agriculture, retail trade, and forest sectors, apart from making adjustments in expenditure and consumption patterns to mitigate the adverse consequences of the crises. But for those who found no other alternatives, the crises forced them to do illegal activities, including lootings, stealings, and illegal logging. Such adaptive responses seem to have been quite common. Crises also meant a higher number of crimes.*

KEY WORDS: *Responses to crisis, Indonesian crises, historical comparison, and Besuki residency.*

INTRODUCTION

The twentieth-century history of Indonesia saw four major crises which struck in the 1930s, the 1940s, the late 1960s, and the 1990s respectively. These had deep impacts on the lives of the Indonesian people. The 1930s crisis was a result of the worldwide economic depression; whereas the 1940s crisis was linked to the Japanese occupation and the struggle engendered by the war for independence (1945-1949). The 1960s crisis was the upshot of the unsound economic policies adopted during the Soekarno era (Wie, 2003:194) and the subsequent political transition. Finally, the 1990s crisis was triggered by the Asian financial crisis (Houben,

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2010:410; Wie, 2010:73; and Tambunan, 2011:046). There is no doubt that these four major crises occurring during the twentieth century offer a fertile field for historical comparisons both at national and regional levels.

Most studies on the twentieth-century Indonesian crises have dealt separately and exclusively with one event, focusing on a homogenous theme and viewed from a national/Java perspective. Studies on the 1930s crisis, for example, tended to highlight the economic dimension. So far, the social dimensions of the 1930s crisis have been insufficiently treated. Meanwhile, the 1940s crisis has been pretty well studied, even at regional level, but still with an emphasis on the political dimension. Similarly, the 1960s crisis has largely been studied in political terms, both at national and regional levels. Many studies on the 1990s crisis have focused on economic and political terms, but mostly from a national perspective. Besides these, hardly any study has looked at the series of twentieth-century Indonesian crises comparatively, from both a national and especially a regional perspective. The few efforts which have been made tend to be concerned mostly with spatial comparisons (Java *versus* the Outer islands) in a single crisis experience (O'Malley, 1977) and temporal comparison from a national perspective (Booth, 2003:73-99; Lindblad, 2003:169-182; Wie, 2003:193-195; and Tambunan, 2011:045-058).

In academic literature, there is a growing recognition that the experience of crisis and the level of hardship were not evenly felt between different regions and different social groups (White, Titus & Boomgaard, 2002:155-156). One publication has thoroughly examined such diversity in the context of the Southeast Asian economies in the 1930s Great Depression (Boomgaard & Brown eds., 2000). A more recent publication has indicated the different experiences among Japan- and China-related business in Java during the 1930s and the late 1990s (Nawiyanto, 2009:100-110; and Nawiyanto, 2010). Earlier regional political studies on the 1940s crisis have also demonstrated the differences existing between regions in experiencing, perceiving, and responding to the Indonesian national revolution (Frederick, 1989; Kahin ed., 1989; Lucas, 1989; and Cribb, 1990).

As a country with great diversity, Indonesia is a fertile area for examining different crisis experiences. A valuable work by Jae Bong Park (2012:39-58) has indicated the reasons why in Yogyakarta, the late 1990s crisis did not lead to the outbreak of ethnic and religious violence; while in Surakarta and Jakarta, it provoked anti-Chinese violence. Even at regional level, differences in crisis experience among different socio-economic groups such as female-male, urban-rural, landless-landowner, and younger-older can also be expected to exist. However, little attention has been paid to

these issues and they have remained practically unexplored.

Employing historical method and drawing upon the available historical sources, especially contemporary newspaper reports, official reports, and also supported by other relevant sources, this article is designed to fill in the gap in our knowledge of the historical comparison of a regional community in different crisis experiences. Its spatial scope is the former residency of Besuki, consisting of four regencies, namely: Banyuwangi, Bondowoso, Jember, and Situbondo. Attention is paid to the experience of the region in the crises of the 1930s, the 1940s, and the 1990s. The 1960s crisis is excluded from the discussion here because of the limited time available to collect relevant sources.

Moreover, for a similar reason and without ignoring the fact that the 1940s crisis actually ended in 1949, the focus of the 1940s crisis is directed to the Japanese occupation. The discussion is broadly presented in a chronological order, rather than opting for a thematic approach. The following sections will discuss the responses of the people of Besuki to the 1930s crisis, the 1940s crisis, and the 1990s crisis respectively. In the last section, the main points which have emerged in the discussion are drawn together as conclusion.

RESPONSES TO THE 1930S CRISIS

In the Besuki region, as elsewhere in Java, the 1930s crisis was called *jaman meleset*, a local adaptation of the Depression (*Malaise*). The term was commonly used among rural dwellers, as G. Nooteboom (2003:252) found in his field research in a village in Bondowoso regency, and it is very likely that the same term was also used among the urban people of the region, who were much fewer in number. Meanwhile among the Europeans, the 1930s crisis was commonly described as a *malaise*, which caused widespread turbulence in the economy of colonial Indonesia. A colonial official working in Banyuwangi between 1929 and 1932 depicted the lives of civil servants as growing more difficult, characterized by multiple duties stemming from the reduced staffs and the increased levels of crime, but with a much lower salary. It was, however, a far bigger disaster for the European plantation staff who had been used to living comfortably and now found themselves jobless (Wijmaalen, 2001:208-210).

Having been on the upswing for decades with the plantation sector as the engine of growth, the prosperity of Besuki was shaken. The collapse of the plantation economy created serious problems of unemployment. Many plantations workers lost their jobs as the result of the closure of plantation enterprises and the decision of the remaining enterprises to cut their scale

of operations down drastically. Their numbers included not only plantation workers recruited from the region, many of them were seasonal migrant workers from Madura. With the lack of job opportunities in Besuki, the inflow of seasonal migrant workers from Madura decreased drastically (ANRI, 1938:33 and 59).

The jobless people of Besuki responded to their loss of employment in several ways. Being expelled from the plantation sector, a number of the unemployed sought other jobs. Many of them tried to escape from their misery by working in the farm agriculture sector. With their involvement, the farm agriculture of the region which produced mainly food crops expanded substantially during the 1930s crisis. Others tried to find their fortune by entering retail trade. The availability of cheap consumer goods supplied by the Japanese and the opportunities created by the expansion of Japanese traders in the region paved the way for their involvement in retail trade activities with the outlay of a relatively small capital. As Resident Ch. A. van Romondt reported, the number of retail traders in the region increased significantly after the crisis (ANRI, 1938:66).

Although some found relief in retail trade and farm agriculture, a number of them were not so lucky. Finding no work opportunities in farm agriculture, in order to survive, they were forced to do whatever they could to earn a living. As the region had large tracts of forest and forest lands, they saw cutting forest trees and making use of the forest lands as the easiest way of escaping their subsistence crisis. According to a report by the Resident of Besuki, illegal logging and forest clearing were especially rife in Banyuwangi and Jember regencies. Therefore, starting from 1933, the colonial authorities made a serious attempt to curb the problems by conducting a systematic and comprehensive investigation (ANRI, 1931-1934:8-10). Others turned to crime, stealing other people's property. During the crisis years, it was reported that the number of crimes in Besuki increased considerably (Wijmaalen, 2001:2010).

During the 1930s crisis, the prices of the plantation products dropped steeply. Most of the farmers in Besuki responded to the situation by turning their agricultural fields into food crop production. This was not restricted only to former tobacco fields, food crops were also cultivated on lands previously leased by plantation enterprises. As a result, in contrast to the declining acreage of plantation crops, there was a considerable increase in the acreage of land under food crop cultivation. The cultivation of rice increased from 150,700 hectares in 1931 to 183,400 hectares in 1936. Other food crop cultivation also rose substantially. The cultivation of maize increased from 188,000 hectares in 1932 to 219,000 hectares in 1933.

Meanwhile, the areas under cassava and soybean increased from 17,500 hectares and 15,700 hectares in 1932 to 26,200 hectares and 17,500 hectares in 1933 (Nawiyanto, 2000:179-181). The rising trend in food crop cultivation even continued until the end of the 1930s.

Food crops were chosen by the farmers in the region as the best alternative for two reasons. *First*, food crops were the safest produce for them to turn to, especially during abnormal times, because they could secure and fulfil their basic needs for subsistence. *Second*, with no opportunities to generate profits from plantation crops, planting food crops, especially rice, presented a preferable alternative, especially given the availability of cheap labour and the growing rice market created by the government policy of banning cheap rice imports from 1933. Not surprisingly, it is commonly felt that the 1930s crisis was characterized by difficulties in obtaining money, rather than by problems associated with a shortage in food supplies (Furnivall, 1939:444-445).

All the responses and strategies obviously did mitigate the adverse impact of the crisis and prevented the general prosperity of the region from experiencing a steep drop. One good indication of this is that during the crisis years, the number of deaths in Besuki remained relatively constant. Figures fluctuated at a normal rate as in the pre-crisis years. In 1930, the number of deaths in Besuki was 23,100. This increased slightly to 24,600 in 1931 and then decreased to 24,200 in 1932, and fell again to 24,000 in 1933 (Boomgaard & Gooszen, 1990:179). The population growth in these years remained high. Another indication was that no major case of famine was reported from the region. H.J. Wijmaalen (2001:209) remarked that food supply among the indigenous people was satisfactory.

Despite the compensation from food crop production, the availability of substitute jobs and the low prices of the consumer goods, the 1930s crisis did cause a decline in the people's income. On the one hand, money became scarce and people found it difficult to obtain it. On the other hand, the economic burden increased, not least because the colonial authority imposed higher taxes. These two opposite trends reduced the purchasing power of people and forced them to make adjustments in their consumption. Finding their purchasing power declining, such rich people as government officials, landowners, and religious leaders were forced to reduce their expenditure. However, the adjustment was not made by reducing their needs, but mainly by substituting cheaper consumption goods. These goods were supplied by Japanese traders through their local shops operating the region. It was reported that in Jember and Banyuwangi, Japanese shops were easy to come across, even in small villages (Djie, 1995:78).

The poor, especially landless villagers and wage labourers who found their income declining steeply, faced a more drastic adjustment in basic needs consumption. As commonly found in poor districts, a number of people with insufficient income and low purchasing power were forced to consume low quality food, including dried cassava or *gaplek* (Padmo, 1994:159). Although there is no absolute data on the number of people living below the poverty line, it is almost certain that the poor increased in number during the crisis.

There is no doubt that the crisis caused trouble. The level of hardship, however, was not evenly felt among the people of Besuki. Plantation labourers and landless farmers suffered the most. Especially those who lived in poor districts, with only a few economic resources found themselves in a sorry state. Although a number of the poor could get jobs in farm agriculture, their wages were much lower than they had been and consequently, some still found it difficult to support their households. Under such conditions, to meet their subsistence needs, they were forced to mortgage or sell their valuable items, livestock, and land to the private moneylenders (ANRI, 1938:61). Those who were particularly unfortunate were eventually forced to transfer their lands to private moneylenders to repay their debts.

Meanwhile, the rich such as big landowners, among them village officials and religious leaders, and the Chinese and Arab traders did relatively well. Although a number of the Western planters went bankrupt and their staff lost their positions, the landowners could compensate by expanding food crop production, paying lower labour costs, and taking advantage of the increased availability of cheap consumer goods supplied by the Japanese traders. Similarly, although suffering from the collapse of plantation exports, the decline in purchasing power and the intensification of Japanese trade activity, the Chinese group was still in a position to exploit advantages accruing from the food crop trade. Not only were many of the rice mills in the region owned by the Chinese, this group also played dominant role in the rice trade (Krapels, 1935:479).

Although they may have been only small in number, there were also beneficiaries from the 1930s crisis. The Japanese traders were among the first to profit. With their consumer products priced cheaply, they expanded their trade and won a large portion of the regional market. Another winner was the small number of people who took advantage of the poor by providing loans on harsh terms. By doing so, they bound the debtors to contracts which put their land and incomes in danger of foreclosure (Djojohadikusumo, 1989:254). They included people from different

backgrounds, not only the Chinese and Arab groups but also indigenous big landholders who had control over the rice market in the region. Among such people, the crisis not only caused hardships but also posed opportunities that could be seized to generate lucrative profits.

A different level of hardship was also experienced by rural and urban dwellers. John Ingleson has suggested that the impact of the crisis was felt differently by different urban groups. Some urban dwellers, especially those who had lost their jobs and found no other employment alternatives elsewhere in the urban sector, suffered more severely. John Ingleson implies that they were hit harder than the poor rural dwellers. This explains the phenomenon of urban labourers returning to their villages to seek communal support (Ingleson, 1988:306-309). It is likely that the same trend also prevailed in the residency of Besuki, despite its smaller urban sector. Coolies working in sugar factories, on railways, and in harbours in the region suffered severely from the collapse of plantation economy, being faced with limited urban work opportunities for earning income.

Cogently, the differing levels of hardship in Besuki could be more clearly mapped in geographical terms. Bondowoso and Situbondo (Panarukan) regencies seem to have suffered more severely than Jember and Banyuwangi. This was partly because, as stated by H.J. Wijmaalen (2001:208-209), a colonial official working in Banyuwangi during the crisis years, sugar prices dropped much more steeply than did the prices of other commodities, including coffee and rubber. Another reason was the abundant natural resources available in the latter regencies, providing a kind of safety valve. This also explains why a Surabaya-Based Federation of Labour Unions planned to resettle unemployed urban workers from Surabaya by opening up agricultural fields of 2,000 bouw at Bajulmati and 1,500 bouw at Sanggaran, Banyuwangi regency (Ingleson, 1988:305).

RESPONSES TO THE 1940S CRISIS

In the collective memory of Indonesians, including the people of Besuki, the 1940s crisis, especially the Japanese occupation period, is frequently remembered as “a nightmare” (Djojohadikusumo, n.y.:100). It was much worse than that of the 1930s, because of the scarcity of basic commodities. The general living conditions of the people of Besuki deteriorated terribly. A statement made by two members of the *Heiho*, Herdjan and Samsir, on their return to Besuki which appeared in a Japanese-sponsored local newspaper, reveals that the lives of people grew harder than they had been before the arrival of the Japanese (*Warta BesoekiShuu*, 1/8/2605 [1945]:2). This impression is strongly supported by interviews conducted with eye-

witnesses who lived through the period (Nawiyanto, 2001/2002).

As in the 1930s crisis, the lack of market opportunities for plantation products caused by the outbreak of the Second World War (1939-1945) pushed farmers in the region to shift their operations from cash crop to food crop production. This response was not taken only on the farmers' own initiative, but was an inerasable part of Japanese policy as well. Under the "New Java Construction" policy, one of the most important objectives of the Japanese military government in the conduct of the war was to make Java, including Besuki, the supply base for food for the Japanese army in Southeast Asia and to establish self-sufficiency in food production in the occupied areas (Sato, 1994:175). To achieve their objectives, sugar and tobacco estates in Besuki were switched to rice cultivation. This move was clearly reflected in a significant increase in the area of rice harvested in the region. In 1942, this was 199,000 hectares; and by 1943, it had increased to 214,000 hectares. It continued to rise to 228,000 hectares in 1944 and slightly decreased to 219,000 in 1945 (CKS, 1947, table 3 and 11). In the same period, however, other food crops tended to decrease.

Moreover, other plants including cotton and castor oil plants experienced a significant expansion. The expansion of cotton plant cultivation was inseparable from the growing scarcity of clothes caused by the difficulties in obtaining textile imports. During the Dutch colonial era, the demand for these products was primarily met by imports from overseas (Ishikawa, 2603/1943:4; and Kartodirdjo, Poesponegoro & Notosusanto eds., 1976:151). The reasons for the expansion of castor oil cultivation were the rising need of lubricating oil during the war and the stop in lubricating oil imports from the United States of America (Prillwitz, 1947:17). In 1943, there was an area of 9,606 hectares under cotton in Besuki. This constituted 27 per cent of the total acreage of cotton fields in Java, reaching more than 36,000 hectares (Kurasawa, 1993:29). By 1944, it increased to roughly 15,000 hectares, excluding cotton cultivation in house yards and compounds (*Warta BesoekiShuu*, 13/9/2604 [1944]). By 1944, the cultivation of castor oil plant as an estate crop in Besuki had reached to 2,892 hectares. The cultivation area was the largest among the residencies of Java, followed by Malang residency (2,059 hectares) and Kediri (1,311 hectares) in the second and third places. In Priangan and Bogor residencies, it reached to 956 hectares and 836 hectares respectively (Prillwitz, 1947:17).

As in the 1930s, the 1940s crisis also caused unemployment problems. But in the 1940s, the scale was much larger because export activities not only reduced, they practically stopped (Kartodirdjo & Suryo, 1991:170;

and Mubyarto, *et al.*, 1992:24). Consequently, a large number of people lost their jobs, particularly those whose income had depended largely on the plantation sector. Their numbers included not only plantation workers and staff, but also people employed in other related activities such as road transport and railway and port activities. According to Shigeru Sato (1997:71), unemployment problems beset Java until late 1943. There are no data on the absolute number of the unemployed people in Besuki, but qualitative evidence from the current newspapers indicated the rising problem of unemployment among indigenous people in the region.

In their search for alternative earning-income opportunities, the jobless people of Besuki responded in several ways. Many unemployed people tried to escape from their misery by working on food crop production. This ran parallel to the Japanese policy of converting most of the plantations in the region into rice fields and land for other crops required to support their war effort. In Jember, for example, a number of the jobless people borrowed state-controlled lands from the occupation authorities to set up agricultural activities (*Soeara Asia*, 17/4/2603[1943]). Apart from food crops, they also grew cotton plants. It was reported from Puger district that 490 hectares of swamp lands were distributed among unemployed landless farmers for cotton cultivation (*Soeara Asia*, 12/5/2603 [1943]). Others looked to communal support in the rural community. There was a report from Jember that a number of the unemployed people in Jenggawah had obtained lands bought on the initiative of village officials. The funds were raised by selling paddy collected from the villagers (*Soeara Asia*, 6/8/2603 [1943]).

Some of the jobless searched for alternative income opportunities in the off-farm economic sector. As reported from Banyuwangi, a number of people found employment opportunities in small-scale industry such as coconut processing and limestone quarrying, for which they obtained financial assistance from the local government (*Soeara Asia*, 14/6/2603 [1943]). Similarly, in Jember some of them found employment in small-scale trading and the weaving industry. As clothes became scarce because of the cessation of textile imports, spinning, and weaving activities grew significantly among the peasant households in the region. The spinning and weaving sector appear to have absorbed quite a significant number of unemployed people and those seeking additional income for their households. A number of people also worked for the Japanese in the weaving plants, set up for instances in Kencong and Asembagus (*Soeara Asia*, 12/5/2603 [1943]), and for Japanese companies such as *Mitsui Nôrin Co.* and *Osaka Seima* (Kurasawa, 1993:30-31 and 61).

Others responded to joblessness by seeking employment as *Rōmusha*. A series of campaigns run by the Japanese with the support of nationalist and religious leaders attracted significant number of unemployed people. Their responses were partly encouraged by promises given during the campaigns that they would be paid a reasonable amount, buoyed up by the positive attributes attached to them such as working warriors (*prajurit pekerja*). In various propaganda campaigns, working as a *Rōmusha* was said to be part of a Muslim's responsibility to support the "holy war" Japan was waging against the Allies (*Soeara Asia*, 18/11/2603; 19/11/2603; and 10/12/2603 [1943]). Some *Romusha* workers were employed on various defence projects constructed in the region, for example at Baluran and in the southern hilly areas of Jember and Banyuwangi, traces of which still exist today.

Although the unemployment problem was compensated by the creation of alternative employment in agriculture, small-scale industry, and defence works, all this could not halt the deterioration of socio-economic conditions. There are several indications suggesting that the declining prosperity in the region during the 1940s was much worse than that of the 1930s crisis.

First, it was repeatedly reported that food supplies in the region were growing scarce and consequently many people were being forced to consume lower quality food. The Japanese forced them to reduce rice consumption and supplied them with various non-rice food alternatives, including items that had never ever been consumed, for instance *walang sangit* (a smelly insect), *ampas teh* (used tea leaves), mango, and *rambutan* kernels (*Warta BesoekiShuu*, 21/2/2605 [1945]).

Second, people also found it difficult to obtain clothes, of which there was in a serious shortage, a situation that led to the campaigns to urge the more efficient use of the clothing materials available (*Soeara Asia*, 30/11/2603 [1943]). The use of clothes made from gunny sacks, rubber sheets, *gedebok* (banana tree), and *ancar* was also encouraged (*Warta BesoekiShuu*, 29/11/2604 [1944]).

Third, there was a significant rise in deaths in Besuki residency by from 36,000 in 1939 to 47,000 in 1944 (Kurasawa-Inomata, 1997:126). For the first time after more than a century, the region experienced a population growth rate of below 1.75 per cent. Van der Eng (2002:449) has even estimated a population growth rate of - 0.60 per cent in 1944-1945.

The 1940s crisis hit various socio-economic groups in Besuki. Rich people, including landowners, official villages, and religious leaders, suffered less severely than the poor people. Many farmers also found their income decreasing significantly. Under the controlled market and

forced paddy delivery system, rice cultivation could not generate sufficient profits. Pertinently, rich farmers could avoid serving as *Romusha* by bribing village officials and by asking other people, mostly from among the unemployed labourers, to take on their duties in exchange for cash or food as support for their family. Similarly, with a stronger economic basis and, more importantly, their role strengthened to meet Japanese exploitation purposes (*Warta BesoekiShuu*, 17/1/2605 [1945]), village officials in general were far better off than the poor people. They also had plenty of opportunities to abuse their power, which they most likely did, to accumulate wealth for themselves by asking for bribes, imposing higher quotas of rice delivery than officially demanded, and by other kinds of corrupt practices (Boomgaard & van Zanden, 1990).

The situation of the religious elite was different again. Their authority in religious matters often made village officials reluctant to take their paddy, as recounted by K.H. (*Kyai Haji*) Dophier on the basis of his own experience. Aware of their importance to the community, the Japanese frequently distributed rice, particularly to pro-Japanese religious leaders and their students or *santri* (Kurasawa, 1993:327-328). A number of religious leaders might also have taken advantage of the opportunity to become propagandists for Japanese interests (*Soeara Asia*, 13/4/2604 [1944]; and *Warta BesoekiShuu*, 15/8/2604 [1944]).

Similarly, despite suffering from declining trade activities under the controlled market and the earlier chaotic situation, most Chinese did relatively well during the crisis. The Japanese policies caused no fundamental change in their economic position, although their activities were put under the Japanese military control. Initially, the Japanese planned to expel a large part of Chinese, but in practice this intention was never fully implemented (Aziz, 1955:173). In February 1943, the Japanese decided that the Chinese people would be allowed to continue their economic activities as long as they were willing to cooperate and to serve the Japanese interests (Benda, Irikura & Kishi, 1965:74; and Bantley-Taylor, 1967:12).

Consequently, a number of Chinese continued to play important roles in rice milling and rice delivery to Japan. In 1943, for example, more than twenty rice mills operated by Chinese officially opened in the regency of Jember (*Soeara Asia*, 3/5/2603 [1943]). In Banyuwangi, Chinese also owned the majority of rice mills. The leader of the association of rice mill owners was Lauw Sie Hing (Kurasawa, 1993:113). In Bondowoso, there was the example of a leading rice mill operated by a Chinese, Tjoa Liang Kiam (*Soeara Asia*, 4/7/2603 [1943]). No doubt a small number of them could also seize the advantages offered by the crisis to pursue illegal trade

activities. Reports appearing in the local newspapers indicate that this was indeed the case. The same situation was also found elsewhere in Java and colonial Indonesia (Peck Yang, 1998:197-203; and De Jong, 2002:258).

In contrast to the relatively light lot of the Chinese, the European group was among the worst hit by the crisis, both objectively and subjectively. Having lived for decades as a ruling class with the privileges and prosperous lives which came from being the colonial elite, the European group was placed at its nadir by the 1940s crises. Not only did they suffer from shortages of food and clothing and were forced to live in concentration camps, they were also obliged to do many things, including physical labour that had previously regarded as suitable only for the indigenous coolie workers (Van Velden, 1963). Only few of them, including those who worked in scientific research centres, were allowed to retain their old positions. Their activities, however, were restricted and tightly controlled by the Japanese military government. A similar policy also applied to Eurasians (Touwen-Bouwsma, 1997:38).

Another group, which suffered severely during the crisis, was again the poor people. With few economic resources, landless labourers and small farmers and their families were the hardest hit by the disappearing employment opportunities, the increasing scarcity of food and clothes, and the corrupt bureaucratic officials. Some of them may soon have found other working opportunities; many of them, however, were pushed to serve as *Rōmusha* working for the Japanese. They found that this alternative did not compensate for their losses because they were paid very little and the working conditions were harsh. Some of them may have sought relief by migrating to the neighbouring urban areas, but many more experienced malnutrition, poor health-care, and inhumane treatment during their service as *Rōmusha* (Sato, 1994:154,168, and 199-200).

Apart from the mounting socio-economic pressures, the consequences of the 1940s crisis on the natural resources were also severe. This was glaringly obvious from the serious damage done to the forests. Unlike in the 1930s crisis, when damage was mostly caused by individual or collective initiatives, during the Japanese period extensive damage to the forests occurred as the consequence of the government policy of clearing forest for agricultural fields, fuel wood, and defence works.

The damage to forests continued during the war of independence (1945-1949) because of the absence of a control apparatus. Another reason was, as a forest official put it, that to some people independence was perceived freedom from any rule. There were some, therefore, who felt that could do whatever they liked, including felling timber and using forest lands, even

if this had been legally banned by the colonial government. Finding no alternative to support their households, some people took whatever was available in their immediate surroundings and, of this, the forest was the most visible. This was what they and their ancestors had done in earlier times. Consequently, the forest damage in Besuki was among the worst in Java. Up to 1946, forest damage affected to 2,151 hectares in Bondowoso, 890 hectares in Banyuwangi, and 565 hectares in Jember. Percentage-wise, it constituted more than one-third of the total forest damage in East Java or 9,668 hectares (Soepardi, 1954:38). Some of the forest land was occupied and consequently lay at the root of land conflicts in the region between the Forestry Service and villagers in the years after independence (*Trompet Masyarakat*, 4/8/1958).

RESPONSES TO THE 1990S CRISIS

The 1990s crisis is seen differently by various groups of people in the region of Besuki. For those who had never experienced any hard times, particularly the youth, the crisis was acute. As G. Nooteboom (2003:252 and 259) put it, “...for them not only the lack of good food meant crisis, but also the lack of purchasing power for other consumer goods such as cigarettes, snacks, tea, sweets, and trendy clothes”. However, for those who had suffered hard times in the earlier crises, the 1990s crisis was only a minor spot of turbulence. In their view, a crisis announces itself in a shortage of food, as had happened once in the Japanese occupation period. In contrast, during the 1990s crisis basic needs were still available, and the only problem was sky-rocketing prices which put many goods beyond their normal purchasing power.

The people of Besuki started to experience the crisis in the early 1998 after the prices of basic necessities rocketed. This was several months after the financial crisis had broken out. As the crisis continued to deepen and develop from a financial crisis into multiple crises which assumed economic, social, and political dimensions, many people believed the crisis was the source of all their problems such as the loss of employment opportunities, the soaring prices of basic needs and agricultural inputs, and the declining prices of agricultural products. To cope with the mounting socio-economic problems, different responses and strategies were devised among the inhabitants of the region.

Among the farmers, difficulties had been felt from 1997, a repercussion from the unstable tobacco prices, a bad harvest, and expensive agricultural inputs. Many farmers growing tobacco suffered big financial losses because of the bad harvest and the low price of tobacco in 1998. Fear of further

losses led some farmers to abandon tobacco and cultivate safer food crops. Ineluctably, tobacco cultivation experienced a significant decline, as indicated by the two regencies in the region constituting the leading centre of tobacco cultivation in Indonesia. In Jember, for example, in 1997 the area under tobacco reached to 22,300 hectares. It decreased considerably to 18,951 hectares in 1998 and to 13,958 hectares in 1999. Similarly, in Bondowoso the planted area of tobacco went down from 6,390 hectares in 1997 to 4,866 hectares in 1998 and again to only 3,448 hectares in 1999. A similar trend also prevailed to Banyuwangi, a less important area of tobacco production in the region (BPS Jawa Timur, 2001:157).

A number of farmers who continued to grow tobacco suffered from further financial losses. This explains why in 1999 the area planted with tobacco continued to decline. Many of them went bankrupt and were unable to repay their debts incurred to the moneylenders to finance the risky tobacco cultivation. Only a few of them succeeded in generating reasonable profits, after replacing paid labour with unpaid labour arrangements, mostly by employing family labour (Nooteboom, 2003:256). Other farmers unwilling to take further risks, soon shifted their operations to safer food crops. It is evident from the fact that during the crisis (1997-1999), the area under food crops increased significantly.

In Jember, many farmers shifted to rice crops. Consequently, the harvested area of rice went up from 127,132 hectares in 1997 to 150,680 hectares in 1999. Similarly, for the same period in Banyuwangi, it increased from 102,260 hectares to 123,790 hectares. Benefiting from the better irrigation system in these two regencies, farmers preferred shifting to rice, instead of other food crops. It was a different story in Bondowoso hampered by its drier ecological conditions. Here, more farmers shifted to corn. As a result, the harvested area of corn in the regency went up from 39,559 hectares in 1997 hectares to 41,154 hectares in 1999, whereas other food crops remained relatively stagnant (BPS Jawa Timur, 1998:109-112; and BPS Jawa Timur, 2000:169-172).

As the crisis continued, many people could not maintain their pre-crisis situation. Some farmers and petty traders who were able to generate some profits even found their real net income deteriorating during the crisis. Facing such a situation, many people were forced to make adjustments and the most reasonable way was by cutting expenditure. The ways they made this adjustment differed considerably from one group to another. For rich people and most middle-income people, adjustment was made by cutting down their expenditure on luxury consumer goods. One alternative was by shifting to their cheaper counterparts. Unlike the 1930s crisis, which

was coloured by cheap consumer goods flooding in from Japan, in the 1990s crisis many consumer goods such as electronics and motorcycles originated mainly from China.

In the 1990s crisis, there was a rapid expansion of the Chinese trade market in Besuki and elsewhere in Indonesia (*Kompas*, 26/1/2004). Another alternative was to postpone making the *Haji* (religious pilgrimage to Mecca). This choice is evident from the decrease in the number of people making the pilgrimage from the regencies of Besuki from 3,795 in 1997-1998 to only 1,471 in 1998-1999 (BPS Jawa Timur, 1999:125). However, a number of the middle-income earners, including government officials, had to reduce the quantities of commodities for daily consumption such as meat and milk (interviews with Sutiknyo, 25/3/2005).

Meanwhile, among poor people, such as landless farmers, wage labourer, carpenters, and construction workers, cutting down their quantities of food consumption drastically and shifting to lower quality of food was commonly resorted to. Although there are no exact data, it is very likely that among them cases of malnutrition increased. They were the main element in the poor socio-economic group who experienced the hardest blows from the crisis. They were among the first victims of the crisis because they found themselves out of jobs. Apart from losing income for their households, they were also dealt a body blow by the soaring prices of consumer goods. Having already lived under the poverty line for years, they plunged deeper into a subsistence crisis. Community support by which they might have obtained nutritious food channelled through ritual traditions (*tasyakuran, selamatan*) also declined both in quantity and quality. Therefore, for them the Government support programmes such as cheap rice, health, and education subsidy programmes were a major help in relieving their misery during the time of turbulence.

There were several ways by which poor residents of Besuki responded to the crisis. Finding themselves without a source of income, some of them were forced to mortgage or sell their belongings, livestock and even land. There were cases illustrating that poor people who sold their land, then, used the money to buy cheaper land located in remoter places. They put what was left towards supporting their households. Another temporary solution was to become uninvited guests at weddings or other celebrations at which they could obtain free food. Some others, however, found looting and pillaging property owned by others was the easiest alternative to escape the deprivations of the subsistence crisis. They grabbed whatever was available in their surroundings, no matter what laws they violated, in order to survive.

There are reports that large crowds looted shops and warehouses in the region owned mostly by the Chinese. Others also reported that large mobs pillaged shrimp and fish ponds and plundered rice fields, yet others cut down hectares of coffee shrubs (*Republika*, 18/7/1998; and Choy, 1999:14). In Jember, looting took place for about a fortnight and reached its peak on 14-15 January 1998. Banyuwangi was the scene of larger scale looting and the destruction of hundreds of Chinese-owned stores, warehouses, and vehicles on 12-13 January 1998. A similar riot broke out in Bondowoso regency in August, targeting Chinese rice mills (article in <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Senate/9388/article/an.anatomy.of.the.recent.anti.et.htm>, 23/2/2012). The targets were not confined to private property. Forced by the necessity to meet their subsistence needs and partly taking advantage of the chaotic situation, not a few of the poor also entered the forests in the region and cut down trees illegally or worked forest land for subsistence production without giving the sustainability of the environment a second thought.

Not surprisingly, the crisis of the late 1990s also increased pressure on the natural resources. The illegal felling activities inflicted large-scale damage on the forests in the region. One report reveals that since the crisis about 10,000 hectares of teak and mahogany forest in Jember had been illegally cut down (*Republika*, 3/4/2001). A month later, it was reported that forest damage increased to 11,000 hectares, and the largest illegally deforested area was in Baban Silosanen, reaching to 4,000 hectares (*Republika*, 13/5/2001). Similarly, illegal logging also took place in Banyuwangi regency and caused serious forest damage, including the protected Alas Purwo and Baluran National Parks. From Banyuwangi, it was reported that thousands of people pursued their illegal activities without fear, sometimes even under the noses of the forest guards (*Suara Merdeka*, 19/10/2001). Moreover, similar forest damage as the result of illegal logging activities was also reported to have been found in Bondowoso and Situbondo regencies (*Kompas Edisi Jawa Timur*, 23/12/2002).

After being fired from their employment in industrial sector, some of the crisis victims tried to operate small-scale economic activities. In urban areas of Jember, for example, after the crisis made itself felt there, many food-stalls (*warung makan*) began to operate along the sides of roads, especially at night. Similar trends were also found in Banyuwangi, Bondowoso, and Situbondo. In rural areas, some of the poor people and labourers returning from the urban sector tried to find whatever temporary employment was available. A number of people found refuge in the agriculture sector and in home industries, but others migrated to other places. G. Nooteboom's

observation shows that some villagers of Bondowoso sought jobs in the forest sector of Banyuwangi, but some also migrated to Kalimantan (Nooteboom, 2003:253). During the crisis, many agricultural producers in the Outer Islands enjoyed economic benefits from the export market (Booth, 2002:190).

Despite the hardships, for rich and middle groups the blows dealt by the crisis were relatively modest. Although many of them were also forced to adjust their pattern of consumption, some of these groups even found some opportunities to gain benefits from the crisis. Some of them benefited substantially from depositing money in banks when deposit interest was set at extraordinarily high rates during the crisis. It was also quite common for government officials from regency to rural levels and non-governmental organization activists to try to get access to various government programmes designed to overcome the impact of the crisis. This is unequivocally indicated by various cases of the milking and misuse of the aid programmes provided (*Republika*, 26/2/1999). Not surprisingly, the flows of aid programmes also created a number of newly rich people (*orang kaya baru*) among the bureaucratic apparatus and those who could obtain access to and a position in the aid distribution.

There were also a number of people among rich farmers, moneylenders, and traders who did better during the crisis. They took advantage of the situation at the expense of the poor in need of instant money and forced to mortgage or sell their valuable belongings, livestock, and land at a low price (Nooteboom, 2003:265). Villagers with multiple economic resources such as land, livestock, and other additional sources of income also had opportunities to improve their position. On the one hand, they could generate benefits from the rising prices of cattle and maize; and on the other hand, while doing so, they could consume the cheap rice provided by the government under the social safety-net program. G. Nooteboom (2003:258) has observed that with better revenues, some farmers could afford the cost of renovating their houses, new furniture, and second-hand motorcycles.

In geographical terms, the impact of the 1990s crisis also differed from one area to another. With a larger urban sector, Jember and Banyuwangi each appear to have suffered more severely than Bondowoso and Panarukan. This may be reflected by the higher increase in crisis related to social problems, in particular the number of families living below the poverty line. In Jember regency, the number of poor families increased by more than 400 per cent, from 23,600 in 1997 to 121,100 in 1999. For Banyuwangi, it went up by 125 per cent, from 23,100 to 52,000. Bondowoso regency

experienced an increase of 82 per cent, from 31,200 to 56,900. Meanwhile, for Situbondo, the figure was an increase by 22 per cent, from 26,200 to 32,000 (BPS Jawa Timur, 1997:86; and BPS Jawa Timur, 1999:130). Another possible reason for the more drastic effect experienced by Jember was the fact that the economy of the region was heavily hit by the drop in tobacco prices. It is worth noting, tobacco was the main element in the economy of the region.

CONCLUSION

This article has presented a historical perspective showing the people's responses to the crises in a regional context of the former residency of Besuki. Two main conclusions stand out. The first is the general resemblance in the people's responses to the crisis. A shift in crop production from commercial commodities to safer food crops has been a common response among agriculturalists in the region during the 1930s, 1940s, and the 1990s crises. There is also similarity in the response to the crises by adjusting patterns of consumption towards cheaper consumer products. Another resemblance is that the rising unemployment problems have always increased the pressures on the natural resources of the region, as clearly indicated by the increased illegal forest felling, leading to the serious damage of forest. Similarly, during the times of crisis, agriculture, small scale industries, and retail trade emerged as the sectors in which unemployed people sought income-earning alternatives for their households. It is worth noting that during the crisis, people were relatively dynamic in seeking relief and even in finding opportunities for sustaining and, if possible, improving the socio-economic condition of their households. Their dynamism contradicts the general impressions created, for example, by the UNSFIR (United Nations Support Facility for Indonesian Recovery) Team which stated that people were only passive victims of the crisis and did nothing in response to their joblessness but merely waited for state intervention (UNSFIR Team, 1999:86-89).

Closer observation also suggests important differences in the people's responses to the crisis. Although employment in farm agriculture continued to play a role in overcoming unemployment problems during the time of turbulence, wider opportunities were only available during the 1930s and the 1940s crises. In the most recent crisis such opportunities were much smaller, partly because of the declining availability of agricultural areas as a consequence of a growing population and the increased uses of agricultural land for other purposes. Unlike the situation in the past when Besuki residency was a migration destination for people from other places looking

for employment opportunities, in the latest crisis many of the victims from the region were forced to search for jobs in other places, including the Outer Islands. Besides reflecting the smaller capacity of the rural areas of the region to absorb unemployed people, this might also indicate a partial weakening of the traditional networks of support which are increasingly felt irrelevant in the increasingly commercialized and monetized society with a relatively higher expectation of living conditions.

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