Surviving Spouses: Support for Widows in Malang, East Java
Marianti, R.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Chapter 1
LINKING SUPPORT AND PROBLEMS PERTAINING TO WIDOWHOOD

1. Uncertain Support and Uninteresting Widows

In the beginning of September 1997, I moved to Semeru alley. In order to formally start my fieldwork, I had to inform the Rukun Tetangga\(^1\) (RT) head about my activities in his neighbourhood and to show him my research permit. One evening, after the Isyaa prayer, I went to his house, but both the RT head and his wife were not at home. The middle-aged woman who opened the door asked me to enter in a friendly way. She was bu Qulsum, the RT head’s sister in law. When she knew that I came for pak Mudji, the RT head, she said that he and his wife had gone to a wedding party and that she was not sure what time they would come back.

I told bu Qulsum that I would be carrying out research in the neighbourhood and would therefore like to introduce myself to the RT head, and to show him some formal papers. I further told her that I was interested in investigating the way in which the inhabitants of the alley cope with various problems, especially the gaining and receiving of support from different sources such as their family members, neighbours, friends or the state. Hearing this, she replied enthusiastically, “Yes, I remember now, my sister [the RT head’s wife - RM] told me that she met and talked with you yesterday at the market. You are the one, who is studying at a university in Amsterdam, aren’t you? One of my nephews was married to a Dutch woman and lived in the Netherlands for a couple of years. My nephew told us that in The Netherlands primary education is free, the unemployed get paid and many things are regulated by the state including the health insurance. It is very different from Indonesia, isn’t? Here, we have to solve our problems by ourselves”. When I mentioned the role of mutual help among relatives and neighbours in Indonesia, her forehead was slightly wrinkled. I got the impression that my last comment raised some doubts in her. “Of course people should help each other in time of distress but we do not always provide and receive help. Helping and being helped are often uncertain. Alhamdulillah (Praise be to God) that I receive a pension, it isn’t much but I have a steady monthly income. A sister of mine has to depend on what her children give her from time to time. On occasions they cannot give money to their mother because they have their

\(^1\) A Rukun Tetangga or RT is the smallest administration unit that usually consists of less than 50 households.
own financial problems. Help from relatives, even if they are your own children, and from the neighbours is not as reliable as my pension!” It was obvious that bu Qulsum was only talking about financial help. However, I was a bit surprised by her direct scepticism about familial and neighbourly help. Before I met bu Qulsum, I had talked about my research theme with a few other people in the neighbourhood. From this experience, I was more familiar with the ‘standard’ proud acknowledgement about how rukun (harmonious) “we are as Indonesians” than with this kind of scepticism.

I was surprised again by her reply when I told her that my study was specifically directed at widows and how they deal with different problems by receiving and gaining support from various sources. Her forehead wrinkled again, “Why widows? I am a widow myself and I have problems like other people. Is it that interesting to do research on widows? Most of the widows in this neighbourhood are ordinary older women like me. I don’t think that they have interesting stories to tell”. I told her that in some places women were in difficult circumstances, and in a marginalized socio-cultural position, because of their widowhood. Bu Qulsum seemed to be interested in my explanation but at the end she returned to her earlier opinion, “I think that widows’ problems here are not that much different from other women’s problems except that their husbands are dead”.

I knew that on my first visit to the RT head’s house I would be questioned about my research, my study in Amsterdam and a few personal matters for instance about my family. I also prepared myself for some minor communication problems in explaining what I would like to do in this alley, but I did not expect to be confronted by this straight scepticism at the first meeting with a widow at the research site. I went back to my lodging house with the feeling that I might be on the wrong track.

As the collected data grew, it became more and more clear that the inherent uncertainty in familial and communal support mechanisms and the lack of socio-cultural marginalisation in the widows’ lives are important entry points in understanding support mechanisms and problems pertaining to widowhood in Java. I shall come back to these two entry points in section two and three below before I formulate some research questions in section four, describe the research methods in section five and the organisation of the book in section six.
2. Support as an Object of Study

In the first place, this study is concerned with support and support relationships. The chapters are aimed at examining the way in which various support mechanisms work and why they work that way. In the analysis, I pay attention to both the receiving as well as the providing end of support because the dynamic interrelation and interaction of the receiver(s) and provider(s) of support are central to this study. Here, I emphasise the idea that people can get protection and support through different arrangements that can be based on the *kinship and communal solidarity* (such as the helping relationships among family, friends and neighbours), *the market* (such as the private insurance) and *the state supervision* (such as various social insurance for medical, old-age, survivor, work-injury and disability benefits).

This section deals with some issues related to this emphasis. Firstly, I shall discuss the position of ‘support’ toward two related terms namely ‘social security’ and ‘care’. Then, some weaknesses and strengths of different support arrangements will be highlighted.

**Positioning and delineating support**

How social security should be understood and defined with regard to differences between developed and developing countries is an object of elaborate examinations (ILO, 1984: 2-3; F. von Benda-Beckmann et. al (eds.), 1988; Burgess and Stern, 1991; Atkinson and Hills, 1991; F. Von Benda-Beckmann and K. von Benda-Beckmann, 1994; Dixon and Scheurell, 1995). In these examinations, the definition of social security includes some aspects. Each definition emphasises different aspects, but in general, they highlight the objectives of social security mechanisms, their resources, and the distress that needs to be coped with.

In his effort to classify issues and authors of social security in the Third World, Hirtz (1994: 235) identified a school of thought which brought to the fore ‘[…] the role of solidarity, reciprocity, communality, and other patterns of socially organized ways of sharing and exclusion’ in people’s struggle to cope with contingencies and hardships. This has further stimulated the theoretical debates on the interaction between kinship and the state in the field of social security (Benda-Beckmann et al, 1988). Studies inspired by this school of thought demonstrated that in many developing countries, the state is not the sole provider of social security and even when the state does supervise welfare programmes, it cannot completely replace the private helping responsibility and activities (Benda-Beckmann, 1995: 77).

I share the idea that these non-state arrangements are highly relevant in an analysis on how people cope with various hardships. This idea will be highlighted repeatedly in the
following chapters. However, the inclusion of a wide array of mechanisms can result in an overly broad, and, therefore, blurred definition of social security. Bartel's and Noth's (1998: 14-15) definition and categorization of social security system in Indonesia is an example of an 'all included' definition of social security. Social security is defined as '[...] the protection which society provides for its members to survive on this planet'. Based on this definition, the social security system in Indonesia is differentiated into general social security and social security in industrial relations. Within the 'general social security' they included four elements namely, family, *dukun* (traditional healers), *Puskesmas* (health centres) and *Pt. Jaja Raharja* (sic) (a state insurance for traffic accidents). These four providers of protection are very different in many respects; therefore it is unclear what are the criteria for placing them in the same category. Moreover, the protection that is supposed to be provided is highly disputable. At this point, I argue that acknowledging the plurality of social security should not lead to the opening of the Pandora's box. The fact that people can seek assistance and protection through various arrangements does not make these arrangements suitable to be perceived as a part of social security system. Highlighting the social security *function* of these arrangements is not the same as defining them as social security arrangements.

Concerning this problem, I shall use Ginneken's (1999:4-6) definition, which described social security as, '(a) The provision of benefits to households and individuals (b) through public or collective arrangements (c) to protect against low or declining living standards (d) arising from a number of basic risks and needs.' In his book Ginneken also defined social security ' [...] as being composed of social insurance and social assistance' and said 'Social security schemes are called statutory when they are established by legislation'. Accordingly, not all kinds and forms of support examined in this study can be defined *specifically* as (statutory) social security. Here, I make a distinction between helping relationships and activities among family members and neighbours, and some forms of state support (such as the various social insurance programmes). Although I perceive family, neighbours and the state as sources or providers of support, I do not place all support

---

2 Concerning the role of *dukun* in the medical services, Bartel and Noth (1998:15) wrote that '[...] for many poor people, Dukuns are the only possibility to get help'. This is especially because 'The price for the treatment is up to the patient or depends on the economic situation of the patient. Even if the patient does not have any money, the Dukuns helps him'(sic). This description needs to be scrutinized. As in a visit to a doctor, a patient/client commonly has to pay the *dukun* for each treatment and consultation. Although, in a few cases, (a part of) the payment can be given in kind. Moreover, the cost of a visit to a 'well known' traditional healer can be more expensive than a visit to a doctor. Consequently, it is too idealistic to suppose that the *dukuns* will surely help those who cannot pay. I seriously doubt whether *dukuns* can be included in the general social security system of Indonesia.
arrangements related to these sources under the social security system. This means, the term support refers to a wider array of arrangements than the term social security.

‘Support’ also overlaps in some respects with ‘care’. Both ‘support’ and ‘care’ imply activities and feelings, but they are not congruent. In the literature, ‘caring’ is distinguished between ‘caring for’ (‘the actual tasks associated with caring’) and ‘caring about’ (‘the emotional relationship between the carer and the cared for’) (Morgan, 1996:97-98). These two forms of caring imply a high degree of personal involvement of the caregiver. The ‘caring for’ often refers to instrumental aid such as nursing activities that commonly are performed by closest relatives like children, parents, siblings or grand children. The ‘caring about’ refers to a close attention and affection. This emotional aid also implies a greater degree of intimacy and therefore tends to be provided by those who have a stronger emotional bond to the (care) recipients. Thus, in both forms of care, the carer, usually has a close relationship with the cared-for. This is not necessary in support relations since support can be provided indirectly, for example, the donation of money as an economic support for victims of war. This support can indicate the donor’s deep sympathy for the war victims, but the sympathy is quite impersonal, thus, not similar to affection. Therefore, unlike care, support can be used for a wider range of aid (economic, social, emotional and even practical/instrumental). Since the most important aim of this study is the portrayal of the landscape of various kinds and forms of helps, helping actions and relations, and the demonstration of how they work and relate to each other, the term ‘support’ is more suitable than ‘care’ to cover a greater range.

The term ‘support’ is used in this study to refer to several issues, first, support is about help, assistance or back up provided by others to cope with problems. The emphasis on others (as support providers) does not mean that the support receivers are less important or inactive. In most cases, people can neither totally rely on themselves nor totally depend on other people. Even those who have resources (money, labour, goods etc.) may need help from others to convert and to mobilise the resources into the actual support, since these resources constitute a mere potential (Benda-Beckmann, 1994:22). In this study, both the providing as well as the receiving ends are perceived as equally important to be examined in order to understand how people establish and maintain support relationships and how the support flows.

Second, support does not necessarily guarantee an adequate protection or solution. By underlining this, I intend to include various small and less intensive kinds of assistance that are important for coping with day-to-day problems without an intention to protect adequately the needy and the weak. This kind of assistance is omnipresent in the Indonesian context,
contrary to the state organised social assistance and social insurance which are not available or accessible to most of the people. Therefore an attempt to understand support relationships among people in Indonesia should not overlook these small and less intensive forms of help.

Third, support is also not necessarily related to the usage of social means. Support does not have to be provided through collective arrangement. For various reasons, people do not always possess equal access to the existing collective arrangements. Consequently, the individual help, which is often small and less intensive, are easier and more realistic to be gained by those without access to the collective arrangements.

Fourth, support is provided and received by individuals, groups, or institutions in the form of goods, money (material) and/or services (immaterial).

These four matters are orientation points in examining support and support relationships in the following chapters. After positioning support towards a few related terms, in the next sections I shall deal with two issues that are highly relevant for understanding the way support arrangements work and why they work that way.

The inadequate and inequitable protection by state supervised social security and private insurance

In the first section, I described that bu Qulsum admired how well state support is regulated in a developed country like The Netherlands. This kind of enthusiasm and admiration were not only expressed by bu Qulsum. Many people in the research sites reacted similarly when we talked about the Dutch welfare system. This enthusiasm often turned into a complaint on the almost complete lack of state support in our country. At present, the state supervised social security schemes in Indonesia³ consist of:

1. Old age and Survivors’ Insurance (Provident Funds) which cover the Old Age Savings and Death Insurance and Pension Funds;
2. Employment Injury or Disability Insurance provides for the disabled including the permanently and totally disabled persons, and their dependants;

These programmes are only accessible for workers in the formal sector, civil servants and members of the armed forces and their dependants. This means, only 20,5% of the total population are covered by the existing social insurance programmes. Consequently, the

³ The social insurance programme for workers in the formal sector is called specifically as the Jaminan Sosial Tenaga Kerja or Jamsostek.
majority of Indonesians have to deal with various kinds of contingencies such as work injuries, disability, sickness, unemployment, loss of income, death etc. without any protection by social insurance and social assistance.

According to Midgley (1994: 220), ‘[...] a common feature of social security in the Third World is the limited coverage afforded to the population, and the disparity in coverage between those in regular wage employment and those in the subsistence sector of the economy’. Fuchs (1988:45) also came to a similar conclusion that the (statutory) social security in most developing countries ‘[...] has become the privilege of the wage earners in the formal sector (Mesa-Lago 1978). The principle of work and welfare (Macarow 1980) excludes non-wage-earners from benefits [...]’. This problem is made worse by the fact that the benefits are financed through ‘[...] inequitable funding mechanisms, that utilize revenues from those who are not covered by statutory social security to subsidize those who are [...]’ (Midgley, 1994:221). Why then is the coverage of statutory social security in a developing country such as Indonesia extremely limited?

Generally, this limitation is caused by diverse factors (Ginneken, 1999: 6-13)4. First, the lack of government resources that can be related to the low GNP per capita and the difficulty of raising revenue due to the limitation of tax instruments (Burgess and Stern, 1991: 62). Second, the lack of administrative capacity. This includes incomplete and mal-administration that lead to weakness in record keeping, inefficient targeting and high-cost operation (Ginneken, 1999:13; Burgess and Stern 1991:65-72; Esmara, 1986:64). Third, the lack of appropriate policy making. In the case of Indonesia, this third constraint can relate to certain values and norms. The lack of policy on old-age security for instance, can partly be connected to the ideological emphasis on the importance of family support. The notion that family members should and would assist each other in time of distress has a significant influence on the country’s welfare policy. Policy makers tend to perceive matters such as care and housing for the elderly as family matters because whenever it is needed, family would take care of and protect their vulnerable members (Niehof, 1997:1-2). Therefore, they do not recognise an urgent need for state intervention on old-age security. These three factors can especially hinder the implementation of social assistance programmes.

Beside the factors mentioned above, some other factors can also be identified. However, these are more relevant for the implementation of social insurance programmes. A social insurance programme can be unsuccessfully implemented because of the heavy burden

4 See also Esmara,1986:64.
of contributions. This is especially true for the informal sector workers who often have irregular and unpredictable incomes. According to Ginneken (1999:8) ‘A common conclusion is that many workers outside the formal sector are unable or unwilling to contribute a relatively high percentage of their incomes to finance social security benefits that do not meet their priority needs. In addition, they may not be familiar with, and/or distrust, the way the statutory social security scheme is managed’. Concerning the situation in Indonesia, Esmara (1986:64) argued that ‘[...] Complaints of high rates of contribution from the workers to the social security insurance are quite surprising, [...] since their contribution is not more than one percent of their total wages.’ However, these complaints should not be understood as only related to the amount of the contribution. Nobody is willing to invest even a small part of his/her (low) income on a scheme that is unfamiliar and unreliable. According to Esmara (1986:64), one of the basic weaknesses of the social security system with regard to social insurance programme in Indonesia is that ‘[...] the workers’ rights in the social security insurance are mostly unknown to the workers themselves, with the result that the workers have not actually received the full benefits of the system’. This unwillingness to invest in social insurance programme is also made worse by the very low benefits and inadequate protection from the programme (Midgley, 1994:221). Concerning the social insurance programmes in Indonesia, another problem can be added, as Esmara (1986:64) wrote: ‘The reluctance of the employers to shoulder social insurance costs and the willingness of workers to work without any social protection and in most cases below the minimum wage level, have made social security schemes less meaningful for Indonesian social and economic development’

The exclusivity of the state supervised social security is similar to the market based/private insurance. Recently, there are 62 life insurance companies, 107 non-life insurance companies and 4 reinsurance companies that have business licenses to operate in

---

5 To show how inadequate the provided benefit by Indonesian employee’s social security system is (Jaminan Sosial Tenaga Kerja or the Jamsostek), Bartel and Noth (1998:28) calculated a hypothetical case of a room-boy who works at a middle class hotel in Jakarta and earns Rp. 250.000/month. If he dies during working-time, ‘[...] his spouse gets 60% of 60 months wages as a lump sum (this would be 9 million RP), plus annuity of 25000 RP for 24 months (that is totally 600000 RP), and plus (sic) an additional funeral grant of 200000 Rp. That is totally still less than 10 million Rp and corresponds to the earnings of about 3 years of the late husband (3 million Rp/year). In case that the room-boy does not die during his work, his wife just gets 1,2 million (1 million paid as a lump sum and 200000 as an additional funeral grant). In that case the benefits correspond to less than a half of the annual earnings of the late spouse. It is obvious that these benefits are very base and just grant an substitute of the spouse’s income for a short time.’
Despite that, buying policies of private insurance is not commonly an option for getting a better protection against various risks and contingencies. The policies and monthly premium are simply unaffordable for most of the people. Bartel and Noth (1998:29) wrote that ‘According to the Indonesian Medical Association just 16% of the population are covered by a Health Care Insurance. The other 84% of the population still have to pay cash every time they seek medical care’. Therefore, in the case of hospitalisation for example, people have to use their savings, pawn or sell their valuable assets including houses and lands, or borrow money even at high interest in order to pay for medical care. When these ‘solutions’ are not accessible (any longer), the sick person will be taken care of by the family members at home. This is a common euphemism for a discontinuation of the medical treatment based on familial agreement. Without the required treatment, the disease would be worsened and the sick person could only wait for his last day on earth. Everybody knew and accepted this because there was no other way out.

Only less than 2% of the population have an individual life insurance policy. This situation ‘[...] has partly to do with the relatively low disposable income and the prevalence of the extended family and community ties which ease the sense of security. Another reason might be the still existing belief of many Asians that they provoke fate by purchasing a life policy. [...] An actually new problem in the development of private insurance industry triggered the present financial crisis: people have lost their confidence in local companies after the liquidation of some local banks and insurance companies. People fear losing all their investments. Therefore, some customers change from local to a foreign company or just cancel their contract and prefer saving their money under their pillows’ (Bartel and Noth, 1998:31).

Concerning all factors mentioned above, for the vast majority of Indonesians, the adequate, equitable and affordable protection by statutory social security and private insurance are still beyond reach. However, it is also too simple to assume that they are defenceless against contingencies and hardships. People receive and provide support in various ways and these support arrangements function with all their strengths and weaknesses. At this point, we come to the other side of the coin namely the non-statutory social security that is based on kinship and communal solidarity.

---

*6 Data from Activities information of Insurance Council of Indonesia 1997 and 1999 (www. dai.or.id/*)
The role of support arrangements based on kinship and communal solidarity

Regardless the context, an examination on support mechanisms will unavoidably come across the help and support rendered by kin, neighbours (both individually as well as in groups), friends and organisations that are built on different common purposes and interests. These support arrangements are still perceived as very important for the majority of people in many developing countries. They are also connected with characteristics such as traditional, indigenous, informal, non-statutory etc and distinguished from or even contrasted with the modern, statutory, formal arrangements provided by the state and the market. In this section I shall discuss these seemingly omnipresent support arrangements based on kinship and communal solidarity. To what extent they can provide protection? What are their strengths and weaknesses?

Without romanticising the role of family, friends, neighbours or community based groups in providing protection and support in time of distress, it can be stated that the strengths of this kind of support arrangements are (among others) derived from aspects such as long-term bonds, direct and personal interactions and common background. These aspects can provide a fertile ground for trust and reciprocity to grow that is maintained by manageable information exchange and control. Burgess and Stern (1991:60) mentioned, 'The immediate family or community may be well placed to judge whether an individual really has fallen on hard times, and thus to deal with the question of fraud, and whether that individual has been careless or indolent in bringing about the difficulties. Further, the sanction of social opprobrium which may arise from fraud or neglect can be very strong within the family or community. From this point of view local entities may be the most efficient suppliers of social security'.

However these advantages are only one side of the story. The functioning of support mechanisms based on kinship and communal solidarity are also influenced by some obstacles and therefore they can be inefficient and ineffective in different manners (Zacher, 1998: 27-28; Morduch, 1999:14-21). I shall underline a few most relevant obstacles that will be analysed more elaborately in the following chapters.

One of the obstacles is related to the nature of the shocks that have to be dealt with. Kin and community members are often less able to help each other when they are simultaneously affected by adversities. In other words, familial and communal support mechanisms are ineffective in dealing with covariate shocks such as drought, floods, epidemic, macro-economic crisis etc. These kinds of adversity can have an equalizing effect for the majority of people in the sense that they have to confront resources loss and depletion.
at the same time and therefore only small resources are left for reciprocation or to support the most needy ones. In these circumstances, peoples’ support circle commonly becomes narrower. The lack of support means (for instance economic resources) can be used as a reason to abandon duties and obligations to support and leads to the failure of the support mechanisms. Burgess and Stern (1991:60-61) wrote that ‘Insurance is generally most efficiently supplied if the income of person being insured is not positively correlated with the income of those providing the insurance. Thus if the community falls on bad times it should look for support from outside the community’. I shall come back to this issue in chapter nine where the functioning of various support mechanisms are connected to a covariate shock namely, the economic crisis that started in 1997. Beside the covariate shocks, Morduch (1999:20) showed that ‘informal mechanisms are typically weak against repeated shocks […] When bad conditions are likely to persist for several years in a row, households need to keep very large stores of assets in order to achieve adequate protection’.

The lack of (or extreme limitation of) economic resources as a means of support also make these support arrangements less efficient among the poorest. In the situation where everybody (in familial or neighbourly sphere) is as ‘broke’ as everybody else, the provision and reception of economic support are less likely to happen. Morduch wrote (1999:15-16) ‘[…] pushed close to the subsistence constraint, holding onto whatever one has may be especially tempting despite the agreement to share with others. As a result, reciprocal exchange tends to fall apart (or to offer less of a return) when insurance is most needed. In general, it works best when participants have a cushion from poverty. […] theory suggests that systems of reciprocal transfers will be more effective for slightly richer households and in less dire contexts […]’

The increasing ease of geographical mobility can cause another obstacle for the functioning of familial and communal support. Migration in itself can have both positive and negative effect on these support mechanisms. However, ‘[…] in moving away, households are able to “default” on their obligation to relatives and neighbours’ (Morduch, 1999:17). When the parties of support relationships live near each other, their rights and obligations are protected and secured by various forms of social pressure and sanction. In the situation where the physical distance becomes greater, these pressures and sanctions are ineffective. The parties in the support relationship have less control on each other (Zacher, 1988: 28-30).
Mixed, unfixed and interrelated...

Having reviewed the problems that lie behind the almost complete lack of state support and the strengths and weaknesses of the omnipresent familial and communal support, we go back again to the fact that actually, all these sources of support (family, community/nearest, the state) do exist in Indonesia. In other words, there is multiplicity of support in many aspects: sources, kinds and forms. However, not everybody has similar access to all of the support options. If the various supports that are actually received can be analogised as a 'package', it can be said that some people have a bigger package with more varied contents than others. During the fieldwork I also met and talked with those who had an almost empty package.

A support 'package' is unfixed. It continuously changes in quantity, quality and variety according to different life courses, socio-economic and geographical mobility, conflicts and alliances in social network etc. At this point, it is important to look at the agency of both the receivers and the providers of support. As will be demonstrated in following chapters, in many cases, receiving support is far more than passively waiting for compassion and the provision of support cannot simply be mobilized by sense of duty. Before support is actually provided and received, calculations, assessments and negotiations are often done. This study aims to analyse who has what kind of package and why. Parallel to this, Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (1995:79) wrote ‘[… ] we should presume that the social security market in Third World countries is highly fragmented and to a great extent particularized, with the consequences of domination and suppression […]. Even where certain provisions are clearly prescribed by law—whether state, religious or other law—they still must be mobilized. Failing to recognize that people for various reasons make different use of available options, and that the options are unequally distributed among people, would seriously hamper a proper insight in the actual situation of social security in any area.’

In order to understand to what extent and in what way the various co-existing options for obtaining support play a role in people's effort to solve their problems, these options should not be compartmentalized. At first glance, distinguishing various support arrangements into 'state/ non-state', 'formal/ informal', 'modern/traditional' etc. can make the variation more accessible but it can also confuse different dimensions of these arrangements namely, institutions, source of provision, regulations, and actual relationships (F. and K. von Benda-Beckmann, 1995:76-80). For some scholars these ambiguous dichotomies are a reason to examine the integration of various arrangements that have a comparable aim in protecting and promoting well being (Rose, 1986: 13-36; Zacher, 1988:21-37; Midgley, 1994:219-229). It is not my intention to analyse how various support arrangements should be integrated for the
maximum benefit of support receivers. With regard to the unequal access to these arrangements, I am more intrigued by such questions as: Which combinations of support arrangements are actually accessible for different (categories of) receivers? Are these combinations changeable? In what way are they changeable? To what extent and how does the agency of support receivers play a role in the dynamics of these combinations?

Besides avoiding dichotomies, the effort to free various support arrangements from compartmentalization also includes highlighting their interrelation. Different arrangements may have different degrees of importance at different stages of hardship. The quality and quantity of support rendered by a certain provider may decrease or increase because of the presence or absence of other providers. In chapter four, five and six we will learn how family members and neighbours can substitute or complement each other in providing support and how, on many occasions, their supports are entangled. This phenomenon is also highlighted by F. and K. Benda-Beckmann (1995:78) in their study on social security arrangements in eastern Indonesia, ‘Since people are involved in various arrangements of social security, based on various legal systems, and involving various goods and services, changes in one arrangement usually have implications for the other arrangements as well. It is only through a study of these mixed forms of social security that one can begin to understand what certain changes in one system may mean for the overall situation of people’s social security position […]’

3. Problems Pertaining to Widowhood as Object of Study

After discussing different dimensions of support and support relationships in the Indonesian context, in this section I shall highlight the problems that have to be coped with, namely, those pertaining to widowhood. In order to do this, I shall refer to several studies on widows and widowhood that have been carried out in various time, socio-cultural and geographical contexts7. However it is not my intention to compare such various contexts systematically. In using these studies I aim, firstly, to sensitize us to some sources of widowhood problems, since these problems will be examined again more elaborately within the context of urban Java in the following chapters. Secondly, to underline the fact that, despite of variety of the contexts, we can see similar patterns of problems pertaining to widowhood.

7 Britain and France in the 18th century (Hufton,1995); Britain (London) in the late 50s (Marris, 1958) Algeria in the 80s (Jansen,1987), Spain in the end 90s (Os,1997), contemporary India (Dreze,1990; Chen, 1998, Agarwal, 1998); contemporary Africa (Potash, 1986).
Studies on widowhood show that losing a husband by death is experienced and interpreted differently in different societies. Therefore, generalisation on the meaning of widowhood for women and the problems pertaining to widowhood can result in misrepresentation. Despite this, widowhood is a universal phenomenon in the sense that it can happen to every married woman. It can also be stated that, generally, widowhood causes changes and modifications in the widowed person's life, although these changes and modifications are varied in their intensity (modest – excessive), suddenness (gradually – drastically/abruptly), and quality of their effect (positive – negative).

Changes and modifications in life usually stimulate adaptation and adjustment. Like the changes and modifications, the manners and the extent in which widows can adapt to the new circumstance are also varied. Potash (1986:10) connected this adaptation with 'the options available to widows, the interests that affect the decisions they make about their own lives, and the consequences of such decisions'. She also noted that 'By identifying the possibilities available to widows, the constraints under which they operate and the factors affecting choices, we can both understand behaviour and relate it to the larger system'. With regard to this, I shall discuss problems pertaining to widowhood by examining some constraints and affecting factors.

The death of a spouse is commonly associated with grief. In his studies on widows in London in the late 50s, Marris (1958:10) emphasised the fact that grieving is one of the important elements in widows' hardships. He noted that 'When her husband dies, the widow has to adjust to her new state while she is preoccupied with a painful struggle to master her grief.' Therefore, 'Without first discussing grief, it would not be possible to understand the changes in social relationships that widowhood brings about, nor the way in which its practical problems are solved'. Although several studies (Os, 1997; Lopata, 1979; Marris, 1958:13-21) also identified signs of grief that related to different consequences of grieving. Firstly, many widows had suffered from physical symptoms '[...]which in their [the widows'] own opinion, or that of their doctor, were caused or aggravated by the shock of their husband's death - loss of weight; rheumatism and fibrositis; asthma, bronchitis and cramping pains in the chest; [...]'. Commonest of all was difficulty in sleeping, especially at first [...]'). The second sign was the loss of contact with reality and inability to comprehend the loss. In the first shock of bereavement, many widows were often unable to realize that their husbands were dead. However, this grieving can continue for a longer period. In Os' (1997) study, many of the Spanish widows said that they were still strongly possessed by the memories of their deceased husbands although they died already more than 15 years ago. Regarding this, Marris (1958:21) noted the third sign of grief namely '[...] a tendency to withdraw - to escape from everything that recalls the loss, from sympathetic friends and relatives, from interest in life at all'. As the last sign of grief, he mentioned the tendency of a hostile attitude of the widows towards anything and anyone she blamed to be responsible for the death of their husbands (the hospital, the 'incapable' doctors, the church, the priest, fate).
show same patterns of emotional hardships of widowhood, the intensity and durability of grieving are influenced by some factors such as the emotional closeness between the spouses, the tragic and suddenness of the death, the importance of marital relationships compared to other relationships for the widow’s emotional and social needs etc. Consequently, individual differences should also be taken into account in understanding grieving. The loss and adjustment to a new state in widowhood does not always cause intense grief, therefore, for some widows, the economic and practical problems are tougher to be coped with than the grief.

Some studies demonstrated that patriarchy and idealization of conjugal relationship are roots of widows’ plights. In patriarchal societies, women’s social existence is determined by the relationship with men (father, husband, sons etc.); therefore, widowhood – in the first place - means a loss of identity and status granted by the relationship with a man through a marriage. This loss can deprive a widowed woman in many ways. In the context where patriarchal family is central to the social organisation such as in the (Islamic) Algeria, widows belong to the category of women who ‘[…] are outside the accepted family structure, because the defining relation with a man is lacking’ (Jansen, 1987: 1). Having a marginal position in the kinship structure, these women ‘[…] will need to adjust to the fact that they are inadequately or not at all economically supported. In the process of doing so they also become marginal to the gender structure. Being marginal in one domain, they are also likely to be marginal to the female role patterns in other domains, such as civilization, death, religion, magic, sexuality, or space’ (Jansen, 1987:14). According to the Brahmanical patriarchy, a wife’s social existence depends on her husband. Without a husband she becomes nobody and therefore, falls into a state of social death and is placed in the margin of the society (Dreze, 1990; Chen, 1998)\textsuperscript{9}. In the context of (Catholic) Spain, the death of a husband also leads to a status change of the surviving wife. Especially in the initial phase of widowhood, this change can cause modification in the time structure of the widow’s daily life (Os, 1997)\textsuperscript{10}.

\textsuperscript{9} ‘The widow’s marginal state means that she is, in manner of speaking, functionally incorporated into the household while being considered an outsider. Thus, while she is functionally incorporated into the natal or affinal family, the widow, especially in the affinal household, is the ‘domestic enemy’. At the same time she is the ‘insider’ who has fallen, one who has ceased to belong and been expelled from normal participation in the community (for failing to prevent her husband’s death). She is the object of divine and social disfavour. Widowhood is perceived as a disrupter of social order and a potential violation of the moral order’ (Chakravarti,1998:64)

\textsuperscript{10} ‘Na het verlies van haar man, ondergaat zij echter een statusverandering […] Met de statusverandering die een weduwe ondergaat, gaat een verandering in de structurering van tijd
With regard to the idealization of conjugal relationships, it is not uncommon for other identities and roles of widows to be overshadowed by the fact that she is the wife of a deceased man. This status is often maintained by the obligation to perform mourning customs. These customs, which often consist of prescriptions for the bereaved, such as the wearing of certain colours, avoidance of public domains, withdrawal from participation in social activities (at least for a certain period) etc., are not only a ritualised expression of and a way to deal with grief, but also a mark of connection between the survivor and the dead. As stated by Marris (1958:32), ‘Mourning seems everywhere to involve an evasion, at least for a while, of the finality of death, and there seems to be a parallel between this gradual assimilation of death as an event of consequence to society, with the struggle of the bereaved to accept the reality of their loss’. Regarding this, the undergoing of the state of mourning reflects the ideal that the bond between a wife and her (deceased) husband is not ended by his death. Therefore, widows’ faithfulness and chastity should be maintained and controlled. Consequently, being a widow can be the most important identity and the ‘master status’ that strongly determines how widowed women should live their lives.

For widows of marriageable age, the rules of remarriage can be another source of problems especially if these (social, religious or legal) restrictions for remarriage, or on the contrary, the imposition to marry a certain candidate such as the deceased husband’s brother in a leviratic union do not provide possibilities for widows to choose. However, in a context where widows can choose to remarry or not, this option often requires a complex consideration of ‘cost and reward’.

The legal position of women, especially on inheritance and property rights, and the consequences of it are varied in different contexts. However, generally it has a crucial

---

samen. Op de dood van haar echtgenoot volgt een periode van desoriëntatie, ze neemt niet langer deel aan het gewone sociale leven, haar dagelijks bestaan neemt een ander ritme aan. Gedurende de eerste maanden, maar ook nog lange tijd nadien bevindt zij zich in een soort van sociaal vacuüm, waarin tijdloosheid optreedt’ (Os, 1997:317).

11 Considerations as to whether to remarry or not are multiple and various. For both options, the most important consideration is the widow’s age and childlessness, which are strongly connected to her reproduction capacity and desire to have children. Besides reproductive reason, remarriage tends to be opted for when it can reduce economic vulnerability and work burden (in cultivating land or running a business alone). Loneliness and the need for emotional comfort are often seen as reasons for widows to remarry, but according to Potash they are less relevant for societies where ‘[...]men and women rely on other relationships [than a consort relationship –RM] for companionship and emotional gratification’ (Potash, 1986:24-27). The option not to remarry can also be based on different considerations: keeping personal freedom (from wifely duties and subordination), anxiety for choosing a wrong husband and step father for the children, family’s (especially children’s) disapproval, fear of gossips and critics from the community, protecting the entitlement to a widow pension, the deceased husband’s land etc (Os, 1997:287 – 315, Dreze, 1990:64).

The accessibility of income generating activities for women in general and for widows in particular also shapes the consequences of being a widow. Generally, this (in) accessibility is related to both structural factors such as the division of labour (according to gender) in the given society as well as individual factors like age, health state, level of education etc. Studies show how widows are constrained from doing certain income earning activities simply because these activities are perceived as men's work. If we look to the context of rural Spain for example, land ownership can be ambiguous for women. On the one hand it can provide economic safety but on the other hand it can be a source of problems. The agrarian sector is mainly a male domain and the cooperative, which is very important for agrarian production, is less accessible for women. Although many women are members of the cooperative, they only play marginal role in the decision making process. Thus, women who (have to) generate income in the agrarian sector barely have the power to protect their interests (Os, 1997:69-72). Interestingly, similar occupational constraints and limitations can also be found in totally other time and geographical contexts. In the eighteenth century Britain and France, some occupations (gold- or silversmith and watchmaker) and businesses (building or shoemaking trades) were obviously inaccessible for widows (and women in general) ‘[...] because the skills necessary in these occupations were regarded as something acquired over a long period after a rigorous training' (Hufton, 1995:134).

Contrary to the occupational constraints and limitation above, widowhood or spouseless-ness can also make women suitable for some specific employments. Back to the case of eighteenth century Britain, beside their employment in the teaching sector as a governess, Hufton (1995:138-139) also wrote that spinsters and widows of middle class origin often carried out other tasks ‘[...]looked after aged parents, travelled to care for sick relatives or stepped in to care for the orphaned in the family. [...] Women without husbands were nurses, companions, housekeepers, mother's help, foster parents. [...] In the towns some helped with family business'. In her book on women without men in Algeria, Jansen
(1987:245-246) described how these women could perform tasks such as bathhouse workers, washers of the dead, sorcerers, midwives, courtesans and prostitutes, that are perceived as highly unsuitable for ‘other’ women. She argued that ‘In their marginality, they [women without men-RM] break the norms for their gender. They do what other women do not do. They thereby help to define what other women should or should not do. They help to set the boundaries of femininity by being themselves unfeminine. Women are considered as feminine if they do not do the things women without men do. [...] they gain power from the monopoly they have over many functions that others are unable or unwilling to perform.’

The migration history of widows and their children is also an entry point to examine problems pertaining to widowhood. Where a woman lives after her husband’s death plays a crucial part for her widowhood because it is related to the access to productive assets (especially land), custodial rights over children, rules of remarriage and (un)availability of a social network and back up (Potash: 1986:17). Dreze (1990:68-59) wrote that patrilocal residence (in combination with patrilineal inheritance) is one of the causes of widows’ deprivation in rural India. After the death of their husband, widows ‘[...] are expected to remain in their husband’s village, and in most cases they do so (unless they remarry). At the same time, outside a leviratic union they are unlikely to get any support from their affinal relatives – quite the contrary. Widows are thus denied both the freedom to leave their husband’s village, and the support they need to live there happily’ (for case-studies see also Gorhe et. al, 1998: 261-283). Residential rights and obligations are varied for African widows. The widows’ decision to stay with their affinal families often depends on what is considered as the most advantageous option for the widows. One of the important considerations for remaining in their husband’s community is the bond with children (and grandchildren). Regarding this, in some African communities, the importance of a son for a widowed mother’s well being is comparable to the rural Indian context. Potash (1986:20) noted that, ‘Older widows who remain in their husband’s community [...] usually reside with mature sons. [...] Childless older widows who remain in their husband’s community are sometimes isolated and may suffer serious economic deprivation’.

---

12 ‘Patrilocality in the narrow sense refers to the norm, prevalent in most of North India, according to which a woman has to leave her parental home at the time of marriage to join her husband in his own village. [...] patrilocality also refers to the drastic alienation from her parental family experienced by a married woman after her “transfer” to her husband’s family. [...] In her new “home”, the life of the young bride is one of hard work and subordination, and possibly also of seclusion or even harassment’ (Dreze,1990:57-56).
After the death of her husband, a widow can also (be forced to) live with one of her adult children. Referring to Koo’s study on Korean widows, Lopata (1987:15) identified some problems faced by widows who have to follow their sons to Seoul. These widowed mothers confront the difficulties that are caused by their inability to adapt to the urban lifestyle, to develop new social networks and to find a new role in the city. In the following chapter I will show that, for widows in urban Java, the problems of patrilocal residence is negligible, although tensions and conflicts with in-laws are quite common. In urban Java, problems stimulated by the necessity to follow and live with their adult children in a city are more relevant. Most of the widows I talked with said that they preferred to live in their own house, but a few of them have to migrate to the city – despite of all inconveniences – because for them, that is the only way to be secure to get old age care.

Widowhood problems discussed above only show a part of hardships faced by widows. Nevertheless, they can sensitise us to the diversity of the hardships. To deal with this diversity, widowhood problems can be differentiated into three general categories namely economic, emotional and practical problems. It is important to note that these categories are not mutually exclusive. The categorization is mainly useful for analytical clarity since in the daily practice they are closely intermingled. For instance, economic problems such as the lack of a sufficient income can prevent a widow from participating in the neighbourly organisations. This non-participation can cause social deprivation and can exclude the poor widow from various neighbourly assistances that are usually embedded in such organisations. There are cases where different kind of problems (poverty, childlessness, loneliness, physical inability, serious illness) formed a vicious circle that is difficult to break. Later, I shall show how a few widows, who experienced this vicious circle, ended up in a tragic situation of being severely ill and dying alone.

Widows and problems pertaining to widowhood: why investigate them?
In the first section of this chapter, I wrote about my first meeting with bu Qulsum, a Javanese widow who said that ‘most widows in the neighbourhood are ordinary older women like her and do not have interesting stories to tell’. This scepticism is a warning for me not to consider widows in (urban) Java as a culturally distinct category having to follow different ways of life than the rest of the community.

If you walk along an alley path in a Javanese urban neighbourhood, you will see adults and children in both sexes, various age categories, sizes, styles and circumstances doing various outdoor activities. Certainly, there are several widows among the women in this
crowd, but usually they are not distinguishable from the non-widowed women. Although in Java the death of a spouse can severely change the life of a married person, widows (and widowers) do not (and are not expected to) mark their widowhood in their physical appearance. Widowhood is one of the stages on the marriage journey and one of the inherent risks of being married. It is obviously not something to be celebrated but commonly it is also not something to be blamed for or burdened upon the surviving spouse for the rest of her/his life.

It can be said that, in Java, widowhood is very much a part of the day-to-day existence for many persons, both the widows as well as the non-widows, and often without a dramatic and segregative element. The socio-cultural exclusion based on widowhood that usually results in emotional and economic hardships - like what happen to widows in other cultural-religious contexts - does not happen to widows in Java. Therefore, the deprivations that can be experienced by Javanese widows are usually not caused by their widowhood as such. Throughout the book I wish to emphasise that many problems that are faced by Javanese widows are basically a practical, and not a cultural, consequence of loosing their husbands by death.

If most of the problems pertaining to widowhood in the Javanese context are basically the practical consequence of loosing a spouse, and, therefore, in many aspects are comparable to problems of a divorce or abandonment, why then investigate widows? What makes widows and the problems of widowhood interesting to be studied? The answer to these questions has an analytical as well as a practical side. Let us start with the analytical side.

Analytically, an investigation of widows and the problems of widowhood in Java will not differ too much from investigations on other kinds of marriage dissolution. There are a lot of similarities between widowhood and other kinds of marriage dissolution like divorce that make widowhood problems not unique. The most important reasons to study widows therefore belong to the practical side. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that widows are interesting for study because of their close connection with the rest of the community. Although widowhood is a specific circumstance that is caused by the death of a husband, and therefore widows do form a specific social category, the problems of widowhood are not exclusive ones. These problems are often part of wider social problems such as poverty, ageing, gender discrimination, the exclusivity of many welfare schemes etc. By investigating widow and problems pertaining to widowhood we will also learn about people who belong to other social categories and the ways these people connect with the widows. Therefore, the value of this study does not lie in the disclosure of how distinct the Javanese widows’ lives

20
are, but on the exposition of how different social categories — including widows — relate to each other and how many aspects of their lives intertwine richly both in the special as well as at the day-to-day circumstances.

There are a few practical reasons for investigating widows. First, compared to other kinds of marriage dissolution, widowhood has a more or less clearer boundary, in the sense that although widows are far from being homogeneous, the (individual) variations among them can be placed within two fixed conditions namely that they are outliving their husbands and have not remarried. Second, widows form a significant part of female population in Indonesia. In 1996 for example, widows formed 8.8% of the female population while widowers only formed 1.6% of the male population. In the research location, about 20–30% of the households have at least one widowed person (mostly a woman) as a household member or as the household head. This also means that many people, who are not widows themselves, have to face the phenomenon of widowhood in their daily lives closely and therefore dealing with widowhood problems is a widely shared experience that deserves to be investigated further. At least, these problems should not be overlooked in understanding the lives of Indonesian women in general. Third, despite of the high incidence of widowhood among Indonesian women, studies on Indonesian widows are still very meagre. Widows and widowhood are often investigated as a part of another research theme and have been discussed sparsely. My endeavour is on the other way around. Widows is the point of departure and the problems of widowhood have functioned as a compass in order to approach how do people (the widows and the non-widows) deal with these problems through support relationships.

4. Defining The Research Problems

As I wrote above, multiplicity of support in sources, kinds and forms is a fact in the Indonesian context. Nevertheless, the access to all support options is unequal among people. Each individual or group will have different mixture of the available options. These options are interrelated and the mixture of them is continuously changing in its quality, quantity and variety according to factors such as: life courses, socio-economic and geographical mobility, conflicts or alliances in social network. The multiplicity, interrelation and changes of support options are also valid for widows either as individuals or a social category. The dynamic of widows’ engagement in gaining and providing support through various support arrangements
is the core of my inquiry. Regarding this, I formulate the central questions of this research as follows:

*How do support arrangements for widows in urban neighbourhoods of Java work and why do they work in that way?*

The more specific questions are:

- What kinds of support arrangements are available for widows who live in urban neighbourhoods of Java?
- What determines widows' access to those support arrangements?
- Who are the providers of that support? Is there any change in the providers of support? What happens if the past providers are no longer able, or willing, to continue their support? How do the widows cope with the changes? What factors affect the coping capability of the widows?
- How and to what extent do neighbourly organisations (the PKK, kelompok pengajian) and communal mutual help practices such as the sumbangan, layatan, zakat, gotong royong, etc. broaden widows' support options?
- How do different sources and kinds of support intertwine in daily life or in special occasions such as a funeral?
- Which widows are entitled to state organised support and in what forms? How does the state organised support affect support relationships between the widows and their families and neighbours?
- How does the recent manifold crises affect the support options for urban widows? How do the widows' pre-crisis vulnerabilities determine the experience of hardship during the crisis period?

While the central questions are the main threads of the book, each of these specific questions forms the central topic of a chapter.¹³

¹³ Questions 1,2 and 3 will be dealt in chapter four, questions 1,2,3 and 4 in chapter five, question 5 in chapter six, questions 6 in chapter seven and question 7 in chapter eight.
5. The Research in the Alleys

The research sites are some alleys located at four kelurahan in the city of Malang, East Java. An elaborate description of these sites will be provided in chapter 2; therefore, in this section I focus on the research methods and experiences. I did the first fieldwork between August 1997 and June 1998. The second fieldwork took place between July – August 1999. The research population consists of 111 widows\(^{14}\). I collected the data of 31 widows\(^{15}\) through in-depth interviews and 80 widows through a survey. Besides interviewing widows I also did interviews with staffs of governmental institutions\(^{16}\) both at the municipal level as well as at the lower levels.

*Entering the alleys*

During the first month I spent most of the time in selecting the suitable research neighbourhoods and applying for the research permission for the municipal and local levels. In September 1997, I started my research in Semeru alley by visiting the RW and RTs heads. I got an official permission that also functioned as an identity card. Having this permission, I visited and introduced myself to other alley inhabitants. Later I learned that most of them paid little attention to this official permission.

Initially, I prepared myself for the first contact through neighbours who were curious about a new inhabitant in the alley. Soon I learned that as a *native researcher*, I am only one of the 'new faces' that regularly appeared in and left the Semeru alley again. Therefore, I decided to work in a 'more aggressive' way: I asked the RT heads the names and addresses of all widows in their RT. They could inform me because they kept the *kartu keluarga* (family card) of every household. Carrying those lists, I knocked on the widows' doors.

The inhabitants of Kacangan alley were much more aware of my presence in their alley. However, I also got the alley widows' names from the RT heads. This 'strategy' was also safer,

---

\(^{14}\) 36 people from kelurahan Kauman  
47 people from kelurahan Kotalama,  
22 people from kelurahan Purwodadi  
6 people from kelurahan Samaan (Because of an administrative problem with my research permit, I could only carry out the research in a very short period in this neighbourhood)  
\(^{15}\) 20 people from Semeru alley that is situated in kelurahan Kauman and 11 people from Kacangan alley that is situated in kelurahan Kotalama.  
\(^{16}\) The Social Department of the Municipality of Malang (*Bagian Sosial Kotamadya Malang*), the Social Office of Malang (*Dinas Sosial Kotamadya Malang*) and the Regional Planning board (*Kantor Badan Perencanaan Daerah*)
since I would not insult the RT heads by doing my work in their neighbourhoods without visiting them first.

In order to introduce myself to a broader section of Semeru alley inhabitants, especially to the women, I attended occasions such as the PKK (the neighbourly women organization) meetings and the layatan (the wake before and after a burial). In the meetings, the activists usually asked me to introduce myself as formally as possible. On this kind of occasion, formality was unavoidable since it was part of the general etiquette and people were accustomed to it. In Kacangan alley there is no PKK organisation, it seemed to me that nobody in the alley bothered about that. As a result of the lack of this formal organization, I introduced myself only in (informal) visits.

The Observation
I prefer to call my observation a direct observation, instead of participant observation. I usually did the observation 'within' the occasion, but I was not an integral part of it. Whatever I did in order to participate in the alley life, the alley residents and I knew for sure that I was (and will always be) an outsider. Apart from having pleasant neighbourly relations with some people in the alleys, most people accepted me, in the first place, as a student who was doing research in order to accomplish my study and as a temporary resident of the neighbourhood. I was a part of the alley life in these ways.

In Semeru alley, I attended women’s organisation meetings and other types of gathering such as the layatan (the wake before and after a burial). In the women’s organisation meetings I learned about the relationships among the alley women, including the widows' self-representation in public activities. By helping in the kitchen during a layatan, I could get insights on the sudden problem of the first days of bereavement for a widow and her family. The involvement in a layatan was usually appreciated very much by the bereaved family. It provided me access to the better and opener interviews. In this aspect, my work in Kacangan alley was more difficult. The only public activity that I could attend was the Koran reading in the mosque. The greatest obstacle is my total inability to read the Koran. Moreover, during the three hours of Koran reading, people were supposed to focus their mind on the Koran instead of talking to each other. Thus, the Koran reading in itself was less a suitable occasion to gain information. After the reading, most of the women usually tried to get home as soon as possible because it was quite late in the evening. Again, not an appropriate time to chat with them.
Two weeks before I came to the Kacangan alley, four men (husbands) died due to different reasons in the same week. But, during my stay, none of the remaining alley men died. Consequently, there was no opportunity to observe the funerary rituals for a deceased person in the Kacangan alley. However, this circumstance can hardly be considered as 'unfortunate'.

The (in-depth) interviews

Most of the in-depth interviews took less than one hour. In the Semeru alley, the most suitable hours to visit widows and women in general were after the Dhuhur pray at noon to 2 p.m. or in the afternoon from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. I had more irregular visiting hours in the Kacangan alley because I had to adjust to the variety of the widows’ working hours as market traders.

It was obvious that most of the alley widows did not have more leisure time than the married women. They did the household tasks and engaged in diverse income earning activities too (petty trading, traditional massage etc). In the Semeru alley, the morning soap operas also kept some widows busy. Hence, I could not come for an interview in the morning hours. In both alleys, I had to take careful note of their praying times during my visit.

The widows usually did not like it if I recorded the interview. Actually, it was also difficult to record an interview since most of the interviewees put their television on all the time. Sometimes they even asked me not to make notes. Contrary to the tape recorder and the block-note, the widows and many other people in the alleys appreciated my camera very much. They liked to pose for various photo-sessions.

I rarely felt disturbed by the presence of other people (especially the widows’ close relatives) during an interview. Sometimes, they interrupted the conversation to make a correction on the widow’s answer. In most cases, the presence of relatives or close neighbours did not prevent the widows from telling the story of their life. On the contrary, they seemed to be more relaxed and had more self-confidence. They liked to know that there were people who could help them to remember the past better. Usually after the second or third visits the interviews were considered as ordinary neighbourly visits, and therefore, they did not need to be accompanied by other people any longer.

Some researchers mentioned the hindrances and the lack of privacy in conducting the interviews because of the presence of other people. I also experienced (that kinds of) unpleasant situations in a few interviews in the Kacangan alley. One of the present neighbours took my notebook without my permission, dominated the conversation, and gave answers on behalf of the old widow. However, the term 'privacy' should be used carefully in
understanding this kind of situation. Within a context of such a crowded neighbourhood and complex living arrangement, the term 'privacy' has a specific meaning. In the case of Kacangan alley, it would not be realistic if I wanted to conduct an interview without the sound of crying and shouting children or curious eyes of the neighbours around me.

I also conducted interviews with people outside the alleys namely, middle –upper class widows from outside the alleys (a widow of a branch director of a government bank and an owner/a general manager of a four stars hotel in the nearby recreation resort), activists and members of women organizations in the city and staffs of government institutions (see footnote 17 above)

After gaining a more or less substantial amount of data through in-depth interview, I conducted a survey in three kelurahan namely, Kauman, Kotalama and Purwodadi. My main intention was to increase the number of my respondents or the width of the research. Thus, gathering the data of a wider population of widows. For this survey I chose some neighbourhoods around the Semeru and Kacangan alleys.

Revisiting the alleys
During the second fieldwork in 1999, I also visited both Semeru and Kacangan alleys again. But due to lack of time I could only reside at the Semeru alley. Since this fieldwork was aimed at collecting some additional data, I did not talk with all widows in the alleys at the same length. However, the interviews in this second fieldwork are generally better than those in the first fieldwork. In this second fieldwork I also encountered bad news from the research sites: a few of the widows had died several months before I came. Regarding their age and health state, I shall hear this kind of bad news again and again in the near future. Therefore, saying goodbye to the widows at the end of a fieldwork can be a goodbye in the deepest sense of the word.

6. The Outline of the Book

In the first two sections of this chapter, I deal with the responsibility to explain the relevance of investigating support for widows in urban Java. I connect the relevance of study on support with two issues. The first issue is the very limited protection from the Indonesian statutory social security and the private insurance. Here, I highlight both the extent of the statutory social security coverage and some constraints for expanding this limited coverage. The second issue is the role of support arrangements based on kinship and communal solidarity,
especially the strengths and weaknesses of these arrangements. Then, the relevance of investigating problems pertaining to widowhood within the context of urban Java is also explained. In this introductory chapter, I also define the research problems, describe the research methods and experiences.

Chapter two is primarily an elaborate description of the research sites both at the city and at the neighbourhood level. The city (Malang) is introduced in its historical background and contemporary scene. The description of the neighbourhoods is focused on two inner city alleys, namely the Semeru and Kacangan alleys, where I stayed during the fieldwork and carried out the in-depth research. In this description, the daily activities and relationships (including tensions and alliances) of the inhabitants are brought to the fore. The neighbourhoods where the survey was conducted are not elaborately described since their physical and social conditions are more or less similar with the Semeru and Kacangan alleys.

In chapter three, I first discuss some popular images of widows and the alternative identities that suppress the construction of one clear-cut widow identity in (urban) Java. Then, I examine the similarity and differences between widows and women who belong to other spouseless categories (divorceses, abandoned women and spinsters) and the ways gender roles affect the experience of widowhood. In the last part of this chapter I provide a general description on the widows who compose the research population (their age category, health state, income generating activities, recent living conditions).

In chapter four, I begin with a theoretical view of support relationships among family members that is followed by a brief description about the widows’ family. The most important pillar of this chapter is the analysis on the various kinds and numerous forms of support provided by the widows’ family members. In this chapter I also illuminate the relative importance of family support by analysing factors that determine the widows’ access to the support and the situation where family support is absent.

Chapter five starts with discussion on support relationships among neighbours and various aspects of neighbouring in the Semeru and Kacangan alleys. Then, different kinds and forms of neighbourly support, the widows’ access, and the importance of this support are analysed in a parallel way to the previous chapter.

After examining the variety of family and neighbourly support, in chapter six, I deal with their intertwinement in a few funerals. The intertwinement of family and neighbourly support is demonstrated chronologically in each phase of the funerals. In this chapter I also highlight the affecting factors and the nature of the intertwinement.
Chapter seven is an examination on how widow pension and health insurance influence the widows’ coping capability and engagement in support relationships. The discussion is opened by an elaborate description on pension and health insurance (Asuransi Kesehatan) to which the ‘happy few’ pensioner widows are entitled. Then I analyse how this state support determines the experience of economic hardships and enables the beneficiaries to build long-term (economic) protection. This chapter is closed by unusual stories of widows and their pensions.

In chapter eight, support relations and support flows are placed within a specific context namely the Indonesian economic crisis. First, I link the widows’ pre-crisis (economic) vulnerabilities with their problems within the crisis period and the coping efforts. Then I discuss how the crisis affects support relationships engaged in by the widows, including on how support is negotiated and adjusted during the crisis period.

Chapter nine is a reflection upon the previous chapters. In this chapter, some of the patterns of complexity and hierarchy in the support landscape are highlighted.