PART 3

Selective Appropriation

Moving at a Different Velocity

The Modernization of Transportation and Social Differentiation in Surabaya in the 1920s

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Introduction

Driving through the bustling streets of Surabaya today, or walking along the pavement amid the noise of roaring motorcycles and cars, it is hard to imagine that once upon a time it was people on foot or in a horse-cart that set the pace. Faster forms of urban transportation, like horse trams, electric trams, cars, and bicycles, exerted multiple effects on the city. Roads had to be adjusted to accommodate the more rapid road transportation: a wider carriageway, a hardened surface, and, where possible, curved bends instead of abrupt right angles. Sometimes trees were felled to make room for wider roads or parking bays. The improved means of transportation permitted the well-to-do to live in suburbs, leading to a profound change in urban space itself. Tram and railway lines imposed another transformation on urban space. In Surabaya crossings of road and railway on unequal levels were constructed.

People acquired new habits, as they grew accustomed to the new forms of transportation (Giddens 1990:102). New technologies of transportation (and communication) have overcome physical distance, the 'time-space compression' (Harvey 1989), and open up new opportunities of social interaction. Most conspicuously, the rapidity of movement increased and for many people not used to it, this speed was an exciting sensation (Porath 2002:788). The horse tram of Batavia barely affected the velocity of travel, but it did discipline people into thinking in terms of clock time, regular departure schedules, and correct procedures for boarding and alighting (Proudfoot 2005:64). People's radius of action increased, making it possible to venture beyond one's own ward on a regular basis. People living in the suburbs with office jobs in the centre began to commute, albeit still within city boundaries (Van Roosmalen, this volume). The soundscape changed, as roaring motors pushed the old sound of *azan* and church bells into the background (Colombijn 2007). Traffic had to be better regulated to reduce the risk of new kinds of accidents, and new rules were drawn up to this end. Policemen were stationed to regulate the traffic at the busiest crossroads.

Fascinating footage from 1929 gives an image of the changes taking place in Surabaya. One shot shows a pedestrian with a *pikulan* (carrying-pole) trying to

cross a street, but not succeeding because of the constant flow of cars. Sometimes he ventures a few steps forward off the pavement, but then has to retreat to avoid a car which is hugging the kerb. After more than a minute, he takes a dash and safely reaches the other side of the street. Another shot shows a very busy crossing at Pasar Besar, the majority of the users are either cyclists or car-drivers, but there is still a scattering of horse-drawn carriages and bull-ock carts. In the middle of the crossroads a policeman is standing on a slight elevation, endeavouring to keep some order. People (driving on the left) are supposed to keep the policemen on their right, but some try to take a short cut, see the policeman the last moment and suddenly swerve to the left so as to pass him on the correct side. The flow of traffic is severely hindered by the tram, which every now and then halts in the middle to allow passengers to get in or out. A third scene shows how joined in a coordinated effort up to four policemen try to direct the traffic (*Soerabaia* 1929). A photograph of thirty-one cars parked in Tunjungan, one of the main thoroughfares in the city, taken around the same year is an equally graphic record of the modernization of the street scene (Broeshart et al. 1994:36).

New forms of transportation were expensive and consequently people's access to them was unequal. The passage of the pedestrian with a *pikulan* sketched above was hampered by car owners. Even the cost of a tram ticket could be prohibitive and reminded people of their relatively low economic standing (Proudfoot 2005). Trains, trams, and railway stations (including the distinction between the classes of carriage) were a place where it was possible to mark out class differences, or be forced to accept one's inferior position.

Accepting the notion that people did not simply consume transportation, but that transportation also had a productive capacity, it is obvious that unequal access to transportation increased, or reinforced, social inequality. The better off people profited most from positive income effects of new forms of transportation. Again, pre-war (unpublished) footage from Surabaya allows a glimpse of this inequality. This shot shows traffic travelling at different speeds. At Tunjungan private cars dominate the scene almost completely and the speed of the traffic is high. In contrast, in a narrow street a cart with one axle and giant wooden wheels pulled by a zebu slows all the traffic down. A private car does not have the room to overtake the cart and has to adjust its speed to the pace of the zebu. Cyclists, pedestrians, and horse-drawn carriages give the traffic a chaotic appearance and no traffic rules are directly discernible in the images (*Nederlands Indië voor 1942 (10)* 1939; see also Broeshart et al. 1994:89).

Traffic not only emphasized differences, it also had a democratizing and emancipatory effect. Rudolf Mrázek, who tellingly opens his *Engineers of*

happy land with a study of roads and traffic, evokes the images in which all passengers on the electric tram in Batavia, regardless of class, were subject to the same rhythm and the same shaking. A committee investigating the use of trains in Java in 1904 discovered to its surprise that the number of passengers in first and second class had risen by 4,000 and 33,000, respectively in the previous three years, but the number of third class passengers had jumped by no fewer than 550,000! The committee also reported its finding that the lower class indigenous people travelled by train more eagerly than the indigenous aristocrats and that they especially appreciated the 50 kg free baggage allowance, allowing them to carry goats, hens, clothes and other goods. As Mrázek observes, the adoption of the train by lower class people contradicted the notion that modernity would trickle down from the European elite, to the masses via the indigenous aristocrats (Mrázek 2002:10–13).

This chapter analyses the degree to which modern transportation accentuated social inequalities. At what rate were new forms of transportation introduced and who profited from them? Who were included and excluded by ‘modernization’? The new traffic, especially the growing differential velocity of movement, caused traffic accidents, and therefore an analysis of who were most often victim of these accidents is also called for. Finally, the new ways the state attempted to discipline the mass movement of modern transportation will be examined.

Throughout this chapter we wish to argue that class difference made more impact on the choice for particular forms of transportation than ethnicity. Our analysis goes against the current, hegemonic historiography that colonial society was foremost, if not exclusively, dominated by ethnic differences, cast in a racial discourse. While, of course, ethnicity was very important and racial discrimination visible in many places, we believe that in some aspects of colonial society, for example housing (Colombijn 2010), a focus on income rather than ethnicity gives more insight in the social dynamics.¹ We believe this is also the case with traffic. Even the best scholars can too easily interpret social differences in ethnic terms, missing out on class. For instance, Howard Dick (2002:350) aptly points out one discriminatory side-effect of the cutting down of trees to widen roads: ‘[t]he shady, peaceful streets of the 1900s gave way to sun-filled streets of wall-to-wall bitumen, far less pleasant for those on foot’, and then continues with: ‘which is to say, the Indonesian population’. Why is going on foot one-to-one associated with Indonesians? Were there no

1 Ethnicity remains important as an antecedent variable explaining unequal chances to appropriate a higher income.

Europeans who could not afford a car and had to walk? Or took a stroll because they liked it? How about the Indonesians who passed through the 'wall-to-wall bitumen' roads in their own car? The contention of this chapter is that financial means rather than 'racial' categories were the deciding factor in people's actual choice in their mode of transport.

Constraints imposed by space and available data means that one other social dimension, which was probably as important as income, has had to be skipped. The use of modern means of transportation was gendered. Men had more access to the new means of transportation than women and consequently profited more from the modernization.²

Surabaya in the 1920s is an excellent case to study urban traffic. As the capital city of the province of East Java it was the second largest city of the Netherlands Indies at the time, and offered a great variety of forms of transportation. The city was also very well connected to destinations farther away by its port, railway, and airfield. The 1920s formed an optimistic decade between the economic disturbances of the First World War and the Depression.

Private Means of Transportation

The first major road construction undertaken by the colonial state was the notorious Grote Postweg (Great Post Road). By 1890 the intercity road network in Java already covered a fair area and after this period more investments were made in improving the surface (asphalting was introduced in the 1920s) rather than any in further extension of the network (Knaap 1989:26–27; Nas and Pratiwo 2002).

The roads in Java (at least between cities) were built by the indigenous people, who were obliged by law to work a certain number of days per year on the roads. In 1914–1916 forced labour was abolished and replaced by a poll tax on the indigenous people (Knaap 1989:27). The forced labour was actually a form of double discrimination: the roads were built with the input of the indigenous people, while non-indigenous people, who enjoyed higher incomes on average, had more opportunity to buy the vehicles to travel on the roads. A motor vehicle tax was only introduced in 1928 and later replaced by a heavy excise duty on petrol (Knaap 1989:27). Indigenous people who wanted to be exempted from forced labour on the roads could pay so-called *rodigelden*, at least in Padang (West Sumatra). By the early twentieth century the *rodigelden* had become a regular tax on the indigenous population, used for road construction, none of

2 Age is another factor that influenced chances to use particular forms of traffic, but this point is perhaps so obvious it is unnecessary to be spelled out.

whom then still laboured on roads. The humiliating *rodigelden* were finally halved in 1937 when more progressive European members of the municipal council sided with their indigenous colleagues, but they were still not abolished before the Second World War (Colombijn 1994:93–101).

The potential of roads was, of course, enormously expanded with the introduction of cars and bicycles. The motorcar made its appearance in Java in 1894, two years earlier than in either Singapore or the Netherlands. It was a Benz, owned by Susuhunan Pakubuwana X. In 1900 there were fifteen motor vehicles (including motorcycles) in Java, ten years later the number of registered vehicles had risen steeply to around 1,000. By then cars were mass-produced, but their precarious reliability combined with a lack of passable roads still confined their use largely to cities. The number of motorized vehicles peaked at 104,000 in 1929: 68,000 cars, 16,000 trucks, 15,000 motorcycles and 6,000 buses (Dick and Rimmer 2003:66; Knaap 1989:28, 85). Traffic counts in Buitenzorg (Bogor) in 1920–1921 and again in 1928 also show a spectacular increase in the share of cars in the traffic (Van Roosmalen 2008:139).

Howard Dick (2002:349) provides figures pertaining to the introduction of the car in Surabaya. The first automobile arrived in 1890. By 1911 about 500 cars had been registered, by 1920 this number had risen to 2,000 and in 1939 there were 6,657 cars, including 466 taxis. Another source records that there were over 3,400 registered cars in 1927 (SBS 1928). While registered car ownership for the whole of Java and of the Netherlands Indies peaked in 1929 and never fully recovered from the economic crisis (Knaap 1989:85), the Depression did not have a similarly lasting effect on car ownership in Surabaya. By the end of the 1930s, the impact of the Depression on car ownership in Surabaya had totally vanished. Why this happened is not certain. East Java, the sugar industry in particular, certainly suffered in the economic malaise and intuitively, but apparently erroneously, we had expected that the car ownership in Surabaya would have reflected the downturn in the fortunes of the rural hinterland.

The numbers of bicycles in Surabaya also showed a rapid increase, doubling per decade: from 9,000 in 1917, to 18,000 in 1925, to 36,000 in 1937. In this case, it is easier to explain why the use of bicycles continued to increase during the Depression: cheap Japanese imports offset declining wages. Third-class passengers on the tram swapped the tram for a bicycle (Dick 2002:349). However, a report carefully compiled by the local Office of Statistics shows that bicycles were already by far the most popular means of transportation before the Depression (Table 10.1).³

3 *Kosong*, *keretek* and *dokar* were horse-drawn carts. *Dokar* were used for the transportation of persons and *keretek* perhaps too; a *kosong*, presumably was used for goods.

TABLE 10.1 *Number of registered vehicles in Surabaya in 1927*

Kind of vehicle	Number of vehicles	Number of vehicles per 1,000 persons
Private cars	3,435	13.6
Buses	102	0.4
Trucks	387	1.5
Motorcycles	610	2.4
Bicycles	22,360	88.4
<i>Kosong</i>	165	0.7
<i>Dokar & keretek</i>	1,952	7.7
Pushcarts	610	2.4

SOURCE: SBS (1928); POPULATION FIGURES AS OF 1 JANUARY 1928 FROM THE SAME REPORT HAVE BEEN USED FOR THE CALCULATION OF THE LAST COLUMN.

Ownership of the various means of transportation was unequally divided. Dick (2002:349) states that the bicycle was particularly important to indigenous people, who were finding some new employment at the urban fringes: in the port and at the naval base in the north and on the Ngagel industrial estate in the south. However, it can be assumed that the use of bicycles was also common among the Dutch, who were used to this vehicle in Europe.

More details are known about the relationship between ownership of cars and ethnicity. Of the registered vehicles in Java, 34 per cent were owned by Europeans, 28 per cent by indigenous people, 24 per cent by non-indigenous Asians (*Vreemde Oosterlingen*), and the remainder either by companies or the government (Knaap 1989:28, 85). This disproportionate share of the Europeans and non-indigenous Asians reflects their over-representation in the higher income groups. Compared to the whole of Java, car ownership in Surabaya was even more skewed, as Europeans owned 60 per cent of the private cars.⁴ Assuming an average family size of five, Howard Dick states that by 1939 on average there was almost one car for every European family, one for every five Chinese or Arab families, and one for every 30,000 indigenous families (Dick 2002:349). Dick's calculations are a little hard to swallow. If one in every 30,000 indigenous families had a car, that would make one car per 150,000 Indonesians, or two or three cars for the entire indigenous population of Surabaya, which cannot be correct. It is also unlikely that on average there was almost one car for

4 Howard Dick (2002: 349) writes '60 percent of private motor vehicles', but from the context it can be gathered that he refers to cars only and not to motorcycles.

every European family, as obviously many European families belonged to the lower income groups and could not afford a car. Should it therefore be assumed that quite a few other European families owned two cars or more?⁵

Although Dick's estimate of the degree to which Europeans were over-represented as car owners can be questioned and by and large it can be assumed that ethnic status is too readily equated with a particular income group (Colombijn 2010:96–97), it is obvious that cars were still accessible to only a small proportion of the people. There were fewer than fourteen cars per 1,000 residents in 1927 (Table 10.1). If it is assumed, rather arbitrarily, that in the course of the year each car was used by six different people, only one in twelve residents would have had a personal experience of sitting in a car (and far fewer would have enjoyed the experience of driving a car). Cars were within the reach of only a thin upper layer of the total population and the spread of motorized vehicles therefore increased the difference between people who had the financial means to consume new forms of modernity and those who did not. The most important modern means of private transport was still the bicycle, not the car.

Public Transportation

When people did not have the means to purchase a vehicle themselves, they could still experience modern means of transportation by taking public transport. The first railway from Surabaya went to Pasuruan and was opened in 1878, with a branch to Malang inaugurated the following year. More regional railways were opened later and, by 1894 or 1899 (sources disagree on the year), it became possible to travel by train from Surabaya to Jakarta (via Yogyakarta and Bandung). Two companies, the Staatsspoorwegen (State Railways) and Nederlands-Indische Spoorwegmaatschappij (NIS, Netherlands Indies Railway Company), exploited the railways around Surabaya. They each ran different, mutually detached stations (Staatsspoorwegen the Gubeng and Kota stations, and NIS Pasar Turi) and debates about connecting the lines at one new station proved fruitless. Taxis and horse-drawn carriages (*dokar*) profited from the fact that there were two main railway stations (Kota and Pasar Turi) and many passengers needed a vehicle to cross the one kilometre separating the stations to continue their journey by train. The companies engaged in fierce competition

5 Trusting that Dick did not make an error in his calculation and that his raw data compelled him to make his claims about unequal car ownership, some doubts can be raised about the reliability or validity of his original data.

on the westbound lines, until they agreed on a division of freight and passengers in 1926. Further cooperation was forced upon them when a regular air link was established between Batavia and Surabaya in 1929. In a successful attempt to meet the challenge of air transport, the railways managed to set up a jointly operated rail connection between Surabaya and the capital of the colony, which ran the 900 km in one day offering luxurious carriages (Broeshart et al. 1994:27; Dick 2002:420–422; von Faber 1936:274; Knaap 1989:29).

In urban life, trams played a bigger role than interregional railways. Trams were introduced into Surabaya between 1889 and 1891 (the exact year differs from source to source). These trams were operated by the Oost-Java Stoomtram Maatschappij (OJS, East Java Steam Tramway Company). It is not certain whether these first trams in Surabaya were steam trams, or trams that loaded steam at fixed points. Between 1913 and 1916, a new steam tramline was built skirting the city centre along its west side. In 1923 and 1924, the OJS opened four new electric tramlines, running from Wonokromo in the south to the port of Tanjung Perak in the north. As this line was a double track, an enormous advantage over the steam tram, trams could always pass each other and could operate far more frequently, running at least one every ten minutes. An additional advantage of this high frequency was that the tram could be shorter (and yet serve the same total number of passengers) and caused less disruption to the other traffic (Von Faber 1936:276–280; Dick 2002:260, 348; Dick and Rimmer 2003:68; Knaap 1989:29). From maps from the late 1930s (*Atlas* 1938:23a; Van Diessen and Voskuil 1998:116–123) and common parlance (Von Faber 1936:275), we can infer that by then at least, the NIS trains were functioning as an urban steam tram system for the section within the city boundaries.

Both the steam and electric trams played an important role in transportation. In 1927, 11.4 million passengers used the electric tram (an average of 45 trips per urban resident in a year!) and 5.2 million passengers the steam tram (an average of 21 trips per person) (SBS 1928).⁶ Photographs testify to the fact that the tram had become a regular and important part of the street scene in Surabaya in the 1920s (Broeshart et al. 1994). Dick and Rimmer (2003:68, 70) call attention to the fact that the electric tram seemed to be an enormous improvement compared to either its horse or steam counterpart: no more piles of horse manure or belching smoke. The overhead electricity cables were an eyesore to progressive urban planners (Karsten 1939), but perhaps not to the general public.

6 Unfortunately, there seems to be a typo in the statistical report, which says that 52.237.33 passengers took the steam tram; from the revenues (in guilders and cents) mentioned a line below in the report we can infer that the digits were wrongly placed; the figure of 5.2 million passengers agrees with the revenues of that year.

Different kinds of passengers used the two types of trams. The steam tram connected the port area, to the rural hinterland of Surabaya, circumventing the city centre, running through the kampongs on the western side of the city and inner-city neighbourhoods around Pasar Turi station. In contrast, the main electric tram line, although also starting in the port area, cut straight through the city centre: passing in front of the governor's office, and carrying on through the main business and shopping streets, Pasar Besar and Tunjungan. It subsequently took a route through the most chic streets of the city, Palmenlaan and Darmo Boulevard, to its terminus in the south of the city near the zoo. A shorter east–west line served new residential areas of the city, which were connected to the shopping area around Tunjungan (*Atlas* 1938:23a; Van Diessen and Voskuil 1998:116–123).

These routes suggest that probably the steam tram predominantly served the lower income groups of the population, whereas the electric trams tended to cater to middle and upper class people. Furthermore, six commuter trains carrying market traders also arrived at Pasar Turi every morning. Depending on their place of departure and the specific goods brought into Surabaya from those places, the trains were nicknamed 'grass train', 'palm-wine train', 'chicken train', and so on. Coolies working in the port area and the factories also helped to contribute to the daily bustle at Pasar Turi (Von Faber 1936:273). Although it is perhaps merely a historical conjuncture and not a causal relationship that the construction of new middle class suburbs coincided with the emergence of the electric tram, the fact remains that the more well-to-do-residents used the more modern form of public transport.

The association of the steam tram with lower income people and the electric tram with those with higher incomes was definitely not absolute. In 1925, overly conscious of their social standing, first class steam tram passengers complained there were not enough carriages and they had to stand in the first class carriages. From the point of view of comfort it was not ideal, the first class was positioned directly behind the locomotive, so they suffered from the smoke. The first class passengers asked for more carriages and demanded the third-class carriages be positioned directly behind the locomotive (*Pewartara Soerabaia* 8-1-1925).

The contention of this chapter is that financial means rather than 'racial' categories were the deciding factor in people's actual choice in their mode of transport, but ethnic sensitivities definitely did play a role in the question of which means of transportation was deemed appropriate. Even though they might hold themselves aloof from interaction in the tramcar, the public was ethnically mixed, people sat side by side, on the same level, on the same benches. In 1870, discussing the possibility of starting a tram in Surabaya, the

editor of a Dutch newspaper commented that people should be aware of the unseemliness of a white lady sitting next to a coolie. It would also be galling if a coolie on a tram were to overtake a white man struggling by on foot (Proudfoot 2005:138–152).

The competition between steam tram, electric tram, bus, and taxi was a common phenomenon throughout Southeast Asian cities (Dick and Rimmer 2003:70), and Surabaya formed no exception. In 1924, the OJS also began to operate buses to those inner-city neighbourhoods where investment in the construction of tramlines was not warranted, but the service was not profitable and was discontinued the next year. In 1927 a new private company started a bus service running parallel to the steam tramway and in 1929 another company began to operate a bus line duplicating the route of the electric tramway. To counter this competition, the OJS felt compelled to operate buses on the same route, which competed not only with the other company, but also with its own electric trams. A price war was the result. In an attempt to economize, the maintenance of the buses was neglected. After one year the private bus company threw in the towel. In 1931 the council approved a bylaw, which gave the OJS the preferential right to exploit bus lines. The rationale of the bylaw was primarily to protect the profitability of the electric tram, which was considered to be in the public interest, but it was also to eliminate the existence of dangerously ill-maintained buses. The municipal bylaw gave the OJS a *de facto* monopoly on bus transportation. In 1931, the OJS operated regular buses to six destinations in the city (Von Faber 1936:283–286).

Taxis reveal a very similar story of stiff competition, cannibalistic economic behaviour, and municipal qualms about the quandary of allowing a liberal market and low prices versus regulating the market to ensure minimal safety standards. About 400 taxis were operating in Surabaya in 1925 and the number more than doubled to 843 registered taxis in 1929. Of these taxis 56 per cent were owned by Chinese, 22 per cent by indigenous people, 16 per cent by Europeans and 7 per cent by Arabs. An overwhelming majority (95 per cent) of the drivers was indigenous (SBS 1929; *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* 4-3-1930).

It is tempting to interpret the over-representation of Chinese taxi owners as confirmation of their proverbial proclivity for business. Conversely, an equally plausible explanation of this over-representation lies in a miscalculation of the economic conjuncture by Chinese car owners. The taxi business in Surabaya was boosted by the economic slump directly following on the *hausse* after the First World War. The war had disrupted trade between Indonesia and continental Europe and suspended demand was rapidly fulfilled in the period 1919–1921. When most needs had been satisfied, the mood changed again and both importers and exporters were stuck with unmarketable stock. Many people

who had optimistically purchased a car during the high conjuncture had to sell it and reverted to using taxis. Other car owners began to operate their private vehicle as a taxi to recover the costs (Von Faber 1936:281). It is possible that many of the Chinese taxi operators of the 1920s were traders who had incurred economic losses in 1922–1923.

In any case, the fierce competition resulted in diminishing profit margins. Taxi drivers had refused a municipal proposal to install taximeters in 1920, preferring to bargain for the fare (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 6-11-1920). This freedom to bargain backfired on the taxi operators when people who operated taxis as a part-time business especially accepted very low taxi fares in the customer market. The professional taxi operators, organized in the *Soerabaiaschen Bond van Autoverhuurders* (Sobova, Surabaya Association of Car Rental Firms) asked the municipal administration to restrict competition in 1922 and again in 1924.⁷ On both occasions, the council rejected this submission, giving priority to the interests of the customer (who included, of course, the councillors themselves). A first municipal bylaw on taxis in 1925 regulated the inspection of taxis and the fares they could charge and the testing of drivers, but only for registered taxi companies. This regulation actually disadvantaged regular companies in their competition with wild taxi-drivers. In 1926, a revised bylaw was imposed on all taxis and to some degree at least controlled the rowdy driving styles and ill-maintained cars of many wild taxis. Municipal attempts to set fares continued to be ineffectual because both drivers and customers ignored the municipal decrees. During the Depression, the regular taxi firms again faced stiff competition from wild taxis, which undersold trips (Von Faber 1936:281–282).

To complete this overview of public transportation, the least commonly accessible but yet the most modern form of transportation was flying. Surabaya was the scene of the first successful flight in Indonesia, in 1911. As already briefly hinted, in 1929 the *Koninklijke Nederlandsch-Indische Luchtvaart Maatschappij* (KNILM, Royal Netherlands Indies Airlines) established a regular service between Surabaya, Batavia, Bandung and Semarang. The airfield was moved several times. Between 1938 and 1940, a modern airfield (with an air traffic control tower, arrival and departure lounges, and two runways at right angles to each other) was finally built at the north-western end of the city (Broeshart et al. 1994:27; Van Diessen & Voskuil 1998:116; Knaap 1989:31).

7 Rudolf Mrázek (2002: 243) reports in a footnote that another taxi drivers' union, B.A.T.O.J.A., was established in 1928, which united both indigenous and Chinese drivers. It is worth noting that a shared professional interest overcame ethnic differences.

Traffic Accidents

The introduction of new mechanical forms of transport inevitably led to many accidents. From the vantage point of current knowledge about traffic safety, the greatest cause of traffic accidents was the variation in the speed of the disparate vehicles. The different velocity is, as already mentioned, abundantly clear in the old films. The old footage we have studied already abound in cases of near accidents. Pedestrians crossing a street choked with cars were especially at risk. Often the person on foot ran across the street, only just managing to avoid a fast approaching car (*Soerabaia* 1929). Apparently, pedestrians still found it difficult to assess the speed of the approaching motorized vehicle properly.

The urban administration issued three-monthly reports about the number of traffic accidents, but unfortunately not all of them could be traced, but a summary report for 1927 has survived (Table 10.2). The incidence of reported accidents rose rapidly from 1,384 in 1927 to 2,048 the next year, and 2,349 in 1929. The number declined again to 1,922 in 1930 (SBS 1931:5). The Municipal Statistical Office attributed the declining number of accidents to the installation of traffic lights and the setting up of driving schools (SBS 1931:3, 15), but it is also conceivable that the fall was positively influenced by the declining use of motorized vehicles in the Depression.

The number of people killed or injured correlated with the number of accidents: from 316 in 1927, the figure rose to 536 in 1929, and dropped to 533 in 1930 (Tables 10.2 and 10.3). It is intriguing that Europeans were over-represented in the number of victims and Chinese under-represented (Table 10.3). This difference is tricky to interpret. Perhaps Europeans made more use of modern means of transportation and consequently ran a higher risk of being involved

TABLE 10.2 *Damage from traffic accidents in Surabaya in 1927*

Kind of damage	Number of accidents
Lethal accident (<i>met doodelijken afloop</i>)	12
Seriously injured (<i>zwaar lichamelijk letsel</i>)	48
Slightly injured (<i>licht lichamelijk letsel</i>)	256
Material damage only (<i>alleen materiële schade</i>)	1,068
Total	1,384

SOURCE: SBS (1928)

TABLE 10.3 *Number of victims of traffic accidents in Surabaya, 1928–1930*

	Indigenous	Chinese	Other Asians	Europeans	Total
1928	350	31	10	60	451
1929	432	36	8	60	536
1930	472	23	2	36	533
Ttotal 1928–1930	1,254	90	20	156	1,520
Share in accidents, 1928–1930	82.5	5.9	1.3	10.3	100
Share in population, 1930	79.4	11.4	1.6	7.6	100

SOURCE: SBS (1930:15); SBS (1931:15); *VOLKSTELLING 1930* (1936:2, 78–81).

in accidents? Perhaps on average, because of an unwarranted sense of superiority, Europeans were more reckless drivers? It is also conceivable that European victims were more dutifully registered, whereas Chinese tried to avoid being included in any registration. The reason is a mystery.

The traffic accidents created a demand for ambulances. The appearance of this specialized vehicle was both a response to the modernization of the city and a sign of its modernity. When exactly the ambulance was introduced into Surabaya is not known, but the actual number must have been small, because when just one had to be repaired, its absence was immediately felt in the city. A local newspaper backed the call for more ambulances, printing the story of how an accident victim died in the street, because bystanders had waited three hours in vain for an ambulance (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 2-12-1920, 3-12-1920). It was not uncommon, however, for ordinary vehicles, including horse-carriages, to transport the injured victims of traffic accidents to hospital (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 5-2-1925).

A comparison of the news reported in the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* and *Pewarta Soerabaia* shows how different layers of the population diverged in their thoughts about the modernization of the traffic. Given the fact that literacy was not yet general and that both newspapers served the middle class or elite, the Dutch language used in the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* restricted its readership to Dutch people and upper-layers of the non-Dutch middle class. *Pewarta Soerabaia* was Chinese-owned and the majority of its readers were probably found among this ethnic group and among lower middle class people of mixed background. Three monthly samples of both newspapers were taken from the years 1920, 1925 and 1930.

The *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* protected the anonymity of the European citizens. Both the European responsible for an accident and the victims were

designated Mr, Mrs or Miss (*de heer, mevrouw, mejuffrouw*) followed by their initials. Such a precaution was not deemed necessary if Chinese persons were involved; their full name was usually given, without the honorific Mr, Mrs, or Miss. The indigenous persons involved in accidents were faceless and described anonymously as 'an indigenous woman'.⁸

Pewarta Soerabaia carried more frequent reports of traffic accidents, gave more details, and its discourse leaned more towards how problematic modern traffic could be for the ordinary citizen. Although it also used initials or such designations as *bumiputera* (indigenous), at least after 1925 it usually gave full names: 'driven by Haji Abdoelrahman', 'Wagimin, a car-driver', 'a child of Mr Von Elgg', 'J.P. van der Wal on a bicycle'.⁹

Not surprisingly, most accidents were caused by driving errors (Table 10.4). According to the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* (2-3-1920), speeding was the most important cause of accidents. This conclusion was, however, as much a moral judgement as a factual conclusion. The head-on collision between two cars, the incident that led the newspaper to draw this conclusion, happened at 5.30 a.m. and the dawning light might have interfered with the driver's vision. What was worse, one of the cars was driving on the wrong side of the road.

The bulk of the vehicles involved in accidents were private cars and carts drawn by animals, either horse-drawn carriages or ox-carts. Pedestrians and cyclists, who made up a larger share of the traffic, were far less accident-prone

TABLE 10.4 *Causes of traffic accidents in Surabaya, 1928–1930*

Cause	1928	1929	1930
Driving errors made by the driver of vehicle	1,832	2,109	1,619
Errors by pedestrian	73	97	89
Skids, technical defects of the vehicle, uncontrolled horses	73	79	75
Other and unknown causes	71	64	59
Total	2,049	2,349	1,842

SOURCE: SBS (1930:17); SBS (1931:17).

8 *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* 7-2-1920, 1-3-1920, 2-3-1920, 13-2-1925, 18-2-1925, 12-3-1925, 5-3-1930, 11-3-1930, 12-3-1930.

9 'dikandarkan oleh hadji Abdoelrachman', 'Wagimin, sopir mobil', 'seorang anak dari Mr. von Elgg', 'J.P. van der Wal berkendaraan spada' (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 3-1-1925, 6-2-1925, 20-3-1925, 10-2-1930).

(Table 10.5). A contributory cause of the fact that cars and carriages were involved in accidents was the difference in their speeds. Many accidents described in the newspapers involved vehicles with a different velocity. For instance, a car approached a *dokar* from behind at such a speed that impact was inevitable. The *dokar* was flung aside by the impact and the female passenger was wounded on her knee and in her mouth (*Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* 19-3-1927). In another incident, a car driver, 'who did not seem very skilled yet' (*jang rupanja belon begitoe pandei djalankan*) collided with two horse-drawn carriages (a *dokar* and a *kosong*) in one crash (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 7-2-1920). In yet another accident, a Dutch driver hit a pushcart when he attempted to overtake a pedestrian. He was driving too fast and failed to take into account the width of the cart and the narrowness of the road at that point (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 4-3-1930). The last example concerns a *kosong* making a turn. The driver made a warning indication with his whip before he began the manoeuvre. A car that was about to overtake him drove at such speed that impact seemed unavoidable. The driver still tried to control his horse, but in vain. The car crashed into the *kosong*, which was launched into the air by the impact (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 10-12-1920).

Although in all these examples the car-driver seemed to be largely to blame for the accident, the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* (2-3-1920) was of the opinion that driving a carriage is more difficult than driving a car. Cars were machines

TABLE 10.5 *Vehicles and pedestrians involved in accidents in Surabaya, 1928–1930*

	1928	1929	1930
	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)
Private cars	1,746 (43.9)	1,949 (42.7)	1,611 (43.2)
Animal drawn carts	856 (21.5)	891 (19.5)	639 (17.1)
Bicycles	622 (15.6)	753 (16.5)	627 (16.8)
Pedestrians	256 (6.4)	305 (6.7)	239 (6.4)
Trucks	125 (3.1)	170 (3.7)	206 (5.5)
Trams	186 (4.7)	182 (4.0)	126 (3.4)
Motorcycles	131 (3.3)	175 (3.8)	175 (4.7)
buses	54 (1.4)	135 (3.0)	108 (2.9)

The number of pedestrians includes people pushing a barrow and people disembarking a tram.

SOURCE: SBS (1930:17); SBS (1931:17).

and therefore easier to control. Horses, on the other hand, could become nervous and difficult to control. Nevertheless, in reality uncontrollable horses did not pose a serious threat (Table 10.4).

The unwillingness to take responsibility for accidents complicated the disciplining of traffic users. A coachman, for instance, ran down a woman pedestrian with his carriage and fled. The woman died in the street, but the driver did not manage to escape, as a telegraph officer who witnessed the accident ran after him and caught him (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 8-1-1925). In the case of the car crashing into the *kosong* about to make a turn, the chauffeur began to stop his car to check on the victim. A white person sitting in the car, presumably the owner of the car, shouted at the chauffeur to drive on. Subsequently, the chauffeur left the *kosong* behind unattended. The newspaper concluded bitterly:

It is only to be hoped that tomorrow or the day after, people who are so cold-hearted and inconsiderate will meet an even crueller retribution, because for people like them no punishment is more severe than that meted out by God.¹⁰

Regulating Modern Traffic

The accidents and the introduction of more up-to-date means of transportation demanded new regulations to govern the modern traffic. Traffic regulations had existed in Surabaya since at least 1888. The Resident of Surabaya issued traffic rules to be used on main roads and for the use of vehicles or horses, their purpose being to keep the roads clean and the traffic running smoothly. Animals had to be well trained and drivers had to prevent the horse soiling on the street, keep an eye on their animal, and use their whip to give signs when they wanted to overtake another carriage or make a turn (Resident Soerabaia 1889). The rule that a driver keep an eye on his animal suggests that at the time such care could not yet be taken for granted and the driver could get around while dozing on the box.

Such carelessness was clearly no longer possible when motorcars appeared on the scene. The newspapers often attributed accidents to a lack of skill, and this dearth was attributed to the fact that many car-drivers did not

10 *'Tetapi diharep sadja soepaia besok atau loesa, orang-orang jang begitoe kedjem dan jang tiada mempoenjain perasa'an manoesia, bisa dapetken pembalesan jang lebih heibat, sebab orang-orang demikian itoe, tiada mempoenjain lain hoekoeman jang lebih berat daripada hoekoemannja Allah'* (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 8-1-1925).

have a driving licence. The need to issue driving licences as a means to ban incompetent drivers from the streets was debated in the newspapers. Should people driving buses and trucks be required to hold a separate licence? Should drivers not be subject to a psychological test as well – in itself a conspicuous sign of modernization! – as were the engine-drivers on French trains, in order to discover whether they showed an inclination to speed? Berlin was mentioned as an example of a city where drivers not only had to perform the basic functions required to drive the car at the test, but were also obliged to take a course of at least six lessons, in which they were taught the traffic regulations (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 2-3-1920, 10-2-1930; *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* 2-3-1920, 14-2-1930).

The newspapers, and perhaps the general public too, demanded that the state play its part in improving the driving skills of the chauffeurs. The state itself also gradually became convinced that it had to play a bigger role in regulating the traffic. In other words, the new technology forced the state to modernize itself. The problem was that most contemporary policemen did not know how to drive a car themselves and therefore could neither give a driving test, nor issue a driving licence. As a reporter from *Pewarta Soerabaia* (15-12-1920) remarked: 'The police does not understand how a car is driven'¹¹ and therefore he thought it was a change for the better that, as of December 1920, the responsibility for issuing licences was taken away from the police. Henceforward driving licences were issued by a commission led by two managers of a taxi company, Cobbe and De Hoog. In contrast to the police, they were able to prove they were competent to drive a car. Perhaps this solution made sense, because Cobbe and De Hoog possessed the authority an ordinary policemen lacked. The solution was definitely not only in the interest of the road-users at large, it was of great assistance to the taxi company. The owners could earn extra income from issuing licences and they were handed the means to protect their business on a plate by helping their own drivers to get a licence, and perhaps to keep others out of the business.

In 1920 the city police department proposed that the municipal council install simple signs with 'Stop' and 'Go' (*vrij*) at every junction to lighten the work of the traffic police. The council accepted the idea, but policemen still had to be present to work the signs. The municipal council was also open to other ideas from the police department, namely a speed limit and a scheme to prevent the overcrowding of narrow streets (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 29-10-1920; Van Diessen 2004:134, 148). The editor of *Pewarta Soerabaia* was dissatisfied, as he thought the new measures did not go far enough. The newspaper launched a

11 '[P]olitie toch tiada mengerti djalannja motor'.

debate about the trucks that obstructed the flow of traffic, especially when they were loading and unloading. The newspaper asked for a regulation banning trucks from narrow streets and regulating their loading and unloading (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 1-11-1920).

As stated, the different speed of motorized vehicles and horse-drawn carriages posed a risk, and the passage of the tram along public roads also created problems. In 1925 all vehicles were prohibited to stop on the tramlines (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 20-1-1925, 17-2-1925), but the editor of *Pewarta Soerabaia* remarked that this prohibition unjustly put the blame for the problems on other road users. 'Sooner or later the tram will claim lives, because when it comes from Kepatian and crosses Tambakbajan Street it neither rings its bell nor reduces its speed' (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 30-1-1925).¹² The tramlines were also subjected to another regulation, not related to the traffic safety. This regulation prohibited horse-drawn carriages and taxis to wait for passengers in front of the railway station. Now that railway passengers had to walk longer distances to find a taxi or carriage, more often than not they preferred the tram that stopped in front of the station. Cogently, this regulation was issued at a time the tram company had lost its competition with the taxis (*Pewarta Soerabaia* 9-2-1925). The direction the modernization of traffic took was inextricably connected to particular interests.

Conclusion

Modern transportation was the outcome of technology-driven modernization, but simultaneously stimulated the wider modernization of society. The spread of tramlines, motorcars and bicycles elicited the need for other inventions like traffic lights, ambulances, strict timetables, as well as the rationalization and standardization of traffic rules. Hence, the urban landscape was profoundly changed in various ways, not just restricted to the appearance of the cities but also inevitably affecting the behaviour of their inhabitants. In the words of Alexandre Freire (2009), the new means of transportation were 'consumption icons of a social transformation'. These transformations occurred very rapidly in Surabaya in the 1920s and outmoded forms of transportation gradually became obsolete. By 1940 it was recognized that ox-carts slowed down the flow of traffic and therefore posed a dangerous threat. New traffic rules made

12 'Ini tram besok atawa loesa aken mengambil korban djiwa manoesia, sebab apabila djalan di Kepatian liwatan straat Tambakbajan, tida maoe kasi bel atawa djoega tida maoe koe-rangin djalannja'.

participation of horse-carts in traffic impossible (*Soerabaiasch-Handelsblad* 7-3-1940).

The benefits of new forms of transportation were not distributed evenly. The choice of public or private transportation and the form this public transportation could take (steam tram, electric tram, taxi) or private transportation (car or bicycle) was to a considerable degree influenced by income. Conversely, the means of transportation determined the mobility of a person and a concomitant lifestyle and chances to appropriate a certain income. There was a strong association between income on the one hand and range and speed of movement on the other. In short, the mobilization of the transportation reinforced social inequality.

However, even though people from different social classes were obliged to move at different velocities, they definitely all seized the opportunities offered by the new means of transportation. Lower-income people did not lag behind their well-to-do counterparts in this respect. It is therefore important to bear in mind that the modernization of transportation also emancipated lower-income people. They had fewer opportunities to use modern means of transportation than rich people, but this did not prevent them increasing their mobility and pace of life by recourse to the new means of transportation. Rich and poor moved at different velocities, but they all did this in the highest gear.

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