

# Missing millions: The victims of Java's 1944-45 famine

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National  
University

Conference for the Conclusion and Signature of the Treaty of Peace with Japan; San Francisco, California, September 4-8, 1951; Record of Proceedings, pp.219-224:

*The Vice President of the Conference—P. C. Spender: The Chair recognizes His Excellency Ahmad Subardjo, Minister for Foreign Affairs from Indonesia, and the representative for Indonesia.*

*The Delegate of Indonesia—Ahmad Subardjo (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Mr. Chairman, Fellow Delegates: It was after a careful study of the underlying principles of the Japanese peace treaty that the Indonesian Government decided to send a delegation to San Fran-*


...

*nesian Government, I should like to go on record as laying the blame for a large measure of our present difficulties, shortages, and delays in realizing our reconstruction and rehabilitation after World War II at the door of the Japanese and their activities during the occupation of our country.*

*The damages which Indonesia suffered during the Japanese occupation are twofold: first, the loss of life of approximately four million people; and second, material damages of billions of dollars. I shall refrain from mentioning figures here since it would be irrelevant to the purport of this Conference, but my Government has the facts and figures on hand and will produce them at the proper time and*

- 1951 conference in San Francisco to sign international peace treaty with Japan
- Subardjo mentioned 4 million victims
- Indonesian government never published the promised facts and figures
- But 4 million = 8% of Java's 1940 population!

# This presentation

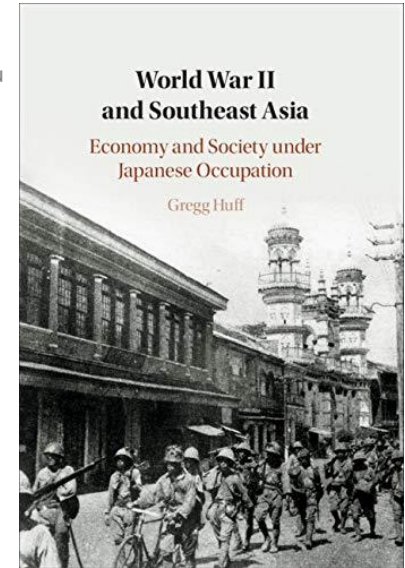
- Is not about the causes of the famine:
  - see 
  - or see Gregg Huff's 2020 book
- But about 2 new papers:
  1. Re-estimating the famine victims
    - where does the 4 million estimate come from? What is it based on?
    - is it accurate? If not, how to re-estimate?
  2. Why are the 4 million victims not part of Indonesia's historiography and public memory?

## Peraturan dan Pengendalian: Menjelaskan Penurunan Produksi Pangan di Jawa 1940-1946 dan Kelaparan 1944-1945\*

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# Human toll of the famine is a contentious issue

- 4 million? Egbert de Vries (1946) concluded 2.4 million victims
- Some foreign historians repeated the De Vries estimate (including me)
- But historiography in Indonesia remains largely silent about this human tragedy
  - Poesponegoro and Notosusanto (1990), Soejono *et al.* (2008), Imran (2012).
  - discussion human toll of 1942-45 focuses on the *romusha*
- Historians Aiko Kurasawa + Shigeru Sato studied rural Java during 1942-1945, doubted the estimates of 2.4 million and 4 million
  - but did not clearly specify what was wrong with either
- For that reason:
  - Where does the number of 4 million come from? Is it reliable?
  - Why is it not part of Indonesia's historiography and public memory?





Oeroesan Perekonomian  
Prawoto Soemodilogo



Ma'moer (10 Januari 1946)

# Geboorte en sterfte onder de Japansche bezetting

## RESIDENTIE BATAVIA

**A**NGETROFFEN zijn statistieken, door officiële Indonesische instanties opgemaakt voor de Japanners, over geboorte en sterfte in de residentie Batavia. De statistieken loopen over de periode Januari 1943 tot en met Mei 1945.

De residentie Batavia had in 1930 2,6 mill. inwoners, ruim 5 % van de bevolking van Java en Madoera. Het is een gebied met de uitgestrekte rijksschuren van Krawang, Tjikampek, Bekast en Tambora. Er zijn uit deze streken niet zulke verhalen bekend van honger en ellende als uit Midden- en een deel van Oost-Java.

De normale geboorte- en sterftecijfers zijn resp. 28‰ en 16‰, met een geboorte-overschot van 12‰.

In begin 1943 was dit praktisch nog normaal. Tot en met April 1943 geboorte 27‰, sterfte 16,5‰.

Vanaf mei 1943 komen enige maanden met onwaarschijnlijke geboortecijfers — plotseling 35-37‰ en een die langzaam oploopt tot 23‰. Het geboortecijfer blijft in de statistiek normaal. Van December 1943 op 23‰! Dit is aanleiding om de hoopgevoerde sterftecijfers in eind 1943 te beschouwen als een soft ons, deze cijfers zeker niet als verworpen te beschouwen, eerder het tegendeel. Men die van geen ongunstige statistieken wilde hoo-

In de eerste helft van 1944 is de geboorte gedaald tusschen 22‰ en 23‰, de sterfte is gestegen tot 19‰.

In augustus 1944 is er voor het eerst een sterfte-overschot van 3‰, en dit sterfte-overschot loopt continu op tot het in Maart 1945 reeds 13‰ bedraagt. Dit blijft het ook in de opeenvolgende maanden Mei 1945; het moet daarna nog erger geworden zijn.

De geboorte blijft dalen; in September/December '44 is zij nog 17‰, in Januari/Mei nog slechts 14‰.

De sterfte, komt in Maart 1945 op 23‰, in April op 24,5‰, in Mei op 25,5‰, in Juni op 26,5‰, in Juli op 27,5‰, in Augustus op 28,5‰, in September op 29,5‰, in Oktober op 30,5‰, in November op 31,5‰, in December op 32,5‰.

De sterftecijfers in 1945 zijn dus 23,5‰, 24,5‰, 25,5‰, 26,5‰, 27,5‰, 28,5‰, 29,5‰, 30,5‰, 31,5‰, 32,5‰.

De geboortecijfers in 1945 zijn dus 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰.

De geboortecijfers in 1945 zijn dus 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰.

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De geboortecijfers in 1945 zijn dus 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰, 23,5‰.

Residenties	Geboort. in duizend				Sterfte in duizend				Geboort.-%	Sterfte-%	Geboort.-% sterfte-overschot
	1943	1944	1939	1943-1944	1943	1944	1939	1943-1944			
Bantam	30	28	24	24	20	28	20	25	24	28	+4
Djakarta	64	74	51	50	46	50	21	21	+1	+1	
Bogor	55	80	45	37	41	50	17	19	5	5	
Priangan	126	129	89	80	74	83	39	38	30	30	
Tjirebon	73	76	65	50	57	80	18	33	15	15	
Semarang	75	63	48	52	55	103	22	50	55	55	
Pati	71	57	45	59	31	31	40	38			
Pekalongan	104	104	80	65	70	120	29	42	40	40	
Banjarmas	82	86	70	44	48	86	30	36	16	16	
Madoera	138	100	80	61	43	100	29	38	30	30	
Djakakarta	63	62	49	34	34	53	27	28	4	4	
Soerakarta	94	96	83	59	62	115	27	38	32	32	
Soerabaya	53	51	41	42	44	62	18	28	21	21	
Bodjonegoro	40	40	30	44	45	70	16	40	49	49	
Kediri	81	81	68	40	42	71	24	25	3	3	
Madien	83	67	55	40	40	57	24	25	2	2	
Malang	83	65	59	45	45	63	23	28	17	17	
Besoeld	50	57	47	36	37	47	20	23	—	—	
Madoera	45	41	32	32	30	50	15	25	18	18	

Java en Mad. 1.376.1314 1.105.881.936 1.423 25 33 318

Op grond van deze cijfers leed het gebied Java en Madoera in 1944 door minder geboorte en meer sterfte een verlies van 813.000 zielen, of rond 2 %, der totale bevolking. In 1945 was het verschil met 1939 nog slechts 120.000 zielen.

Uit de cijfers voor Batavia valt te concluderen, dat in 1945 de situatie belangrijk erger is geworden. Calamiteuze verhoudingscijfers bestonden in 1944 in de angselooten residenties Cheribon — Pekalongan — Semarang — Pati — Bodjonegoro — Banoemang — Kedoe en Soerakarta.

Een geboortecijfer-overschot was er alleen nog — en dan nog nauwelijks — in Batavia en Priangan, terwijl Besoeld een evenwicht vertoonde.

De geboorte was reeds in 1944 zeer laag in Buitenzorg, Cheribon, Bodjonegoro, Soerabaya en Madoera.

Indien de Batavia-cijfers mogen worden gektraproleerd, zouden voor Java en Madoera de geboortecijfers in 1945 mogen worden getaxceerd op 18‰, de sterftecijfers op 40‰, een sterfte-overschot derhalve van 22‰ of rond 1.000.000 zielen, bij een normaal accres van 500.000 zielen. Zonder rekening te houden met de enkele honderd-duizenden Javansche dwangarbeiders, door de Japanners weggevoerd, zou de oorlog dus op Java en Madoera gekost hebben aan zielen:

1943	120.000
1944	813.000
1945	± 1.500.000
1943-1945	± 2.450.000 zielen.

Men moet vrezen dat deze ongunstige ontwikkeling in 1946 nog nauwer en dat het totaal der directe en indirecte verliesverliezen op Java tusschen 3.000.000 en 4.000.000 zielen bedraagt.

E. DE VRIES

\*) ± betekent geboorte-overschot.

# 4m. DIED IN JAVA UNDER JAPS.

## Food Crisis Expected in December

**BATAVIA (A.A.P.)**—More than four million people died in Java during the Japanese occupation from starvation and disease, the Netherlands East Indies Director of Economic Affairs (Dr. J. E. van Hoogstraten) told a press conference yesterday.

Present food supplies would be sufficient until the middle of December, but after that great quantities of food would have to be imported, he said. A total of 70,000 tons of canned food, clothing, footwear, medicines and toilet articles had already been purchased from the U.S. Army in the South-West Pacific.

**DR. VAN HOOGSTREten**, who has been in Australia arranging for supplies for the rehabilitation of Java, deplored the Australian waterside workers' strike, which he claimed was "undoubtedly Communist inspired," and



an Indonesian official appeared at north with a flag of truce. He stated that Japs, not Indonesians, had done the shooting.

A British spokesman declared that an Allied officer who addressed the Indonesian forces in a Government building was fired upon, and added that it was unlikely that any Japs were fighting the Allied troops. Aneta also learns that Ralph Coniston, an Aneta correspondent, last reported in the interior of Java, and at Australian correspondent, Robert Griston, are now safe. The deaths of

Saturday Evening Express (Tasmania) (20 October 1945).

# Data on deaths and births in Java

- Village records in Java, published 1874-1895 (Gardiner & Oei 1986)
- Revived 1911 by public health service (*DVG-Jawatan Kesehatan*) for contagious disease surveillance: if MR  $\uparrow$  in region  $\rightarrow$  investigate + contain outbreak
- Public health service officer in each Java *kabupaten* supervised weekly data collection in villages, aggregated data  $\rightarrow$  to residency office  $\rightarrow$  to head office in Jakarta  $\rightarrow$  annual statistical yearbook, last for 1940
- OK for contagious disease monitoring, but 1920s-1930s already known that infant mortality was under-recorded, both as deaths and births
- Since 1933 improvement of registration + work towards a nascent civil register for Indonesians. But roll-out in Java interrupted 1942, resumed 1952 by new *Departemen Kesehatan* + extended to other islands
- Publication of MR and BR resumed 1952 until quality deteriorated in 1960s





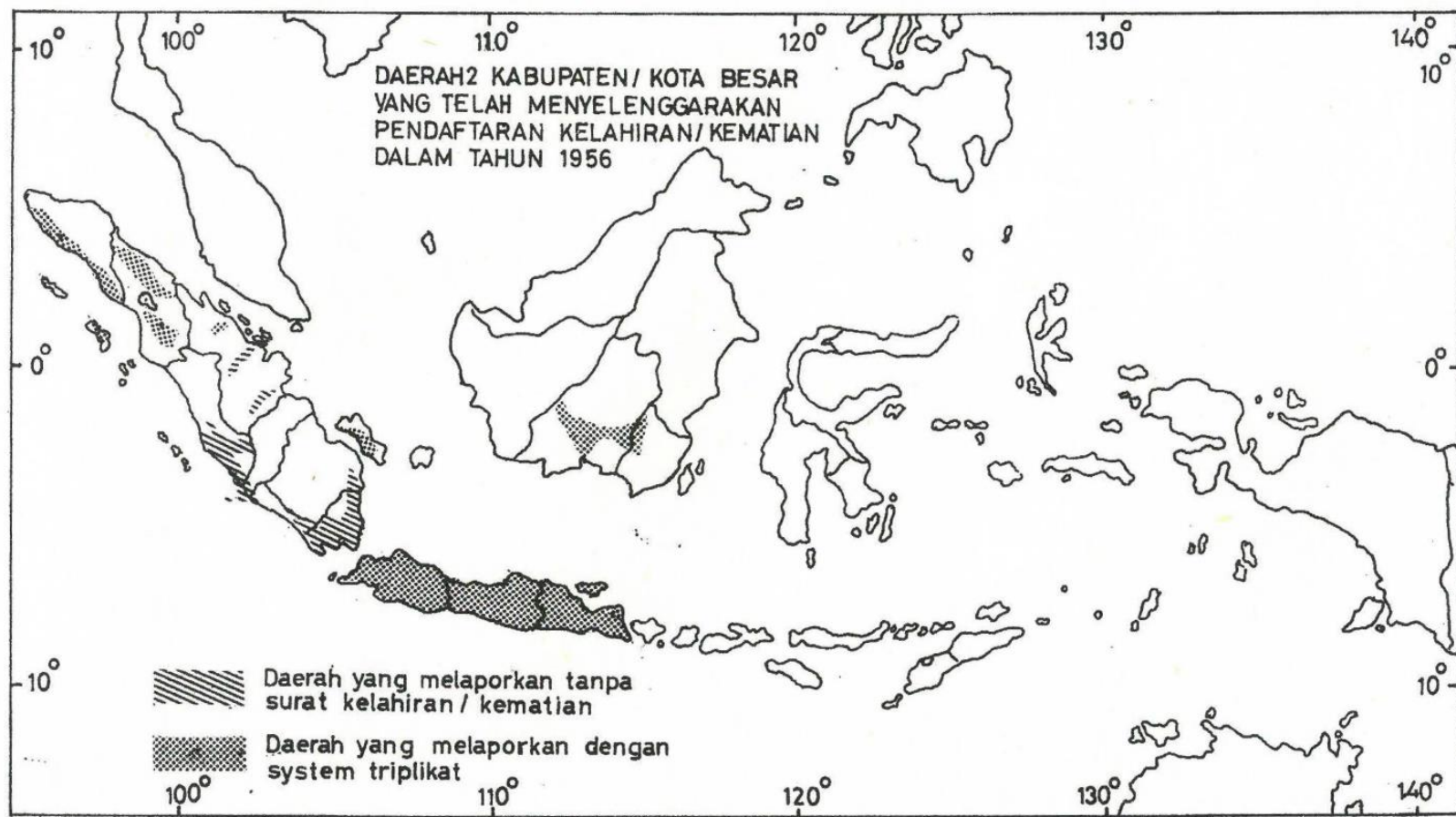


From Mochtar (1953) 'Health education and rural health problems in Indonesia'.

- By 1952 rollout of the improved deaths and births registration system in Java almost complete



- By 1956 rollout in Java completed
- Rollout in other islands started



From Soedarjono (1956) 'Pendaftaran penduduk, kelahiran dan kematian di Indonesia'.



BAGIAN STATISTIK

LAPORAN

KELAHIRAN & KEMATIAN

TAHUNAN TAHUN 1963.

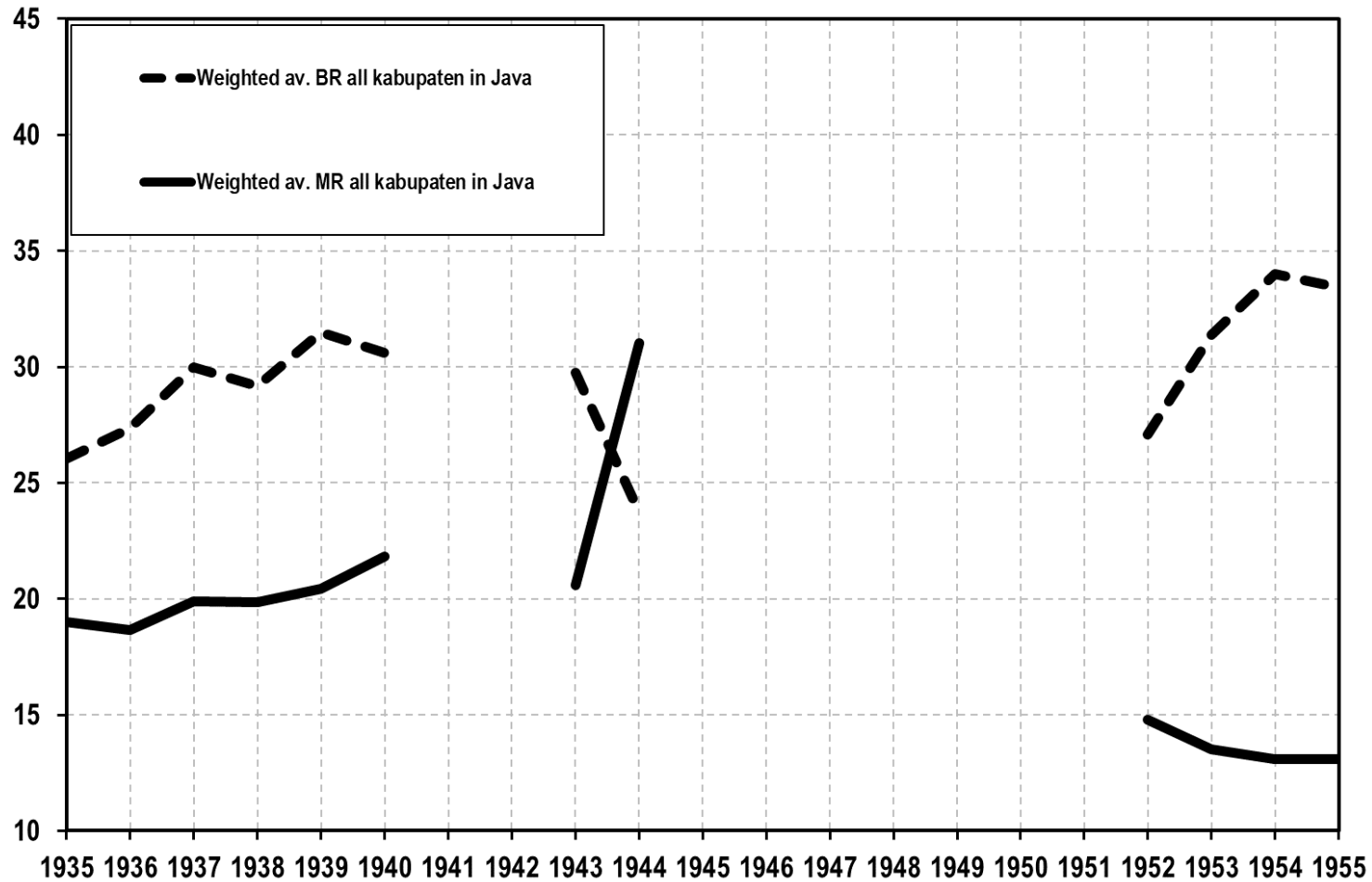
DAERAH DJAWA DAN MADURA

LAPORAN SUSULAN KELAHIRAN/KEMATIAN TRIBUNAL KE IV TAHUN 1963 = 3 =

D A E R A H	Djumlah penduduk bulan oktober 1961 (Sensus)	Djumlah jiwa yg. dipakai sebagai dasar penghitung nilai kelahiran/kematian.	Kelahiran hidup		Kematian		Sisa kelahiran		Mati karena bersalin		Lahir-mati		Kematian bayi	
			Ba-njak	Per 1000 penduduk per tahun	Ba-njak	Per 1000 penduduk per tahun	Ba-njak	Per 1000 penduduk per tahun	Ba-njak	Per 1000 kelahiran Iht+Lm	Ba-njak	Per 1000 kelahiran Iht+Lm	Ba-njak	Per 1000 kelahiran Iht+Lm
<b>Kares: MALANG</b>	3.990.655	x)												
Kt.pr. Malang	341.452	x)												
Kt.pr. Pasuruan	63.408	65.165	421	25,8	152	9,3	269	16,5	-	-	3	7,1	35	83,1
Det.II Malang	1.474.106	1.503.972	7.292	19,4	4.433	11,8	2.859	16,6	17	2,3	97	13,1	733	100,5
Det.II Pasuruan	729.367	733.629	6.871	37,5	2.579	14,1	4.292	23,4	6	0,9	31	4,5	724	105,4
<b>Kares: KEDIRI</b>	3.769.990	z)												
Kt.pr. Blitar	62.972	65.754	385	23,4	95	5,8	290	17,6	-	-	-	-	2	5,2
Det.II Kediri	918.036	944.314	4.241	18,0	2.015	8,5	2.226	9,5	12	2,8	66	15,3	380	89,6
Det.II Blitar	839.952	877.249	5.403	24,6	1.921	8,8	3.482	15,8	17	3,1	46	8,4	332	61,4
Det.II Trenggalek	438.857	456.412	2.103	19,4	850	7,4	1.253	11,0	1	0,5	21	9,9	163	77,5
Det.II Tulungagung	675.349	696.436	4.112	23,6	1.613	9,3	2.499	14,3	8	1,9	39	9,4	336	81,7
<b>Kares: BESUKI</b>	3.500.803	x)												
Det.II Bondowoso	503.460	506.867	890	7,0	712	5,6	178	1,4	-	-	11	12,2	67	75,3
Det.II Djember	1.501.763	1.523.136	3.580	9,4	1.527	4,0	2.053	5,4	12	3,3	38	10,5	173	48,3
<b>Kares: MADURA</b>	2.150.194	x)												

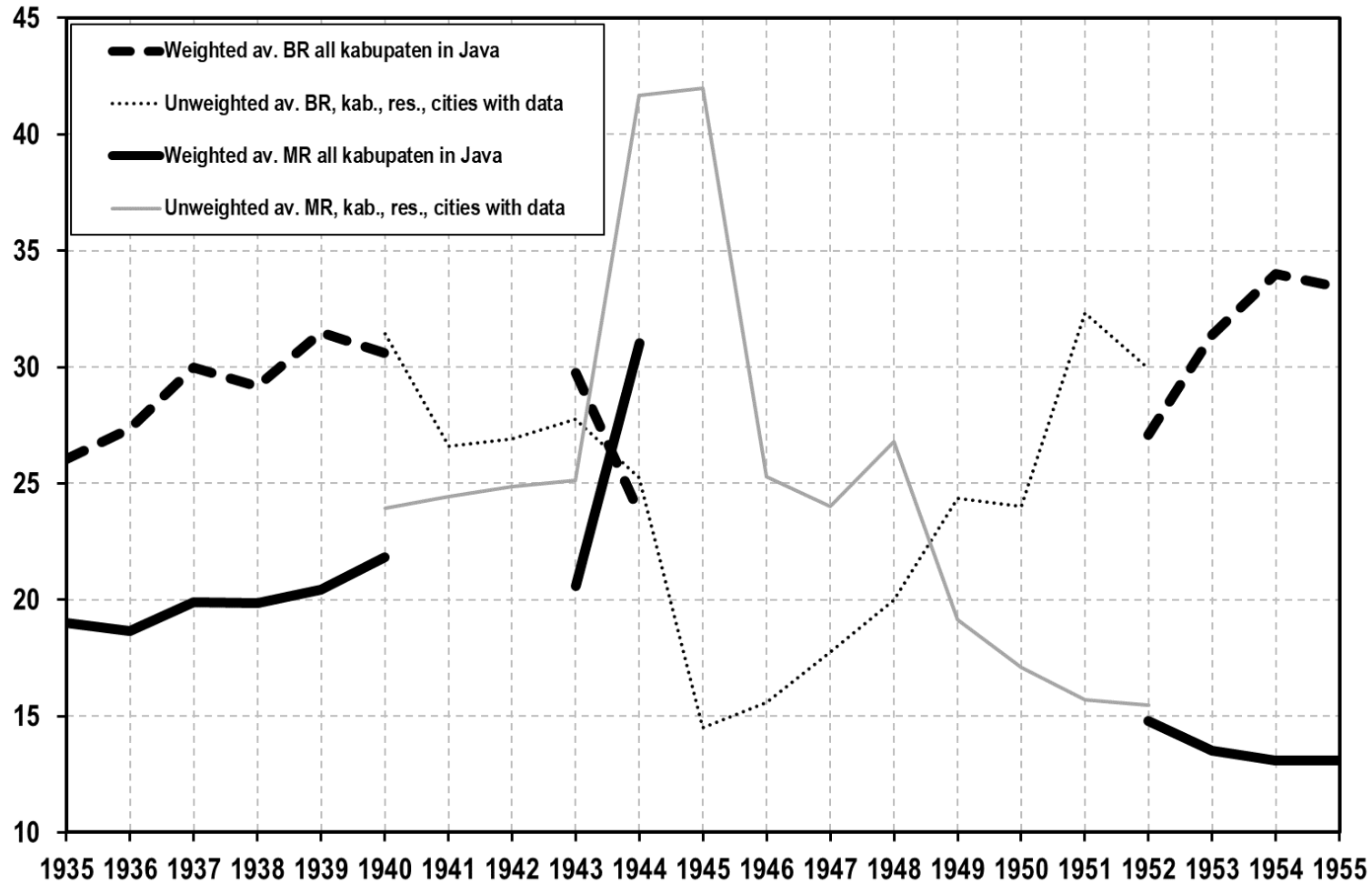
- But by 1963 MR and BR data in Java of no use anymore, due to
  - missing, non-reported values "x)"
  - values decrease over time = increasing under-recording
- 1952-1956 still reasonably complete

# Step 1: Reported aggregated av. mortality (MR) and birth rates of ethnic Indonesian population in all *kabupaten* in Java (%)

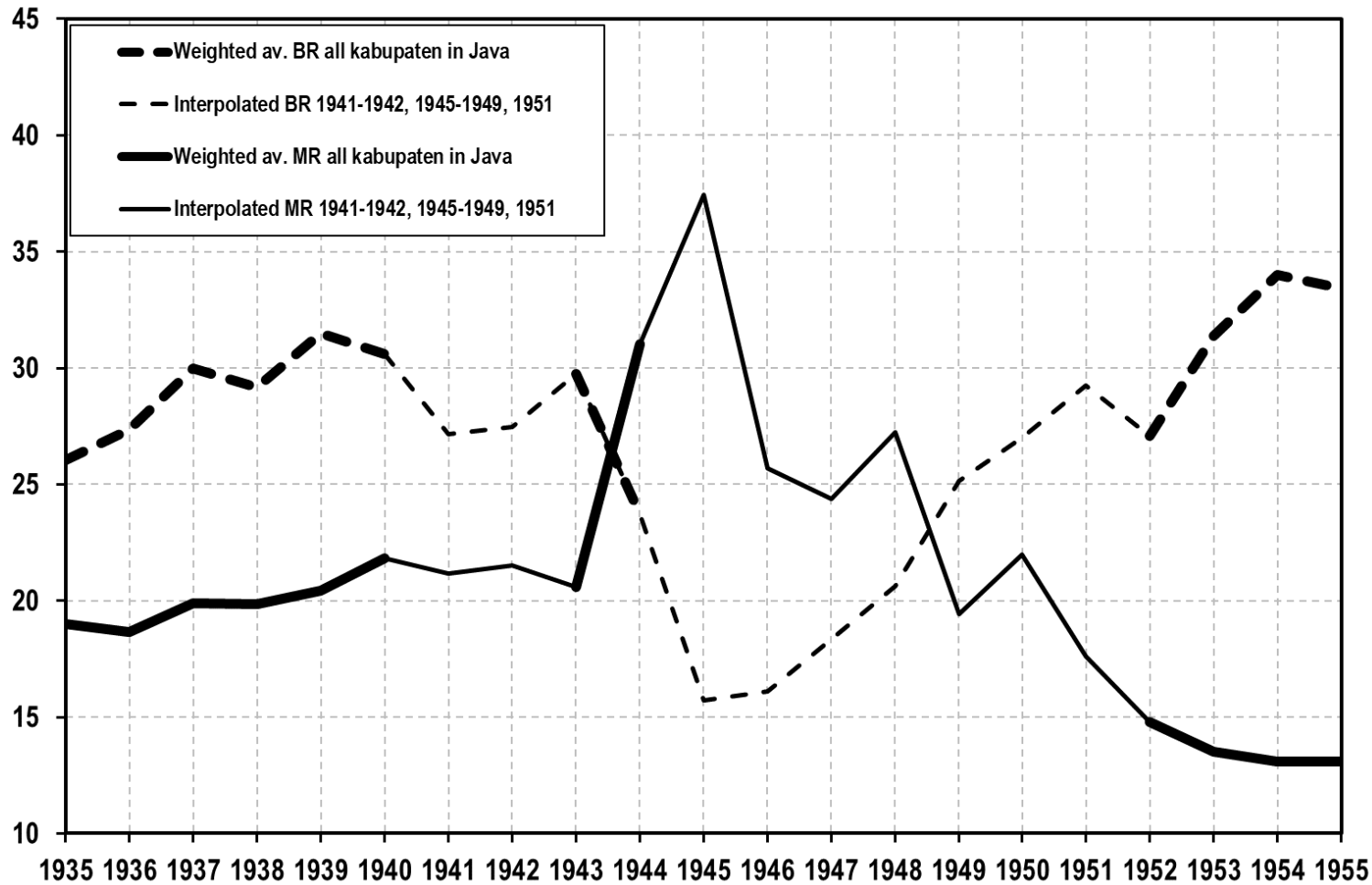


Sources: 1935-1940 *Indisch Verslag*; 1943-1944 Soemodilogo (1946), 1952-1955 Breman (1963). Original source: DVG Public Health Service, Jawatan Kesehatan.

Step 2: Add unweighted averages of incomplete data for *kabupaten*, residencies and cities in Java 1940-1952 for which MR and BR data available (%)



Step 3:  
Interpolate  
the reported  
aggregated  
MR and BR  
data with  
unweighted  
averages for  
*kabupaten*,  
residencies  
and cities in  
Java 1940-  
1952 for  
which MR and  
BR data  
available (‰)

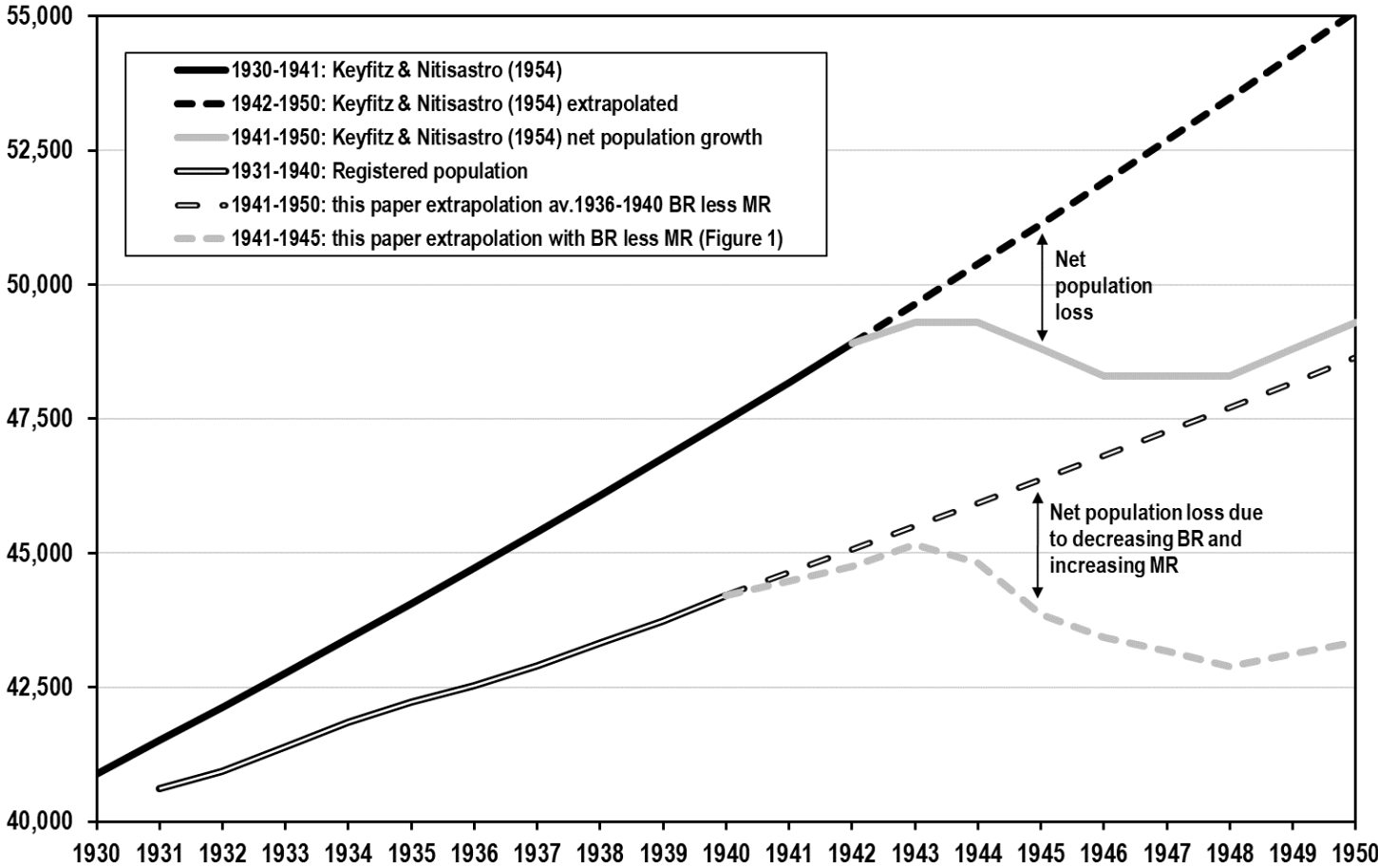




- Other population growth estimates allow net loss estimate for 1942-45

- e.g. Keyfitz & Nitisastro (1954: 57). But is based on net population growth: cannot differentiate between lower births and higher deaths

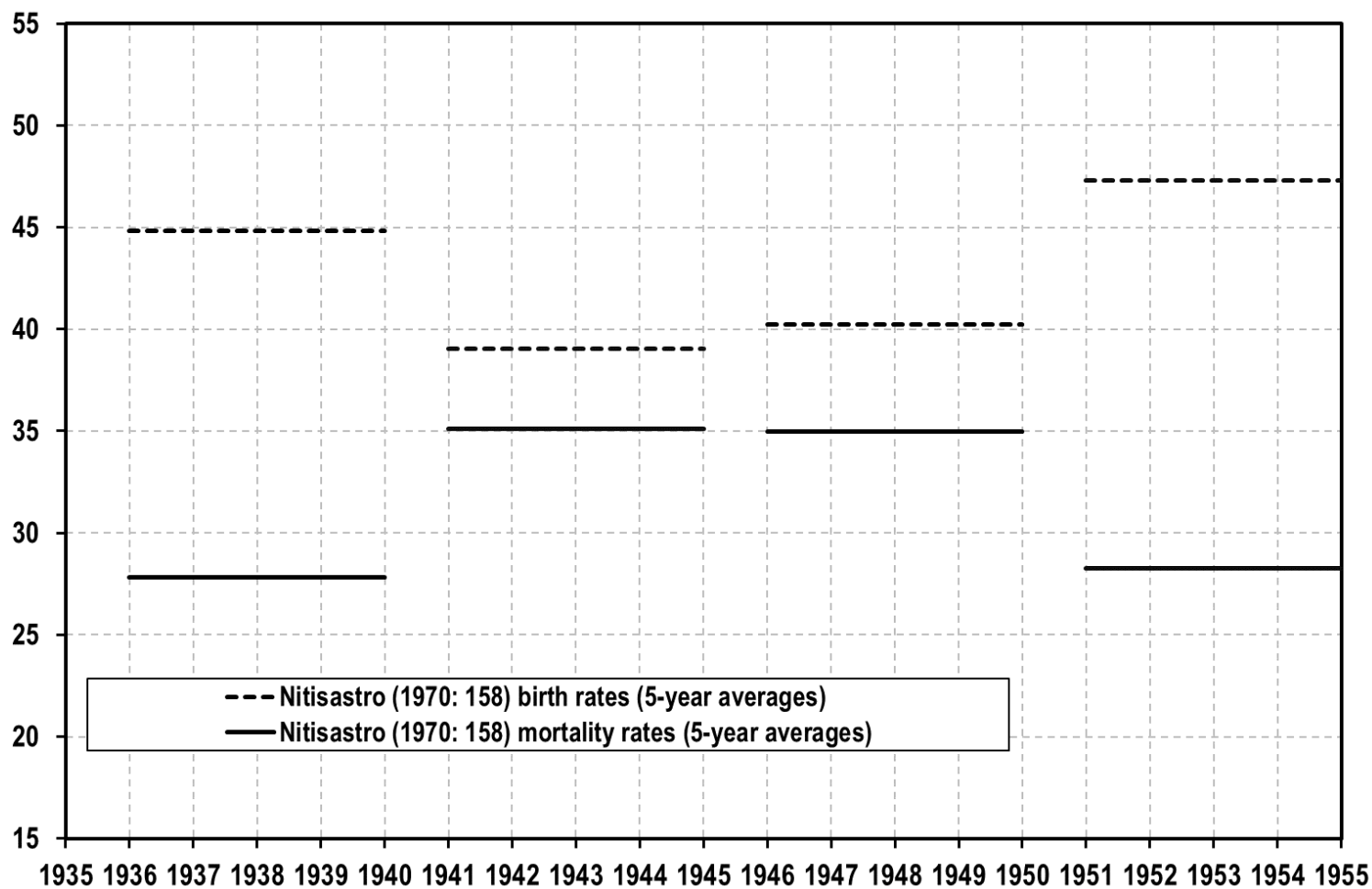
- But now we can ...



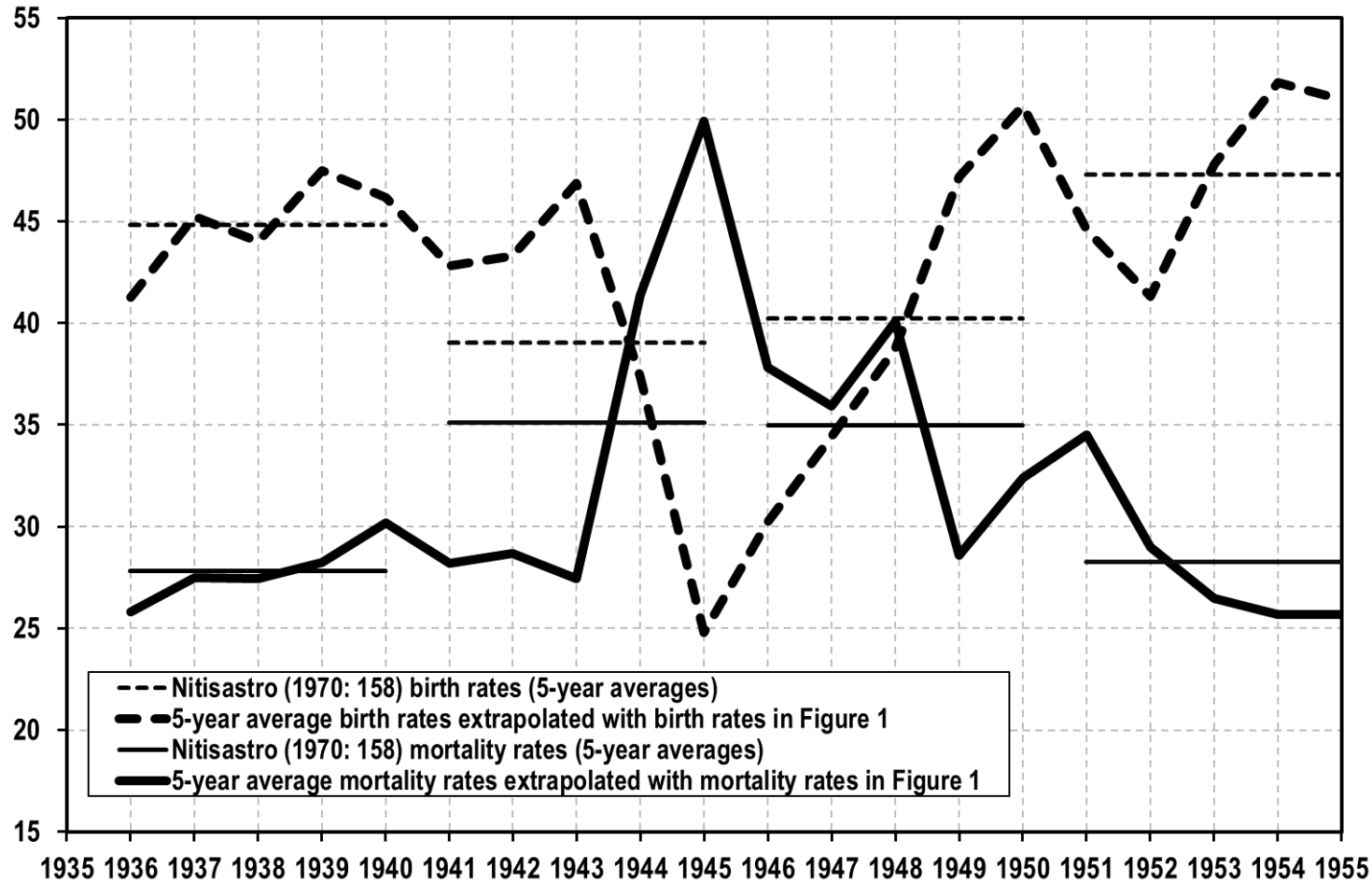
- except that registered population + MR, BR are too low, largely due to under-reporting of IMR



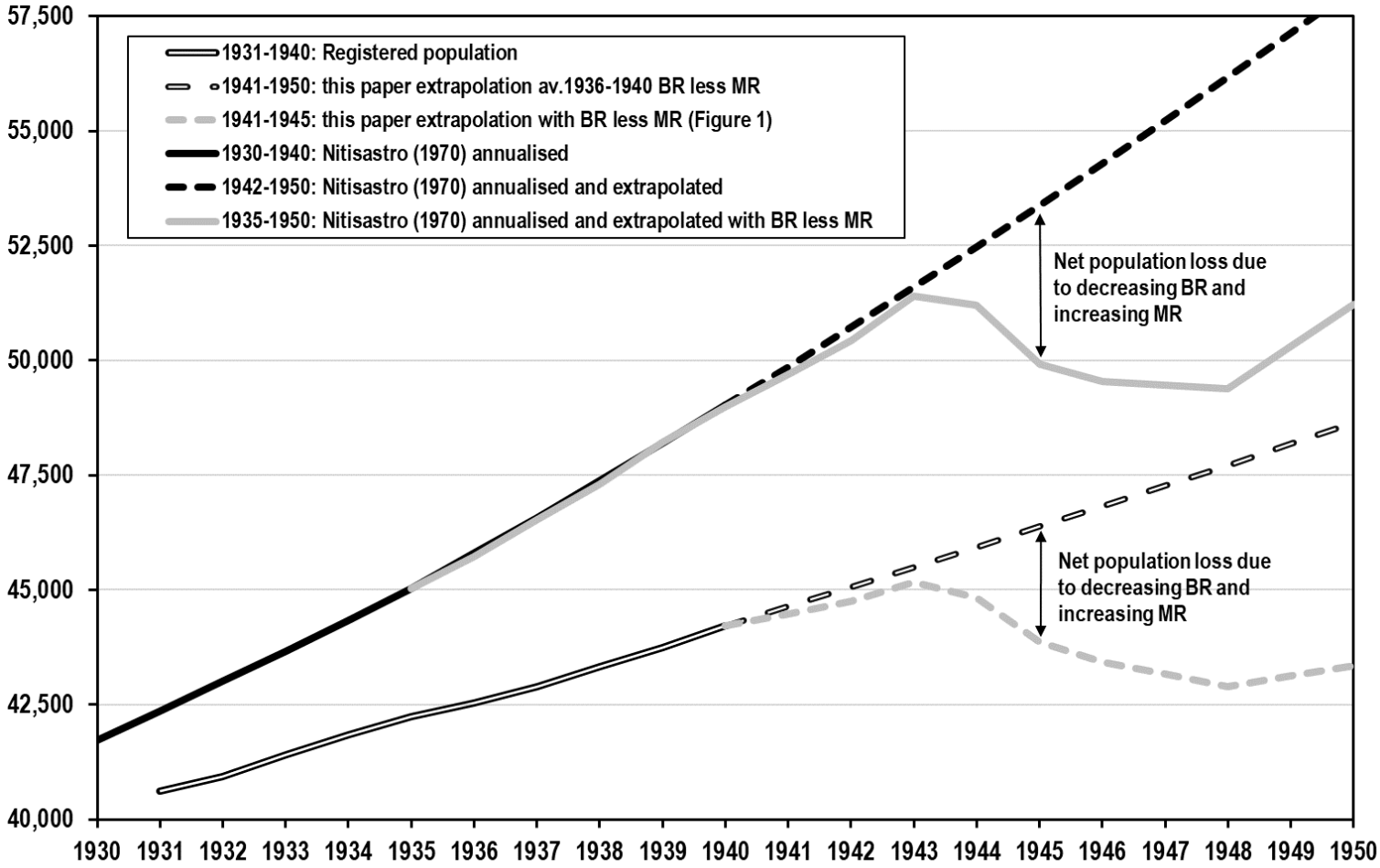
- Solution: use Widjojo Nitisastro (1970) estimates of BR + MR (‰)
- based on 5-yearly age brackets from the 1961 population census + assumptions about life expectancy



Step 4:  
 Extrapolate  
 each of  
 Widjojo  
 Nitisastro's  
 5-yearly  
 estimates of  
 BR and MR  
 with  
 estimated  
 annual BR  
 and MR (‰)



- Corrected net population loss estimates, based on MR and BR and population growth from Nitisastro (1970) extrapolated to annual data





## *Estimates of the Net Loss of Population in Java during 1942-1945*

Source	1930s annual rate of net population growth extrapolated to 1945	Net loss of popu- lation	of which due to	
			higher than normal deaths	missing births
		(× 1,000)		
De Vries (1946), 1943-1945 net loss	1.12% (1939)	2,430	1,539	891
<u>Keyfitz and Nitisastro (1954: 57)</u>	1.50%	2,336	-	-
Johannes <i>et al.</i> (1960)	1.50%	2,349	-	-
This paper, Figure 1 mortality rates	0.96% <sup>a</sup>	2,521	1,351 <sup>b</sup>	1,170 <sup>c</sup>
<u>Nitisastro (1970: 158) extrapolated<sup>d</sup></u>	1.70% <sup>e</sup>	3,464	1,939 <sup>b</sup>	1,525 <sup>c</sup>

a. 1936-1940 5-year average growth of registered population, estimated by extrapolating 1932 registered population with annual registered births and deaths during 1933-1940.

b. Deviation of mortality rates during 1942-1945 from 1936-1940 average mortality rate.

c. Residual.

d. See main text and Figure 3 for the extrapolation of 5-yearly averages.

e. 1935-1940 growth rate.

# What was known during 1944-1945 about the famine conditions in Java?

- Japanese censorship: no newspaper reports on rice purchase system, on food shortages, on 1944 Indramayu uprisings, on malnutrition + famine etc.
  - no food production data published, even though they were collected
  - no MR + BR data published, even though they were collected
- Japanese military government did not commission reports on food situation. But knowledge of food shortages existed, as other reports witnessed
  - e.g. Subardjo (advisor to Japanese navy commander) travelled around rural Java in early 1944 → unpublished July 1944 report
  - e.g. Prawoto (advisor to Department of Economic Affairs) researched April-August 1944 Indramayu farmer uprisings → unpublished October 1944 report
- One exception: Boentaran (member *Chuo Sangi-in*) analysed MR + BR in Semarang residency 1942-1943 + hospital admissions Sept.1943-Feb.1944, concluded deteriorating food and public health situation: MR > BR

## PEMANDANGAN SINGKAT

perihal kesehatan dan makanan rakjat dll.

Sebeloemnja saja persilahkan para pematja melihat Berita Ketabiban tahoen ka 6 Nomor istimewa 8 Desember 2602 No. 2-12 dan Berita Ketabiban tahoen ka 7 No. 2 katja 2-2603.

Dalam karangan saja dengan kalimat seperti tertera diatas jang ke 1 saja telah menoeelis (lihat katja 5 diatas) seperti berikoet: „Di Djawa Tengah kesehatan Rakjat pada 2-3 tahoen jang terbelakang (jaitoe tahoen 2599-2601) kelihatan sedikit moendoer”.

Seteroesnja dengan moelai kalimat ke 2 saja menerangkan: Oentoek menjingkatkan karangan ini dan oentoek mentjapai keterangan sebaik-baiknja tentang kemoendoeran kesehatan Rakjat paling koerang baik adanya, jaitoe kebetoeelan Semarang Syu.

Pada tahoen jang laloe angka kematian dari Semarang Syu, ja'ni 30,1 ‰; ada lebih tinggi dari angka kelahiran sebesar 29,3 ‰. Djadi kelebihan kelahiran atau tambahan djiwa sama sekali tidak ada.

Teroes-meneroes menjelidiki hal ini kami lihat, bahwa dari Semarang Syu ada 2 Ken jang haroes diperhatikan lebih dahoeloe, jaitoe Grobogan Ken dan Demak Ken. Di kedoea Ken itoe soedah pada tahoen 2600 angka kematian Rakjat ada lebih tinggi dari angka kelahiran. Angka sisa kelahiran dari Grobogan Ken telah toeroen sampai -5,1 ‰ dari Demak Ken sampai -2,1 ‰ pada tahoen 2601.

Karangan terseboet bermaksoed mengharap perhatian dari kawan-kawan sedjawat, agar soepaja kita dapat membantoe pada Pemerintah Balatentera Dai Nippon memperbaiki kesehatan dan kekoean Rakjat Indonesia.

Kini Pemerintahan Balatentera Dai Nippon telah berlakoe tepat 2 tahoen lamanja. Dalam tempo sependek itoe Pemerintah mendjalankan

Boentaran Martoatmodjo (1944) 'Pemandangan singkat ...', *Berita Ketabiban*, 3(4-5-6) 43-52,

# In the 1944-45 Sanyo-Kaigi:



15. R. Boentaran Martoatmodjo, dari Semarang, dilantik.



Oeroesan Perekonomian Prawoto Soemodilogo



41. Oto Iskandar Dinata, dari Priangan, dilantik.



Oeroesan Oemoem Ir. Soekarno

Djawa Baroe (October and November 1943).





# Minutes of the 8 January 1945 Sanyo-Kaigi meeting

- Provide advice on rice acquisition system that was well-below target in the 1944 crop season
- Discussion blamed corrupt local officials + Chinese rice millers for shortfall
- Discussion expresses need for more control over rice economy
- Boentaro reported new data  
Central Java: MR » BR → Prawoto expressed dismay about this
- Conclusion: farmers should hand over paddy, price needs increase, rice mills need to be nationalised
- but nothing about the unfolding human disaster

T J A T A T A N stenografis Sidang Sanyo Kaigi ke-empat pada tanggal 8 boelan 1, tahun 2605, djam 10 pagi.

**Ketosa.** Ir. Soekarno

Jang tidak hadir: Dr. Abdoel Rasjid dan Mr. R. Soewandi.

POKOK PEMBITJARAAN:

Pendjoelan padi  
Harga barang.

**Ketosa.** Toean-toean jang terhormat, sidang Dewan Sanyo jang ke-empat saja boeka. Saja madjoekan sebagai pokok pemitjaraan sekarang soal pendjoelan padi oleh pendoedok kepada Pemerintah.

Dalam sidang pertama telah disoesoen satoe panitia pelapor dibawah pimpinan toean Iskandardinata, oentoek memoet laporan; sekorang laporannya soedah selesai, maka saja beri kesempatan kepada ketoesa panitia memadjoekan laporannya.

**R. Oto Iskandardinata.** Sebeloem saja membatja laporan ini, saja terangkan, bahwa panitia telah mengoesoepikan bahan-bahan, soepaja mendjadi bahan peninjauan toean-toean Sanyo lainnja; dan tjara melaporken bosah penjelidikan panitia itoe demikian: jang akan saja batjakan ialah tarotama pengoesoepan-pengoesoepan dalam garis bebarnja, dan sesoedahnja itoe ada pelaporan istimewa jang mengenai ketjoerangan-ketjoerangan dan keoesoesotan-keoesoesotan, jang, djikalau diizinkan oleh toean Ketoesa, akan dikemoekakan oleh toean Prawoto. Selandjoetnja, djikalau dirasa perloe, oleh para Sanyo dibawah pimpinan toean Ketoesa dapat dikemoekakan pertanjaan-pertanjaan jang mengenai pelaporan panitia ini, dan masing-masing penjelidik bersedia memberi keterangan setjoekoepnja.

Toean Ketoesa, laporan kami berboenji begini:  
Kesimpoesan-kesimpoesan "PANITIA PELAPOR"

Pendjoeloesan

Pada sidang pertama dari Dewan Sanyo, jang telah dilangoengken pada tanggal 16-12-2604 djam 15, maka antara lainnja telah dibatjakan oleh Gityoo pertanjaan P. J. M. Gunseikan, jang berboenji sebagai berikoet:

Pertanjaan No. 1.

"Berdasar atas djawaban sidang Tryoo Sangin jang ke-6; bagaimanakah tjara jang seksama, soepaja pendoedok dapat manjamoesnakan kewadjibannya tentoe pendjoelan padi kepada Pemerintah sebagaimana mestinya dengan seadil-adilnja?"

(Djawaban dalam 1 boelan)

Pendjilasan tidak ada.

Karena Dewan Sanyo berpendapat bahwa oentoek dapat menjawab pertanjaan itoe jang mengenai hati djiwa rakjat, dengan seksama, selajaknja lebih dahloe diadakan penjelidikan diderah-deerah, maka pada sidang tersebut poen dibentoek soetoe "Panitia Pelapor", jang terdiri dari 6 (enam) anggota, seperti teraktos dibawah ini:

1. R. Oto Iskandar Dinata, Chianbu Sanyo ..... Anggota/Ketoesa
2. Dr. R. Boentaran Martoetmodjo, Bisei Kyoku Sanyo ..... Anggota
3. R. Prawoto Soemadilogo, Sangyobu Sanyo .....



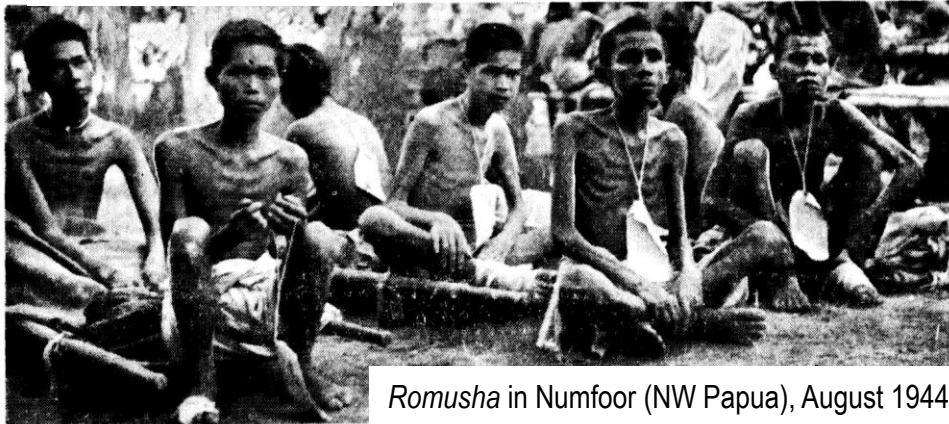
- ca.200,000 *romusha* perished
- since 1940s they are part of Indonesia's public memory + historiography
- due to *kumpulan*<sup>2</sup> & *kelompok*<sup>2</sup> *eks-romusha* in 1940s-1950s
- Sukarno expressed co-responsibility in 1965 Cindy Adams autobiography



Djawa Baroe (October 1944).

June 1948: Sukarno at the Pekanbaru railway *romusha* monument  
<https://kepuustakaan-presiden.perpusnas.go.id/EN/photo/>

Western Mail (5 April 1945)



Romusha in Numfoor (NW Papua), August 1944



"Co-prosperity." Starved and diseased Indonesians, the slave labour of the Japanese conquerors.



# Why are the 1944-45 famine victims not part of public memory?

- In 1951 Subardjo's 4m victims were public knowledge, but then it disappeared from public record in Indonesia. Not even the 2.4m estimate mentioned

## 1. Japan-Indonesia bilateral treaty negotiations 1952-1958

- But compensation for human suffering not part of discussion → no need to repeat 4m victims estimate at risk of offending Japanese counterparts
- 1951 war damage estimate of US\$ 17.5b → 1958 US\$ 0.8b support package

## 2. Mounting media censorship in Indonesia after 1953

- 1946-1951 public criticism of Sukarno role during 1942-1945
  - e.g. 1951 Sukarno sues *Indonesia Raya* for *perasaan terganggu* (hurt feelings)
- Criticism + critical views of Japanese occupation years blunted during 1950s. Coincided with increased censorship since 1953, since March 1957
  - during Suharto presidency sensitive attitude of Indonesian authorities towards relations with Japan persisted, e.g. 1973 *Romusha* film

# The magnitude of the 1944-45 famine: Does it matter?

- Setting the historical record straight
- Establishing magnitude is important in context of a multitude of studies on transgenerational effects of trauma on health and wellbeing
  - many studies on the various transgenerational consequences (physical and mental health) + epigenetic effects (in-utero genetic changes) of famines on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations, also today, such as
    - » 1845-52 Ireland famine: e.g. Walsh (2016) – higher mental illness
    - » 1944-45 Leningrad famine: e.g. Tolkunova *et al.* (2023) – more unhealthy eating
    - » 1944-45 Holland famine: e.g. Veenendaal *et al.* (2013) – higher cardiovascular issues
    - » 1945 Vietnam famine: e.g. Guven *et al.* (2021) – lower socio-economic status
    - » 1959-61 China famine: e.g. Xie & Zhu (2023) – higher health and economic disadvantages; Zhang & Kim (2023) – lower mental health
- But no such studies for Indonesia