

Prostitution Regulations and Practices in the Colony: A Case of Surabaya (Indonesia) 1852-1930

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Abstract: This paper examines the sex industry in Surabaya, Indonesia, during the Dutch colonial period (1852-1930). Prostitution was a major social phenomenon in Surabaya, and the Dutch colonial government implemented a number of measures to curb the social and health problems associated with it. This study explores how the Dutch approached prostitution through their policies in this era. Primary and secondary sources are used to discuss how prostitution activities were organized as a social institution and how they were practiced in the colonial city of Surabaya during its most dynamic period of development. The Dutch colonial government sought to monitor prostitution in the city center, where Dutch and other European citizens resided, but did not directly control this activity in the suburbs. Before 1913, prostitution in the city was mainly supervised in connection with the army and serving soldiers. The increasingly indifference to the proliferation of prostitution leads to a lack of material regarding prostitution in the city in the 1930s.

Keywords: Indonesia, Surabaya, Southeast Asia, prostitution.

Subject classification: History.

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1. Introduction

Indonesia is one of the countries in Southeast Asia that has experienced a long and complex colonial history. The Dutch came into contact with Indonesia as early as the 16th century. This paper looks at the methods of, and policies implemented by the Dutch colonial government to deal with the social and medical problems associated with prostitution in the port city of Surabaya (Indonesia) between 1852 and 1930. Surabaya with its proportionally large indigenous population and large influx of Europeans and other Asians (especially the Chinese) provides an interesting case study on prostitution involving a variety of social groups. Historically, prostitution has been a systemic problem in Southeast Asia in the 20th century (Tagliacozzo, 2008). This is often attributed to the legacy of colonial development when cities and towns were established or expanded under European colonization. The introduction of new economic opportunities, the diversity of ethnic groups, the formation of urban areas, the presence of the military barracks, the laxity of social institutions in the city compared to the traditional village environment, and the high concentration of men in urban areas encouraged preconditions for prostitution. These factors led to the inevitable consequences for health, social order and security, morality, and law.

The colonial government was able to reap direct financial benefits from prostitution by permitting the opening of brothels and organizing periodic health checks for sex workers (Hesselink, 1987:213). This does not mean that colonialism directly created prostitution in the colony, but rather that it made the most of the use of sex workers and normalized prostitution as a form of labor or a “luxury” service, along with gambling and smoking opium (Truong, 1990:197). The Dutch government was no different to other contemporary European colonial powers, such as Britain and France, in implicitly recognizing prostitution as an “acceptable social evil”. Initially, certain efforts were made to bring prostitution into the legal framework. However, these were ultimately unsuccessful, and the Dutch government eventually came to view prostitution as a necessary evil, which had to be monitored closely in the period of high colonialism (Stoler, 2002:78). However, combating prostitution was not an easy task and it required substantial human and material resources that were in short supply in colonial societies.

Studies on colonial prostitution in Indonesia are quite diverse in emphasis, which can be attributed to the different sources used by each researcher. In 1986,

John Ingleson wrote “Prostitution in colonial Java”, in which archival documents were not used. Instead, he relied heavily on newspaper articles. By contrast, in “Prostitution: A necessary evil, particularly in the colonies: Views on prostitution in the Netherlands Indies” (1987), Liesbeth Hesselink extensively consulted state and personal archives in the Netherlands. In 1999, the book “Prostitution in Indonesia. Its History and Evolution” written by Hull, Sulistyaningsih and Jones, offers an overview of prostitution in the long history of Indonesia, which is missing elsewhere in literature.

The most informative writing about prostitution in the Dutch East Indies¹ so far is the dissertation by Andrew Jimenez Abalagin (2003) – “Prostitution policy and the project of modernity: A comparative study of colonial Indonesia and the Philippines 1850-1940”. He compares prostitution in colonial Indonesia and the Philippines, analyzing the two Asian environments. Using diverse sources ranging from regulations to bureaucratic correspondence and to newspaper articles, he reconstructs the history of state regulations put in place to control prostitution in the Netherlands Indies.

Generally speaking, prostitution in colonial Indonesia is now receiving increasing attention from historians who want to explore the darker side of Dutch colonial society. However, the relative lack of sources largely explains why there are few studies on this topic, compared for instance with the British colonies. Most historians of the Netherlands Indies focus on prostitution throughout the colonial Java rather than on a particular region or city. Having a “local” view could provide better insight into how prostitution was carried out in reality.

This paper aims to contribute to such insights by focusing on Surabaya, one of four main cities of Indonesia, by using sources written in Dutch and English. The study is based mostly on Dutch periodicals and reports such as *De Nederlandsch-Indische Politiegids*, *Geneeskundige Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, *Indisch Militair Tijdschrift*, *Onderzoek naar den toestand van het Nederlansch-Indische Leger* (1898), and *Onderzoek naar der mindere welvaar*. For the regulations, the author used one collection of the National Archives of Indonesia (ANRI) -

¹ Netherlands East Indies, or Dutch East Indies was a Dutch colony that is now modern Indonesia. The capital city, Batavia, is now known as Jakarta. The Dutch East India Company originally governed the territory, but control shifted to the Netherlands itself in 1800.

Pemberantasan Prostitusi Di Indonesia Masa Kolonial. In fact, prostitution and its practices seem to have been reflected more often in newspapers since journalism had the freedom to expose real life in society to the public.

2. The historical context of prostitution regulations in Indonesia

In the early 19th century, the Dutch colonists sent a large number of men to the Dutch East Indies to establish a state government. They included soldiers and civilians, who were often separated from their wives and families for long periods of time. In the absence of white women, these men turned to native women for sexual companionship. This led to an increase in the spread of venereal diseases, which posed a threat to the health of the colonial army and the so-called “white race”. In order to address this problem, the Dutch colonial government introduced laws that regulated prostitution. These rules were not new, as the French and British colonialists had also imposed such rules in their own colonies for their militaries (Tiquet, 2020). However, this was the first time that sex workers and their activities were seen as subject to law in the Dutch East Indies.

The regulations required sex workers to register with the government and to undergo regular medical examinations. They were also prohibited from working in certain areas, such as near schools and churches. The regulations were intended to protect the health of the colonial population and to control the spread of venereal diseases. However, they also had the effect of stigmatizing sex workers and making their lives more difficult.

The definition of a “sex worker” in a colonial context is difficult to analyze, as legal frameworks for prostitution and the theory of gender equality were not established at that time. Colonial politicians even argued that prostitution was normal in non-white societies and not condemned (Levine, 2003). Fueled by this attitude, regulations were enacted that unfairly targeted 'fallen women' as the sole source of venereal diseases, jeopardizing public safety, morality, and social well-being; and prostitution was still seen as an “unfortunate but inevitable fact of colonial life” (Mooij, 1998). Combating it was difficult due to the lack of resources, and in the last decades of Dutch rule in Indonesia, it was no longer a priority for law enforcement because other issues had become central to the government such as nationalism or the economic crisis.

According to Hull (2017) and Ingleson (1986), it is not easy to trace the history of prostitution and its ill effects in Indonesia prior to the Dutch connection. However, both agree that it was because of the outbreak of venereal diseases that Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (the Dutch East India Company -VOC) attempted to control the extramarital sexual behavior of its employees. Since the 17th century, a series of regulations on sexual relations were put to the test in Java. Initially, due to lack of specific classification, the VOC set the same rules for prostitution (*hoererije ofte overspel*), mistress (*concubine vuyl concubineren*), and adultery. In short, concubines and prostitution, if this is how it can be referred to, are both common social phenomena in Indonesia's history. This originates from the traditional view that women are seen as goods to serve the sexual needs of men. In the beginning, having a concubine was one of the easiest ways for foreign men to break into domestic society.

It was not until Stamford Raffles arrived in Indonesia as Deputy Governor-General of Java during a brief period of British rule of Indonesia that the importance of fighting venereal disease, mainly syphilis, and treating infected women were specifically recognized. Raffles drafted a mandatory screening system and even intended to build a hospital for prostitutes. The first hospital to treat syphilis was established in 1813 in Yogyakarta. However, Raffles was unable to pursue his proposal further, as the British had to return Java to the Netherlands in 1816.

Dutch colonial administrators initially paid scant attention to the regulation of prostitution, which is said to have originated with Louis Napoleon, a product of the "brief transitional period of ostentation" (Abalahin, 2003: 3). However, the realities of the colonies forced colonial policymakers to realize that the situation had changed, as more and more Dutch soldiers - the backbone of Dutch power in the colonies - were becoming increasingly exposed to local diseases, especially through sexual encounters with prostitutes. According to the authors of "Being the Dutch in the East Indies," in the 18th century, 57% of the Dutch East India Company employees were soldiers, while around 1860 the army made up 32% of the total European population in the Dutch East Indies (Bosma & Raben, 2008: 16).

The Dutch government then continued with its plan to build a venereal hospital, but this was delayed by the Java War (1825-1830) and the reconstruction plan required a larger budget than the government in Batavia could provide. During 1830 to 1845, the Dutch colonial government attempted to implement an on the spot

medical examination program for prostitutes, as syphilis was on the rise. Meanwhile, the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases within the Dutch colonial army was quite high, as evidenced by the records of military hospitals in Java and Madura. Although some individual efforts were made in a few localities, none of the programs were truly effective. Local reports indicated that the number of soldiers treated by doctors was far less than the actual number of those infected, and prostitutes did not like being examined and treated. The reason these women gave for avoiding medical care was the poor facilities of the prison where the medical clinics were located. Additionally, in prison, prostitutes received more “attention” from police officials than from doctors (Schoute, 1937: 737).

After six consecutive years of receiving reports of prostitution from all the Dutch East Indies provinces, the Dutch colonial government promulgated the Regulations on Limiting the Consequences of Prostitution on 15 July 1852. These applied to the three largest cities of Java: Batavia, Semarang, and Surabaya and focused on two main points:

Firstly, sex workers were required to register with the authorities and obtain a license to practice.

Secondly, sex workers were required to undergo periodic medical examinations. If a sex worker was found to be ill, their license to practice would be revoked.

This regulation was actually in accordance with the French system, which required a compulsory medical examination and treatment if necessary for all prostitutes. Due to the difference in receiving and introducing the regulation, one residency would adopt it earlier than others.

However, the regulations were not very effective. Only nine out of 35 provinces reported positive results after the new law was implemented (Abalahin, 2003: 111). As a result, the regulations were abolished in 1874. From then on, the problem of prostitution and sexually transmitted diseases became the responsibility of municipal and local governments.

Towards the end of the 19th century, controlling prostitution in the colony proved to be beyond the capabilities of the Dutch colonial government, from central to local levels. The rapid increase from 2.9% to 9% within three years (1909-1912) in the prevalence of gonorrhea among the white population in the East Indies

demonstrated the failure of medical efforts to control the disease according to the Dutch Encyclopedia of the East Indies (1919: 63). In addition, a growing number of campaigns to deregulate prostitution had taken place in the Netherlands and Great Britain. Opponents argued that the regulation only made prostitution more prevalent because requiring prostitutes to seek medical treatment in fact made clients feel more secure and therefore more likely to seek out sex workers in brothels. By 1910, in the Netherlands, there were no more state brothels and no prostitutes with a license.

Influenced by domestic debates, state regulation of prostitution in Indonesia ended in 1913. Government doctors and medical institutions would no longer examine prostitutes. Hospitals for prostitutes would be closed if there was already a hospital in that locality. Since then, state law has disapproved of the labor exploitation of prostitutes by third parties. In other words, after 1913, the control of prostitution shifted its focus to preventing the exploitation of women and girls in illegal brothels rather than spending money on health care.

It was no surprise that more and more prostitutes avoided obeying the regulation by not registering themselves to work in the brothels.

The implementation of the regulation was somehow hampered by a crucial factor: mandatory medical examinations. However, a severe shortage of doctors rendered this requirement impractical. Furthermore, the inadequate facilities hampered the process and ultimately led to an unsuccessful outcome.

Yet, the end of state regulation did not mean the end of official concern about the problem of prostitution. In 1915, the government established a new Regeeringsbureau ter bestrijding van den Handel in Vrouwen en Meisjes en dien van Ontuchtige Uitgave (Government Bureau at Batavia for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children and in Obscene Publications). The aim of the new office was to treat prostitution neither as a labor mobilization nor disease control issue. Instead, the government was now concerned about protecting the rights of “victims -women and children” and preserving public morality. Therefore, information about the trafficking of women and children became the main duty of the bureau inspectors. By 1925, the local government introduced sub-regulations attempting to stop street prostitutes or to contain their work to certain areas, mostly in the periphery of the city.

3. The situation of Surabaya

Surabaya, the second-largest city in Indonesia, is in the east of Java. The city has long been an important trading center, thanks to its strategic location on the gateway to the fertile valley of the Brantas River. In the 1830s, the Dutch imposed the *Cultuurstelsel* or Cultivation System, which required farmers to grow certain crops for export. This policy led to a boom in sugar production in the region, and Surabaya became an important port for exporting this commodity. The city also grew rapidly as businesses and factories were established to support the sugar industry.

By the mid-1890s, the sugar industry in the area had grown so rapidly that it required a large workforce. The construction of the steam tramway and the introduction of the railway system made it easier for people to move from rural to urban areas, and this led to an increase in prostitution in Surabaya. The government in Batavia noted prostitution was on the rise in Karawang once the railway line between Karawang and Padalarang was constructed, and Surabaya was no exception (Ingleson, 1986: 123).

With its large indigenous population mixed with European and other Asian (especially Chinese) emigration flows, Surabaya provides an interesting case study on prostitution in relation to diversity of social classes. By 1900, it was the largest and most populous city of the Dutch East Indies for all ethnicities. With the emergence of a naval zone and a railway center linking traffic and passenger transport, the number of Europeans in the city also increased from 8,000 out of a population of 150,000 in 1905 to 26,000 in 1930 (Dick, 2002: 127). They were mostly single men with military, merchant, or civilian occupations. Initially, single white women were still restricted from coming to the colony due to the moral and social constraints of the European countries themselves and the dangers of travel; most women when traveling had to be accompanied by a male family member. This gradually changed only after the rise of strong feminist movements and advances in science and technology that made traveling more convenient and safer for women.

Table 1: White Male to Female Ratio in the Dutch East Indies 1880-1930

1880	472 women/1,000 men
1900	636 women/1,000 men
1930	884women/1,000 men

*Source:*Scholten, E. L. (2000). *Familie en liefde: Europese mannen en Indonesische vrouwen*. In *Vetrouwd en vreemd: ontmoetingen tussen Nederland Indie en Indonesie*:45. Hilversum: Verloren.

Surabaya was no exception. Until 1932 the disparity between the city's male and female population was still relatively large, especially among the Chinese and other ethnic groups.

Table 2: Surabaya's Population in December 1931

	Male	Female	Total	Natives	Total
European	14,211	13,417	27,268		
Chinese	28,901	15,197	43,228		
Arabic	2,914	2,384	5,298		
Chinese-Indo	1,109	275	1,384		343,470
	46,325	31,273	77,598	265,872	

Source: Van Helsdingen, W. H. (1933). *Verslag van den Toestand der Stadsgemeente Soerabaja over 1932*. Soerabaja: Wethouders van Soerabaja.

The rapid economic growth, ethnic diversity, and disparity in Surabaya created favorable conditions for the development of prostitution. The illusion of a better life in the city attracted many immigrants, especially domestic migrants, who

soon found that there were not enough job opportunities for them. Colonial society did not favor employment for women, especially the unskilled from the countryside. This led many women to turn to prostitution for a living.

3.1. Prostitution in Surabaya prior to 1852

The Dutch government issued its first edict on prostitution in Java in 1852. However, the local government in Surabaya was already aware of the threat of prostitution in the city. In a letter to Thomas Raffles, Governor John Crawford expressed his concern that it was more difficult to control venereal diseases than to make vaccines widely available. He observed “as long as virginity is scorned and promiscuous relationships outside of wedlock are common, the ability to reduce sexually transmitted diseases remains a painful challenge for women until the source of corruption is cut off.” (Schoute, 1937: 1111).

Crawford believed that if the indigenous people of Java were better equipped to prevent sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) communicating in their native language, it would increase their awareness of the issue. He also believed that venereal disease was largely the responsibility of the natives due to their ignorance, unhygienic practices, and permissiveness in male-female relationships. It should also be noted that Crawford himself suggested that the Chinese were responsible for the appearance of yaws disease in Java, although this is difficult to accurately verify. (Boomgaard, 2007: 33).

This view of venereal disease as a problem caused by the natives was common among the Dutch colonial authorities. It reflected a broader belief that the natives were morally inferior to the Europeans. This belief justified the colonial government’s paternalistic control over them, including its efforts to regulate prostitution.

Not much is known about the activities of prostitution in Surabaya before 1852; however, based on the historical records of Dutch medicine in the East Indies, the prevention and treatment of venereal diseases was one of the colonial government’s primary concerns. When Surabaya was returned to the Dutch, in March 1820 the first hospital dedicated to indigenous women suffering from Venus diseases - Venus ziekte was established in the city on “not a modest scale” (Schoute, 1937: 156). This was a significant initiative, as it was the first hospital of its kind in Java. It suggests that prostitution was already a problem in Surabaya at this time.

The hospital was located outside the city center, next to the naval station and near the brothels. All patients had to remain in the hospital until they were confirmed to have recovered. They were examined by a Western medical doctor once a week and by local healers twice a week. While there is no evidence that a

part of the patients at the hospital were prostitutes, it is a reasonable assumption, as ‘normal’ women would have been less likely to seek medical attention for sexually transmitted infections.

3.2. Prostitution in Surabaya from 1852 to 1913

Surabaya saw the establishment of the first rule by the colonial state in 1852. Five years later, a budget of 20,000 guilders per year was drawn up to fight venereal diseases throughout Java. This funding was allocated to several cities with the excess received by Surabaya for the prevention of STDs as follows:

Table 3: Funding for the Fight against Venereal Diseases in Java in 1857

City	Budget (guilders)
Surabaya	10,337
Semarang	2,680
Pasuruan	2,100
Banten	1,074
Kedu	696
Batavia	612
Priangan	480
Buitenzorg	540
Jepara	420
Madiun	420
Probolingo	120

Source: Abalahin, A.J. (2003). Prostitution policy and the project of modernity: A comparative study of colonial Indonesia and the Philippines, 1850-1940: 98. Cornell University, New York.

In Surabaya at this time, there were three large red-light districts, all concentrated near the navy barracks: Bandaran, Sawahan, and Nyamplungan. The most famous of these was Bandaran, which was located near Fort Prins Hendrik. It was in very poor condition, and constructed mainly from bamboo. In 1866, a fire broke out in Bandaran destroying most of the area. However, the prostitutes and pimps quickly rebuilt their businesses, as there was nowhere else in the city with as favorable a location.

To avoid the police, prostitutes often lived scattered around the city. As the police were unable to maintain control over a wide range, it was difficult for them to track down prostitutes. In 1864, the local government decided that this situation could not continue. They rounded up 228 prostitutes living in 18 brothels and relocated them to the villages of Tjantican Lor, Tjantikan Kidoel, Sambogang, Kampong Blakang, Pengampon, Djagalan, Gili, and Klimboengan Pabeau (Faber, 1931: 243). The brothel owners were responsible for this relocation, and they were required to ensure that the new brothels had small dikes or fences built around them. This was done so that the police could easily reach the brothels when needed.

Initially the plan appeared to have succeeded with the control of three red light districts, involving both increased medical and police surveillance. Just three years later, in 1867, a navy colonel filed a series of serious complaints about an increase in syphilis in Surabaya. Between January and July 1867, 120 Europeans and 26 native sailors were hospitalized with syphilis. However, in the same year, a senior customs officer complained that the incidence of syphilis had been steadily increasing and that if this trend continued, Surabaya would become a “second Yokohama” (Schoute, 1937: 740). This proves that medical regulation and testing did not achieve real success. In response to the above complaint, the battleship commanders ordered the crew to tighten regulations and forced them to have sex only with healthy uninfected women (Schoute, 1937: 740).

In 1874, the revision of the first regulation was sent to almost every residency of Java, including Surabaya. Once again, medical examination was the weakness of the whole system. How could only one doctor manage it, while he also had other duties to perform? In 1858, hundreds of native women were tested weekly in Surabaya. Under the condition that no urban physicians or medical personnel were available for this work, “public women” had to fulfill this duty.

Besides, the police supervision in Surabaya was totally inadequate. The women had to meet on certain days of the month at the office of the town doctor for their venereal examination. But the distance from the bordello kampongs, which were usually situated on the outskirts of the city to the center was a long way and

frequently these women simply forgot or ignored their appointments while it was not difficult to get an “approved” certificate (Faber, 1937: 244). The government once again showed resolve to pursue the regulation by deciding that referred physicians from the city would take medical advice to villages. Therefore, in 1872, two houses were built near Bandaran and Sawahan to make medical examinations more approachable.

After several ups and downs the Pegirian hospital was built in 1830. On 5 November 1865 it was decided to restore, renovate and furnish the hospital for the special care of syphilitic women, with a budget of 14,504 guilders. After three years, renovation was nearly completed. And in the period from 1 July 1868 to the end of June 1869, 130 public women were nursed there, on average. In 1879, a brothel in Kebalen, run by the Europeans, was established and a decade later, the brothels of “Mother” Sas and Braavenboer acquired a certain “reputation” (Faber, 1937: 246).

3.3. Prostitution in Surabaya after 1913

Like other Javan cities, the brothel prohibition order was promulgated in Surabaya in 1913. However, it did not mean that in reality brothels and prostitutes in this city stopped their business. Based on a pretty informative report written by a Dutch doctor named R. D. H. G. Ph. Simons in 1933, and other press articles, practicing prostitution in Surabaya was different in each area where the brothels were situated (Simons, 1939: 5574). If prior to the 20th century, prostitutes and brothels were concentrated in three places in the city center, there was a shift in the location afterwards. Prostitution was practiced in the heavily populated areas on the fringe of the city, in the far north and south. It is hardly seen as a coincidence but rather a solution to cope with the prohibition implemented in 1913.

According to the data collected by Simon during his investigation, there were eight categories of prostitutes in Surabaya during the 1930s:

Prostitutes who worked in small cafes near the harbor and in the old port town;

Street prostitutes;

Prostitutes who worked in Chinese and Japanese brothels in the city center;

Prostitutes who worked in brothel complexes on the outskirts of the city;

Discreet services of native female servants;

More discreet services of housebound Dutch women for young and unmarried Dutch men;

European prostitutes;

Homosexual prostitutes.

One of most important places in Surabaya is the port of Tanjung Perak. This port has contributed to economic development on a quite large scale and had a significant role in developing trade and traffic in Jawa Timur and other parts of Eastern Indonesia. However, Tanjung Perak is not only famous for its economic function but it also provided a place of work for prostitutes. Simons used the English expression “entertaining girls” to refer to the prostitutes working in the numerous cafes around this area. After the forbiddance order from the Dutch colonial government, cafes and hostels had to operate as disguised agencies providing meeting places for prostitutes and their clients. The sailors called taxis to go directly to these cafes where they could hire the girls to dance and then invited them for a drink. Aside from these cafes, the taxi drivers/chauffeurs were “helpful” for the sex industry as they connected clients with prostitutes and became a kind of intermediary, for which they received commissions in return.

Most of the girls who were working in these cafes were indigenous, but they wore different costumes to distinguish themselves from other ordinary women. Simons’ observation advises readers that Javanese women were not chosen by several cafes probably due to their darker skin in contrast with the lighter ones of the Menadonese ethnic group. Usually, they stopped working at 3.00 am and in case they found pimps in the cafes, they took their clients to their own homes, around 10km far away from the center of Surabaya. Probably, the cost of the transaction was negotiated between the seller and client, though this is not mentioned in Simons’ report. Newspapers, however, informed that if a prostitute wanted to rent a room, they had to pay around 30 guilders a month, approximately one guilder a day.

Published in 22 November 1927, the *Nieuwe Soerabajaasche Courant* provided variant knowledge of prostitution in Tanjung Perak. It transpired that prostitutes did not come to this port solely by choice. Sometimes the companies, in an effort to retain their male workers, recruited local brothels to provide women so these men could find solace at the end of the working day more easily. Prostitutes thus could be exploited twice, first by the brothel owners and second by the company.

According to Simons, it was a popular sight to see the prostitutes leaving their brothels and approaching the houses of single men in the city. By doing so, they actively got closer to the customers with the hope that they would be invited to come inside. The police classified those who practiced in this way as street prostitutes. To avoid arrest, these women sometimes asked another man to walk

with them, and thus they appeared like a real couple. This man could be the woman's pimp who might approach the prospective customer and draw attention to his 'walking partner'. If the police caught them, they would be sentenced to two months in prison, like one woman who was arrested in Tandjong Perak while trying to engage in prostitution. Actually, in 1912, the legislative committee of the council in Surabaya wanted to submit a draft on prostitution, mainly directed against street prostitution, the extent of which shamed the city.

In August 1922 *De Sumatra Post* released the news that in Surabaya, every night there was a "public kiss party" given by a Sudanese dancer in a public space. Visitors had to pay 10 cents if they wanted to kiss this dancer. The girl traveled from Bandung to Surabaya since the police there were more lenient and less vigorous in their action against rampant prostitution in the neighborhoods. The journalist worried that if this kind of event was not stopped then it could lead to prostitution.

Newspapers at that time mentioned those who acted as *Beruchte koppelaarsters* – notorious matchmakers. They were believed to have contact with the criminal world in Surabaya. One of the earliest cases was when the Judicial Council in Surabaya arrested Madame Gabriel, who was born in Landzaat. She was accused of her deliberate action to promote sexual abuse on prostitutes and then fined 200 guilders or sentenced to one month in prison. She was supposed to be a *mamasan* – a procurer for a brothel.

De Locomotief Correspondent te Soerabaya released an interesting piece of information about a husband who attempted to barter his wife for 500 guilders per transaction, presenting pictures of her to interested parties. Two detectives caught him during this attempted sale. The interesting thing here is that his wife was European and surely this was not the first time the husband conducted this business. This fact showed that there were European prostitutes who were operating in Surabaya.

The police focused their attention and reinforced their powers against clandestine brothels. Additionally, in September 1927, they arrested an 83-year-old widow for running a notorious company called Kopoetrau. She was already regarded as an adulteress. Outwardly, this was seamstress shop, which was visited by many upper-class ladies and gentlemen. At the same time, the police made a report about another suspect house in Surabaya owned by a man known only as Sand and his wife. He took trips all over Central and East Java and other remote areas of the archipelago to entice poor women to come to his house with the promise of then getting good jobs in the city. After successfully luring these girls, he and his wife forced them into prostitution using some brutal methods such as locking them inside a room, beating or even starving them. When they entered the house, the police

found two Chinese girls and one seemingly European boy present there. One Chinese girl was taken to the house by his wife who drove past and promised to send her to school. The six-year-old European boy looked dirty and neglected explaining he came from Bandung. His parents seemed to have died, and his earliest youth was spent with the S. family. The two girls were only able to escape the house while S. was taking a bath.

Later on, by order of the prosecutor in Surabaya, two women were arrested on 11 September 1928 - one European and one native. The police had them under surveillance for years. However, according to the source of the news, it was the first time the police had sufficient evidence to catch them. The European woman, Madame M, was a widow who had been conducting her matchmaking business for quite a long time while offering her large house in Dinojo as a place for “committing fornication with third parties”. Consequently, she and her native helper enjoyed a certain reputation, which they openly exploited for their business. Her native helper was described as a cunning woman who was not afraid of a little rumor. The prosecutor subjected both women to sharp questioning, after which they were transferred to the detention center. It was expected that these lesser cases would provide fresh insight into the dark side of Surabaya – *donker van Surabaya*. Renting rooms out for prostitution was another form, which was discovered in July 1939. A police raid had reported the house; a 50-year-old Dutch man was arrested after police surveillance. He was fined 250 guilders and sentenced to one-month imprisonment.

Of course, these were not isolated cases. Several examples were found in Surabaya showing that prostitution in this city was quite diverse in practice. For example, the author of one article insisted that the trafficking of women stemmed from Surabaya. The native pimps traveled all over Java trying to attract girls with the offer of beautiful clothes and jewelry. The girls were then brought to Surabaya and sold to one Chinese who was described as *te slecht (too bad)*. Depending on their youth and beauty, a woman could be sold for 60 guilders or more. The Surabaya authorities assumed that these girls were not associated with a crooked way of life in Surabaya’s ports and would have been transported by ship either from Penang or Singapore. They would have been sold to brothels with no way out. These women had no choice but to acquiesce to their miserable fate. Their prices varied from 150 to 300 guilders. Despite the fact that child sexual abuse was not popular at the time, it was found to be practiced in Surabaya in one clandestine brothel called Stikkel. If they were caught by the police, the people involved were fined either a small amount of money, similar to what they spent on buying one girl, or sentenced to a maximum of six months in prison. These punishments were not severe enough to prevent people from getting involved in the sex industry.

However, the question focuses on how the police operated in controlling prostitution, which they were in charge of. Given that the head of the vice squad in Surabaya accompanied Simons to the kampung brothel in Banyu Urip, it is nonsense to say that the police were unaware of this. The author of the article named “*De zedenpolitie, wat zij zou kunnen doen*” raised questions about the police failure to deal with prostitution in Surabaya. It was supposed that in the general sense the police should have known better than anyone else, and would know what every taxi driver knew. What was the reason for their slow reaction? Why did it take them months or years before they could arrest these people involved in prostitution? Those questions are yet to be answered correctly due to a lack of information.

4. Conclusion

Surabaya, which had been a focus of Dutch attention since the early 19th century, grew into a large city that attracted people from all over the world for work. It experienced rapid economic growth, especially before the Great Depression of 1930. However, this growth also led to an increase in prostitution. Surabaya was one of the first Javanese cities to take steps to control its harmful effects. The regulations that were put in place reflected the colonial government’s top priority of protecting the honor and health of the Dutch population, even though they also targeted the indigenous population. The Dutch colonial government in Surabaya sought to monitor prostitution activities in the city center, where Dutch and other European citizens resided. However, the government did not directly control prostitution in the suburbs.

Before the regulations were enacted, the government focused on dealing with the issue of infected women. However, once all official brothels were closed, prostitution in Surabaya became increasingly difficult to control. Before 1913, prostitution in the city was mainly supervised in connection with the army and serving soldiers. However, it later shifted to civil society as more civilians became increasingly involved. The local government moved brothels to the city’s outskirts to avoid dealing with them so often, i.e. out of sight out of mind. This also gave sex workers more independence to practice freely.

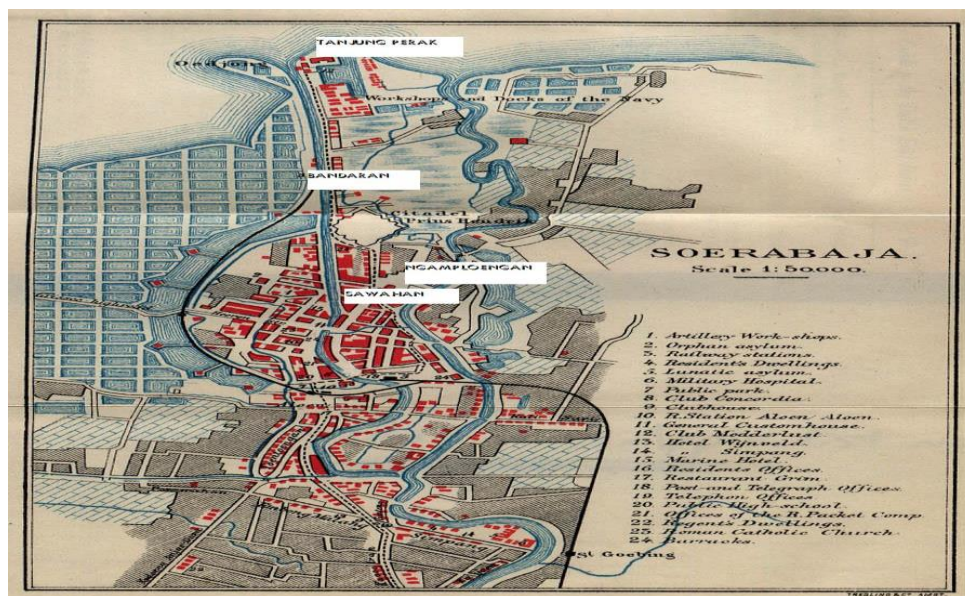
Although the police played a modest role in maintaining law and order, some law enforcement officers were involved with brothels and prostitutes. They saw prostitution as a local problem rather than a crime that required police intervention. Prostitution in Surabaya became more sophisticated and organized, developing into an important link in the Southeast Asian network of trafficking women and children. Surabaya’s press became increasingly indifferent to the proliferation of prostitution, leading to a lack of material regarding prostitution in the city in the 1930s.

Surabaya has a long history of prostitution. The trade began during the colonial period when the city became an economic magnet. Prostitution flourished during this time, and many brothel complexes were established. One of the most famous was Dolly Lane, which had about 1,499 prostitutes in 2014 (Dewi, 2018).

The study of prostitution in colonial Surabaya provides a better understanding of the size and structure of the “sex industry” in response to the regulations implemented by the ruling elite. The case of Surabaya illustrates the continuum of prostitution from the past to the present, from the sporadic to the organized, and closely allied as a complex and sophisticated industry.

It would be extremely helpful if comparative studies could be carried out with other cities in Indonesia and Southeast Asia in general, in order to combine knowledge on trade control and regulation practices, as well as the effectiveness of different levels of government, over each historical period. However, even if an appropriate approach could be devised, would today’s Southeast Asian cities be devoid of prostitution? The question of whether prostitution can be eradicated is a complex one. There are many factors that contribute to this trade, including poverty, inequality, and gender discrimination. It is likely that prostitution will continue to exist in Southeast Asia, even if effective measures are taken to control it.

Distribution of clusters of brothels in Surabaya city (1931)



Source: Faber, G. H. (1931). Oud Soerabaia: De Geschiedenis van Indië Eerste Koopstad van de oudste tijden tot de Instelling van den Gemeenteraad (1906). Gemeente Soerabaia.

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