Surviving Spouses: Support for Widows in Malang, East Java

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Chapter 2
THE RESEARCH SITES
The City and the Neighbourhoods

1. The City: The Municipality of Malang, East Java

The Historical Background
Malang lies at an altitude of 440 - 667 m and is surrounded by a chain of mountains on the eastern part of Java. In Javanese Malang means 'lying across'. About three centuries ago, a sultan from Demak (Central Java) called the area by this peculiar name because at that time, the area was a kind of 'no man's land' and therefore a perfect place for rebels to disappear.

The oldest document to mention the inhabitants of Malang is a Sanskrit inscription dated 760 AD. It records the foundation of Agasty sanctuary by king Gajayana at a place called Dinaya. From the 8th century to the 13th century, Malang and the surrounding areas witnessed the rise and fall of several Hindu kingdoms, including the great ones such as Singosari kingdom. In 1533 Sultan Tranggono, a prince from Demak, led a war of expansion in the area of Malang. To this very day the site of this war is still called the 'Kuto Bedhah' or the destroyed city.

Until the end of the 18th century, Malang was a 'frontier' area. Although, 'de jure' this area was a part of Mataram kingdom, 'de facto' it lay outside the major powers namely, the Mataram kingdom in the Central Java and the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) in Batavia, West Java. In 1770, VOC built the first fortress in Malang. In this early period, their interest was mainly in the expansion of military-political power, because Pasuruan - a port situated 50 km northeast of Malang - was economically more important for the company.

If we start from the VOC period, there are two important phases of early (economic) development of Malang namely: the phase of (coffee) cultivation (after 1767) and the phase in which it was a distribution centre (after the construction of the railways in 1879) (Schaik, 1996). The area had its first development after 1767, when the Dutch initiated coffee cultivation. The first cultivators were Dutchmen as well as Javanese with small-scale private plantations. In 1820, Malang became an important coffee-producing region. When the cultivation system was in operation in Malang, the coffee was cultivated on large-scale government plantations. In 1830, some facilities for government plantation, such as ware-
houses and packing services, were opened. New roads were also opened in order to transport the product to the port in Pasuruan.

This progress continued steadily. In 1860 a Protestant church was constructed; in 1869 an official elementary school was opened, and in 1896 the Concordia, a club and social centre for the cultivators, followed. Between 1855 and 1885, there was a huge immigration of Chinese and Madurese in Malang. This immigration was encouraged by the opening of large-scale cultivation by European enterprises. The Chinese had to live in a particular area, namely Kotalama, located behind the main market of Malang. Up to the present, this area is still a migrant neighbourhood.

The construction of a railway in 1879 was the starting point of the second economic development phase of Malang as a distribution centre. The commercial and service activities relating to various products (supplies for the plantation and the growing urban population, banking activities, hotels etc.) were increased.

In March 24, 1924, Malang became an independent regency and was at that time inhabited by almost 50,000 people. After 1942, the city was involved in several periods of war. Cultivation activities were negatively influenced by the war. After the war periods, the cultivation activities around Malang never flourished again as it had previously.

*The Contemporary Scene*

Malang is a municipality (*kotamadya* or *kodya*) with an area of 110,06 km². This municipality is divided into five *kecamatan*, namely: Klojen, Blimbing, Lowokwaru, Sukun and Kedung Kandang. These kecamatans are divided into several *kelurahan*. Each *kelurahan* is divided into several *Rukun Warga* (RW), and each RW is divided into several *Rukun Tetangga* (RT). One RT is formed by max. 50 households. In 1996, Malang has 5 kecamatans, 57 kelurahans, 470 RWs, 3,379 RTs and 151,983 households. (Malang in Figures, 1996). At the end of 1997, Malang had an average density of 6,492/km² and mean population growth of 2,13%/ year.
Table 2.1: The population of Malang (x 1000) from 1950 to 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>377</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>512</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997¹</td>
<td>714,486</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Sources:
- Schaik, 1996:87
- Malang Dalam Angka, 1996
- Registrasi Penduduk 1997, BPS Malang.

The centre of the city is located at the kecamatan Klojen; and therefore the shopping centres are also situated here, as are the alun-alun (the city square), the pasar besar (the main market), theatres, restaurants, banks, the head offices etc. On Saturday evening the areas around the city square also become the centre of leisure. Those who have less money to spend enjoy the square in the open air among numerous petty traders. Those who can afford extra expenses enjoy their dinner in the 'MacDonald's' before they go to the movie. Another popular leisure activity is 'mlaku-mlaku' or roaming around in the air-conditioned department stores.

The government of the municipality of Malang organised the campaign called “Kota Tri Bina Cita” or “the city with three aims”, namely, education, tourism and industry. However, since the colonial period, Malang has never been an industrial city. The industrial activities in Malang are still small-scale and spread over several parts of the city. Some factories are located at the southern part of the city, but the famous Bentoel cigarette factory is situated in the north. Thus, the city has no special industrial area. Most of the big universities are located in the northwest part of the city in the kecamatan Lowokwaru, hence running boarding houses, small restaurants, and copy services are important income earning activities for many inhabitants of this area.

Malang gains its income from several sectors, but the manufacturing and retailing activities are the most important source of income. In 1996, the city gained about one third of

¹ In 1996 the city had a larger population (718.603). According to some officers of the statistic centre (Badan Pusat Statistik) of Malang, the population decrease was caused by out-migration, both to other cities (especially Jakarta) as well as abroad.
its income from manufacturing activity (especially food, drinks, and tobacco manufacture). The commerce (including retail trade), hotels and restaurants were the sources of another 30% of city's income.

Entering Malang from Surabaya (70 km north of Malang) usually means being trapped in very busy traffic along the main road. Many buses race with each other in order to win more passengers and a small additional income for the day. After a boring journey along the highway, the mountain landscape will welcome travellers after passing Pandaan (40 km north of Malang). In the past 15 years, new houses, commercial centres, restaurants and factories have gradually replaced the paddy-field landscape along this road.

The main road Surabaya - Malang takes travellers entering Malang to its northern part namely the kecamatan Blimbing where the main bus station is located. This bus station is the city's most important centre of public transportation. Since the operation of the angkutan kota (small buses) at the end of 80s, the public transportation of the city is increasingly developed. This development is also connected with the 'boom' of housing projects in diverse areas that are situated at the edge of the city. These new neighbourhoods need a better accessibility and therefore stimulate new routes of the small buses.

2. The Neighbourhoods: The Kelurahan and the Alleys

Initially I intended to carry out my research in an urban kampong. But when I was searching for suitable kampongs for research locations, I became intrigued more and more by the alley both as a geographical as well as a social entity. Most of lower class neighbourhoods in urban areas of Java are physically characterized by alleys (such as 'block' for the modern housing projects). I also learned that the inhabitants of those neighbourhoods often use the word alley both to describe a location as well as to identify themselves according to their living place. The word kampong is often used in a broader sense such as when they refer to a life style or certain social class ("we are only the humble kampong people"), or when they talk about another neighbourhood as a whole.

Although the word kampong suggests a nostalgic Indonesian sphere, it is vague in many respects. The geographical and social boundaries of a kampong are difficult to draw especially because, formally, kampong is not an administrative unit. Therefore, I decided to use gang (alley) as the neighbourhood. Commonly, alleys are seen as parts of a kampong. But both physically as well as socially, an alley is more concrete than a kampong. It is easier to
draw an alley’s geographical boundaries\(^2\) and to follow the social contacts of its inhabitants. Alley life is also more visible for observation than kampong life.

Most of the alleys can be differentiated between the main alley and the lateral alleys that closely connect to each other. These two kinds of alleys also reflect the social hierarchy in the neighbourhood. The better off inhabitants who own or rent the best houses usually reside along the main alley, while the poorer inhabitants reside along the lateral alley.

In this research I carried out a small survey on 80 widows who mostly\(^3\) live in three kelurahan namely, Kauman, Kotalama and Purwodadi. The first two kelurahan are among the oldest inner city neighbourhoods in Malang. Kauman has a relatively low population turnover. Most of its residents are Javanese Moslems. Kotalama has a long history as a migrant neighbourhood that is now densely inhabited by migrants from Madura. Purwodadi is a newer neighbourhood located at the city outskirts. In general, all of these kelurahan can be pictured as lower middle class neighbourhoods that are mostly inhabited by traders, lower echelon civil servants and armed forces, pensioners and small employees.

The Semeru alley is situated at the kelurahan Kauman and the Kacangan alley lies at the kelurahan Kotalama. I chose these two inner city alleys as the sites where I did the in-depth interviews with 31 widows. I resided at the Semeru alley during the first six months of the fieldwork and at the Kacangan alley during the second half-year. When I conducted the in-depth interviews in one alley, I also visited the other alley regularly. Therefore, a practical reason to choose these two alleys is their accessibility. I could be very mobile between the two alleys because different public transportation was available for almost 24 hours.

The more important reason for conducting the in-depth interviews in these two alleys was my (initial) intention to compare different ethnic groups who live in the alleys. The Semeru alley is mostly inhabited by Javanese and the Kacangan alley is mostly inhabited by migrants from Madura. However, as it shall be shown in the following chapters, the Javanese and the (migrant) Madurese widows are quite similar in many respects, because the Madurese in Kacangan alley (and in Kotalama in general) are mostly second or third generation migrants. These migrants are long-term inhabitants of the city who often do not maintain the connection with their villages of origin in Madura any longer. Many of these Madurese

\(^2\) Addresses also based both on jalan (or street) as well as gang (or alley). For instance: ‘Jalan Semeru gang I no 3’ or 1st alley of Semeru street, number 3.

\(^3\) Six out of these 80 widows live at the kelurahan Samaan that is also located at the city centre not far from the kelurahan Kauman. Because of an administrative problem with my research permit, I could only carry out the research in a very short period in this neighbourhood. Nevertheless, Samaan’s profile are comparable to Kauman.
migrants – especially the older generations - speak the Javanese language better than the national language of Indonesia.

In the following sections I shall more elaborately describe the two alleys. This description also reflects the general situation of the kelurahan I mentioned above.

The Semeru Alley

The first research location was the Semeru gang I (the 1st alley of Semeru street), that is located in the kelurahan Kauman. The kelurahan Kauman itself is an area of 0,82 square kilometres (0.74% of municipality of Malang). In 1997, this kelurahan was inhabited by 11.968 people with population density about 14.596/ km2.

There are four RTs in the Semeru alley with a total of 319 inhabitants (96 households). The main alley is about 3,5 meters wide and 250 - 300 meters long. There are two langgar (small mosques) and a small Koran school. Most of the inhabitants are Moslems but not all of them can be considered as a real santri*. The members of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) form the majority of the Moslems in the alley. In the alley's daily life, the problem of 'like and dislike' happens between the NU members and the Muhammadiyah members. However, this friction does not usually lead to serious disturbances in the neighbourhood.

Many kinds of economic activities can be found in Semeru alley: warung (petty restaurants or groceries), finery shops, spectacles shops, tailors, and boarding houses (rumah kost) for students and office employees. Some people have stalls in a small market that is located in the middle of the alley.

Most of the people know their neighbours in the alley. The women meet each other regularly in several activities such as the arisan PKK (saving club) or pengajian (Koran reading). But most of these activities actually do not guarantee mutual help among the alley inhabitants. Their daily social contacts are fragmentary. Usually they only have closer relationships with their nearest neighbours or their relatives who live in the same alley. These relationships can form a kind of neighbourly cell (Sullivan, 1992:45), but these cells are very diverse in their size (usually no more than 5 women) and in their intensity of contact. However, in most cases, the concept of the neighbourly cell is too fixed for an understanding of the women's networks in the Semeru alley. Those women do not borrow and lend kitchen utensils to each other. They may talk about their daily activities, but do not share their work or

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* According to Echols and Shadily (1975), santri means, first, 'student at a traditional type of Moslem school'. Second, 'In Java, a person consciously and exclusively Moslem'. See also C. Geertz (1965).
help each other intensively. These relationships are no more than cliques that are coloured by friendship, familial relationship and/or patron-client relationship.

There is no doubt that supernatural experiences are important and interesting for many people in the alley. The interviews were regularly closed with stories of (the local) ghosts, bad spirits, or victims of black magic among the inhabitants. In one of those visits, I even witnessed a kind of 'exorcism practice' in the daylight. A kyai (religious leader) taught me a prayer to make my supervisors easily agree with my reports. It was a pity that this prayer did not work very well. Probably, the prayer was not suitable for the non-Indonesian supervisors.

The first sign of the Semeru alley's existence is its gate. This gate is constructed by two brown slim pillars and a tiled roof. The name of the alley is written on a wooden board, hanging under the roof. Behind this gate, one can find stone stairs painted in bright red. The gate, the board and the stairs - symbolically and officially - are the beginning of the alley. On one hand they welcome the passers-by, on the other hand they remind them about crossing a boundary.

Down the stairs, in the first stretch of the alley, lie the best houses. Most of these houses are inhabited by pensioners, civil servants, employees, shop or petty restaurant owners etc. Almost in the end of the alley, one can find the Talun market. In the market area, most of the houses are smaller and plain. These differences are not only physically but also socially important, as the alley inhabitants often make a differentiation among themselves between the 'orang pasar' (market people) and the 'bukan orang pasar' (non-market people). The orang pasar are usually petty traders. They are also considered to be from a lower economic and social layer by the bukan orang pasar. The housing conditions within the market area can also give that impression. However, this differentiation is only one of the factors that form the social grouping in the daily life of the alley.

The alley's past
The only person who can 'clearly' remember Semeru alley in the 'old colonial days' is an 82 years old woman. She has been living in Semeru alley since 1937. According to her, it was a time when the alley was thinly populated. Most of the inhabitants were Javanese, but there were two Dutch men. One of them rented a house of the Brandons, one of the old Dutch families in Malang. The other Dutchman had worked in the army and had a Javanese woman as a partner. Without knowing her real name, the alley people used to call this woman 'nyai Sarinah'. There was no social contact between the Javanese and the Dutch inhabitants. They lived in different worlds at a same location.
The Dutchmen's houses were the only stone houses in the alley. The other houses were bamboo houses, surrounded by bamboo trees. These days, those two houses are still among the biggest houses in the alley. In 1980, the main alley road was paved. As far as I could observe, this paving is still in a good condition.

The location of the Talun market was an open piece of land with some big trees at its edge. In 1947, this land functioned as a place where the local people tied their horses. They called this as setal (From Dutch word: stal). It was not before 1960 that this land - more or less officially - became a market. At that time, the member of the local branch of Indonesian Communist Party ordered the building of a barbed wire fence around the market area. But nobody could tell me about the aim of it. In 1989, this market was renovated by the municipal government. The market stalls have been improved with cement floors and new roofs. Since that renovation, many traders complain about the decrease of the market's commercial activities.

One day in Semeru alley
The life of the alley usually begins very early, because the Moslems have to do the morning prayer at 4.30 a.m. An old widow who lives next to my boarding house even starts her daily activities at 3 a.m. Fortunately, I heard those noises only in my first nights in Semeru alley. The morning hours are the busy time for women. Putting the house in order and preparing other household members to do their next activities: going to the work place or to the school.

At 6.30 a.m. one can see many schoolchildren walk along the alley path in their uniforms. The colours of those uniforms namely, red, blue, grey and white are one of important elements of the morning scene. Some female office employees can also be seen walking in their tidy dresses and spreading the fragrance of their perfumes. But most of the housewives' activities take place inside their houses. I could only observe them when they were cleaning the outside of their houses.

In Talun market, morning hours are also the busiest time. Every Wednesday the market develops a more colourful sphere from cloths and plastics household utensils. Some itinerant sellers of those kinds of stuffs come to the market only once a week. However, many petty traders of Talun market said bitterly that their market has more sellers than buyers.

After children and husbands leave home, many mothers and grandmothers continue their household activities accompanied by soap operas. These days, many choices are available: Indonesian, Indian, Philippino, Japanese or Hong Kong films with complicated intrigues, romances and a lot of tears. If the women run a small shop, they have to divide their
time (and concentration) in a more flexible way: moving from the kitchen, the living room - where the television is - and the shop at the front of the house. Mostly they will finish the household tasks after 11 a.m. The children will come home from school after 12 a.m. At noon, the alley will become quieter. Some people pray in the langgar (small mosque). The men wear sarongs and peci (a cap of black velvet), and the women walk in their white muke na (special women’s cloth to pray) to the langgar. In Talun market, the traders are still sitting behind their goods. They wait for the next transaction, although they know it rarely happens. Killing the time, they chat with each other. At 3 to 4 p.m., most of the traders already leave the market. Only those who live there continue their commercial activity.

In the afternoon, children usually play outside their houses. This is also the leisure time for the adults. It is not by chance that many snack sellers turn up in alley scene at this time. Afternoon is also the best time to visit the alley women and to conduct interviews, because they have nothing special to do at this time.

At 5.30 p.m. the Moslem do the Maghrib prayer. People are supposed to stay inside their houses for a while. At 6.15 p.m. the alley's life is back. Small children have their second round to play along the alley. In some houses, the school age children do their homework in the living room, and in some other houses people watching the sinetron (Indonesian soap opera) on the television. The little restaurant is open, and the owner is busy getting the orders done. Most of her customers are people who live in the boarding houses.

At 9 p.m. the alley becomes quiet. In front of a house, some young men chat to each other. One of them plays a guitar. It is acceptable for young men to stay outside late at night. Girls, however, are supposed to be at home. If a few of them dare to ignore this rule, they run the risk to be stigmatised as ‘naughty’. Now, the alley life moves inside the houses and people are preparing themselves for the night’s rest.

The Kacangan Alley

The Kacangan alley is located behind the main market of Malang, in the kelurahan Kotalama. This kelurahan is an area of 0.86 square kilometres (only 0.78% of municipality of Malang). Kotalama is one of the most densely populated areas in Malang. In 1997, this kelurahan was inhabited by 24.552 people with population density of 28.549 /km2. The Brantas river, the biggest river in the city, flows across the Kotalama area The neighbourhoods located along the riverbank are commonly considered as problematic ones by the local government due to
the low socio-economic position of the inhabitants, bad housing conditions, and high risk of landslides.

The Kacangan alley is a small lateral alley that is situated not far from the riverbank. It is about 1.5 metres wide and 150 metres long. The Kacangan alley consists of two RTs, which are inhabited by approximately 469 people. Almost all of them are Madurese. The houses are small and disorderly, built very close to each other. On entering the alley, one is welcomed by the smell of bad odour, damp air and moss-covered walls. Most of the alley inhabitants usually hang their laundry in front of their house, because they have no back yard. They also put many kinds of goods, such as bamboo baskets, old chairs, bamboo cots, even household utensils, in front of their house on the alley side. The shabbiness is indeed visible in almost every corner of the alley.

The Kacangan alley's past is inseparable from the historical background of the Kotalama area as a migrant neighbourhood. As I mentioned above, during 1855 - 1885 Malang took in waves of immigration by the Chinese and the Madurese. They sought work in the new large cultivations. Kotalama was a kind of Chinese ghetto, because they were not allowed to live in other parts of the city. A heritage of this Chinese ghetto is the beautiful k lenteng (Chinese temple). This prayer house is still the largest one in the city.

As mentioned previously, the Madurese who form the majority (more than 97%) of the Kacangan alley's population today are second - even third - generation migrants. Most of them have parents or grandparents who came from Samiran village in Pamekasan on Madura Island. They were small farmers in that dry island. In Malang, these migrants worked in the commercial sector, therefore a neighbourhood near the main market, such as the Kacangan alley, was (and still is) a suitable living place for them.

The daily contact among the different 'ethnic - religion' groups (the Madurese as Moslems and the Chinese as Christians or Buddhist and the Javanese as Moslems) is a source of friction. Along with the growth of their business, thus their upward social mobility, many Chinese moved out from Kotalama to other parts of the city. Living in Kotalama is perceived as less attractive or even inappropriate for the better off and the younger generation, although they still keep their business there. Moreover, the area is also stigmatised as 'a problematic neighbourhood' because of its criminality and slum atmosphere. An old Chinese man who owns a printing business in Kotalama told me that he encouraged his sons to move out of Kotalama for the social and economic progress of their lives.

Due to the very limited living space inside their houses, the inhabitants of Kacangan alley live more 'out-doors' than those in Semeru alley. The alley road is frequently used to
make social contacts. In the morning and in the afternoon, women and children usually
dominate the alley road. Some women do their household works, and the others sit on their
bamboo cots. They talk loudly to each other in the Madurese language. Their voices compete
with the voices of small children around them. Among these women and small children, a
couple of old men can be found. Usually, they only sit silently in one of the corners, and if
necessary they give short comments on the women's conversation.

The neighbourly ties among the Kacangan alley people cannot easily be framed in terms
of the gotong royong (mutual help) ideal. My informants often explicitly complain about the
selfishness of their neighbours. The daily and noisy chats in the public domain such as the
alley path cannot be interpreted as 'emotional proximity' among them. The neighbourly
'warmth' is mostly shown on an occasion such as the wake before a burial.

Most of the Kacangan alley inhabitants (especially the women) work as traders in se-
veral markets in Malang. Many of those women are coconut sellers. For (young) women with
small children, selling snacks and sweets in front of their houses is a suitable income earning
activity. This kind of work can be easily combined with the household tasks. Besides, there
are always many children in the alley as potential customers. Some women who worked as
snack-sellers told me that they need the extra money to give their children uang jajan (pocket
money). These women earn money by selling snacks to other people's children, and then
spend the money by buying other people's snacks for their own children.

The alley men usually engage in several income-earning activities, such as becak
(pedicab) driver, market coolie, tukang parkir (parking man), tailor, second-hand-goods trader
etc. Sometimes they combine different kinds of work in one day, and sometimes they switch
from one kind of work to another according to circumstances. In the period of my fieldwork,
there was no one in the alley who worked as an office employee, civil servant, or joined the
armed forces. None of the Kacangan alley inhabitants could also run a boarding house
because of the high density of the household and limitation of living place.

For the market traders, the work hours begin at 2.30 a.m. and last until 1 - 2 p.m. The
female household members who are not working at the market usually cook the meals for the
family. From 3 p.m. to 7.30 p.m. the women take a rest for a while, do some household chores
then join religious activity, such as Koran reading in the mosque. However, a woman who
works as a vegetable seller has to go to the market at 7 p.m. and comes home at 7.30 a.m.
These kinds of working hours are in conformity with the fact that many markets have 24
hours activities, seven days per week.
Probably because of the fluidity of their work hours, many men could only rarely be seen in the alley’s daily scene. Moreover, the young unemployed men have a special place outside the Kacangan alley to hang around with their peer group. They are free from the household duties.

As I mentioned before, the majority of the alley inhabitants are Madurese. All of them are Moslem and strongly influenced by the Nahdlatul Ulama. Every Thursday evening there are many Koran reading gatherings. The groups use big loudspeakers and noisily compete with each other. However, the conspicuous life under the Islam in general does not say much about the actual religiosity of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. The traditional parties of *teropan* - with alcoholic drinks - are still held, and the conflicts such as *carok* (deadly duel), because of infidelity also still take place.