Surviving Spouses: Support for Widows in Malang, East Java
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1. Introduction

According to the variation within each individual case, in urban Java, many widows receive support from their family and their neighbours. This suggests the need for further inquiry into the intertwinement of these two sources of support. This chapter is aimed at examining the ways in which family and neighbourly support intertwine in particular settings for instance a funeral.

Being one’s kin or neighbour is not the same, although it is also quite common for people to have family members as their neighbours. Generally, in support relationships, family members are more obliged to help than neighbours. Neighbours tend to retreat from a support relation when family support is perceived as sufficient. In this kind of situation, neighbours may provide minor support to demonstrate their concern and out of good neighbourship. But when family support is insufficient or even absent, neighbours usually play a more important role as support providers. For an example, when a death has occurred, the series of funerary ceremonies will be organised by the deceased’s close relatives. Neighbours will come to condole, to give economic support such as a small amount of money, a tray of rice or sugar and often also to assist in the kitchen, but they do not act as the sponsors of the funeral. However, when an old widow who lived alone dies and none of her relatives come, one of the deceased’s next-door neighbours organises the funeral including the collection of money for the funeral cost from other neighbours.

In the case where the two sources of support are present, they should not be understood exclusively from each other. With regard to the different intensity of the support relation, family members and neighbours may provide either similar or different kinds of support at each phase of the crisis. In other words, in many occasions, family and neighbourly supports intertwine with each other. When the family and neighbourly support mutually make up what is lacking, they have a complementary nature toward each other. But when neighbours provide support in place of the family members then the neighbourly support has a substitutionary nature toward family support. Since family members usually occupy a higher rank within the hierarchy of duty in support relationships, it will be less likely for family support to become a substitute of neighbourly support.
This chapter will examine support intertwinement within a funeral. In Java, a funeral commonly consists of a few smaller episodes namely, the burial, the *layatan* (funeral attendance) and the *selamatan* series. Although the intertwinement also occurs on a day-to-day basis, within these particular settings, it usually happens in a more compact way. Regarding this, the central question that will be answered in this chapter is how do family and neighbourly support intertwine with each other on occasions like a burial, *layatan* and series of *selamatan*?

In the following section I shall describe the three episodes related to a funeral namely the burial, the *selamatan* and the *layatan*. This description includes two important points that should be taken into account in the examination of the practices: first, in these occasions a lot of work should be performed soon and simultaneously and second, the social organisation of these occasions is very hierarchic and complex. In the section three, four and five, the intertwining of family and neighbourly support in each episode will be examined chronologically and will also be illustrated with a few funeral cases. The sixth section will illuminate various facets of the support intertwinement. First, a few factors that can affect the support intertwinement will be analysed namely, the social pressure, cost and reward and the absence of formalised intervention. Second, the complementary and substitutionary nature of the support intertwinement will be discussed. In the seventh section I shall draw some conclusions from this chapter.

2. Funerary Practices: Burial, *Selamatan* and *Layatan*

There are two points I shall highlight before I further discuss the three episodes in a funeral. First, these occasions are related to Islam in Java and especially relevant to the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) members\(^1\). The choice of these Islamic funeral practices is a practical one: because 88% of my widowed informants are Moslems and majority of them are NU members. Second, since the guiding principle of my study is analysing support for widows in various

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\(^1\) *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) and Muhammadiyah are the big Islamic organisations in Indonesia. Although not all Indonesian Moslem are the members of these organisations, many of them involve in different ways and degrees in NU or Muhammadiyah organisation. This situation is also demonstrated by the Moslem residents in all of my field work sites. Regarding to the funerary practices, NU and Muhammadiyah have their own rules. The most important and visible difference is that Muhammadiyah members do not hold *selamatan* series.
kinds and forms, instead of focusing on their symbolic aspects, I shall pay attention to various works that have to be performed in a funeral.\footnote{For an elaborate examination of the symbolic aspect of Javanese funerary practices see Geertz, 1960:68-72 and Siegel, 1983:1-14.}

In one of his books, Clifford Geertz (1960:68-76) wrote a vivid description of Javanese burials. When a death has occurred, the next thing that people (family and neighbours) will do is prepare a burial. This preparation includes sending a person for a modin (an officer who performs religious duties at neighbourhood level), to spread the information of the death around the neighbourhood and to the family members who live at other places. When the modin has come, the deceased will be soon bathed. At the meanwhile, people are also busy preparing the grave, the burial paraphernalia and the procession to the cemetery and the first selamatan\footnote{According to Geertz (1960:11), "The selametan is the Javanese version of what is perhaps the world’s most common religious ritual, the communal feast, and, as almost everywhere, it symbolises the mystic and social unity of those participating in it. Friends, neighbours, fellow workers, relatives, local spirits, dead ancestors and near-forgotten gods all get bound, by virtue of their commensality, into a defined social group pledged to mutual support and cooperation. [...]A selametan can be given in response to almost any occurrence one wishes to celebrate, ameliorate, or sanctify. Birth, marriage, sorcery, death, house moving, bad dreams, harvests, name-changing, opening a factory, illness, supplication of the village guardian spirit, circumcision, and starting off a political meeting may all occasion a selametan"}.

The selamatans for a deceased person are held at the 1\textsuperscript{st}, 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 7\textsuperscript{th}, 40\textsuperscript{th}, 100\textsuperscript{th}, 1000\textsuperscript{th} days after death and on the first and the second anniversaries of the death. These selamatans have exactly the same form, but of are increasing size in term of the number of guests, the length of the chants, the quality of the served food, and the quality of the ‘souvenirs’ given to the guests.\footnote{Giving souvenirs to the death selamatan attendants has become very trendy during these last few years, especially among the high and middle class families. The most expensive souvenirs will be given at the last (the 1000\textsuperscript{th}) selamatan, which can be in the form of a sajadah (prayer mat), small Koran, mukena (prayer cloth), tasbih (rosary), sarong etc. Geertz (1960:72) also mentioned that the last selamatan, which marks the point at which the body is thought to have decayed entirely to dust, is the most elaborate.} Geertz (1960:72) also wrote that each child of the deceased who maintains a separate household must give the whole series of selamatan. But nowadays, many families put together their resources (especially the financial resources) and hold the whole selamatan series in one household, since it would be too expensive for each child to hold a complete series. I encountered a case where the deceased’s children divided the obligation to hold the selamatan series among themselves. Having a complete series done properly was considered as the most important goal, regardless how and where it was to be held.
In his analysis, Geertz (1960:68) put various occasions related to a funeral, from burial to the *selamatan* series, under the Javanese term of *layatan*. J. Sullivan (1992:87-88) used a slightly different term for a similar phenomenon namely, *tulung layat*. In his definition, J. Sullivan especially underlined the supportive aspect of the phenomenon. According to him, 'Tulung' means 'to help' and *tulung layat* refers to help given in times of bereavement, but the term does not only cover activities associated with helping the bereaved. It is also used for support in the event of sudden serious illnesses, accidents, natural disasters, and other dire emergencies. It involves neighbours going promptly to the stricken family and working together to provide moral and material succour.

In practice, people (relatives and neighbours) are usually expected to *nglayat* or to go to the bereaved family during the first three days after a death has occurred. They may bring a tray of rice, sugar, noodle, and coffee powder for the death *selamatans* or simply give some money to the stricken family. It is important to note that the *layatan* or *tulung layat* or *nglayat* is done outside the *selamatan*. The former is especially meant to demonstrate responses, salutations, sympathy, condolence, willingness to help and the latter is meant to pray for the deceased.

In order to understand various problems in holding these funerary practices namely the burial, *selamatan* and *layatan*, there are two points that should be highlighted: first, on these occasions, especially in the first days of bereavement, a lot of tasks are expected to be performed promptly and simultaneously. Within a few hours after a death has occurred, the bereaved family must call for the *modin*, prepare the burial paraphernalia and the deceased 's bath, spreading the word about the death, find a grave and the grave diggers, prepare the *selamatan* after the burial, arrange the procession to the cemetery etc. Geertz (1960:68) wrote that, 'Javanese funerals occur as quickly as possible after death. A man dead at 10 A.M will be buried by noon or shortly thereafter, and a man dead at 4 P.M will be in the grave by ten the next morning. Although the family will sometimes delay an hour or so if some relatives are coming from a distance, apparently they rarely delay long enough [...]'  

These simultaneous huge tasks, which have to be carried out in a very limited time, can be more difficult to accomplish if we also take the emotional distress into account. Second, the social organisation of these events is very hierarchic and complex. In his analysis on Javanese ritual celebrations, Keeler (1987) made a differentiation between the *sponsors*
namely members of the family\textsuperscript{5} who hold a ritual celebration and the \textit{rewang} namely, people who assist the sponsors. Keeler (1987:143) also wrote: ‘The ranks of those who \textit{ngrewang} are filled by relatives, neighbours and friends. They can be divided into three groups: 1) the women who join in the cooking; 2) the men who participate in setting up for a ritual [...], a job that often involves removing sections of the house, extending the roof, setting out mats or chairs [...] 3) the young people, of either sex, who perform the above functions and also serve guests tea, snacks, and food before and during the celebration’

Although Keeler’s analysis has focused on large-scale ritual celebrations such as a wedding party or circumcision, his categorisation can be used to examine smaller events like death \textit{selamatan} series. Within these \textit{selamatan}s, the bereaved family is the sponsor, which is assisted by a group of relatives, (close) neighbours and friends. Among the assistants (the \textit{rewang}) there is a division of labour, which is based on one’s socio-economic status (Keeler, 1987: 142-143): ‘Status considerations certainly colour every aspect of a ritual celebration [...] while informants usually choose to stress the egalitarian side of mutual co-operation, saying that who does what is a matter of chance, in fact the distribution of chores\textsuperscript{6} among \textit{rewang} reflects such consideration’

An important difference between the sponsors and the assistants (regardless of rank) can be found in the management of the available funds. Commonly only the core sponsors can play a role in managing the money. However, it does not mean that there will be a ‘sole manager’, since in many \textit{selamatan}s the available funds come from a few sources namely, (1) the sponsors’ contributions and (2) the funeral attendances’ gifts. Regarding the funeral funds, a respectable assistant such as an older close neighbour may give advice about some financial matters, but this person cannot (and is not expected to) decide the expenditures.

Within the frame of this complexity, various problems in organising \textit{selamatan} series should also be understood. This means, a lot of tasks need to be done simultaneously in a short time according to the delicate rules of hierarchy. As I mentioned before, during my fieldwork I had the chance to participate in several death \textit{selamatan}s. Although these events

\textsuperscript{5} In several death \textit{selamatan} I had observed it was obvious that family members are not a homogenous group. They are also divided according to the quality of their relationship with the deceased and the deceased’s first-degree relatives (parents, children, siblings). In all these \textit{selamatan}s, the ‘core’ of the sponsors are usually these first degree relatives.

\textsuperscript{6} The differentiation in distribution of chores according to the assistants’ status can be seen at two points: 1) the sort of work they have performed. Older and/or high-status female relatives or neighbours will carry out high status tasks such as co-ordinating activities in the kitchen or other advisory tasks. 2) the amount of time they have spent in the kitchen. The high-status assistants are not expected to spend many hours in the kitchen. They will be encouraged to do other tasks outside the kitchen like receiving the guests (Keeler, 1987: 143-144)
were not without tensions and conflicts, people who were engaged (including the youths) seemed to know their own ‘domain’ within the selamatan organisation. I also witnessed conflicts among core sponsors about various matters, but they could manage these conflicts in a way, which would tidily keep the conflicts from the foreground. Of course there were also complaints and gossip among the assistants either about one of their number or about one of the sponsors (who had behaved in a domineering way), but this kind of disapproval did not usually directly harm the helping activities.

3. The First Hours After a Death

*Taking the deceased ‘home’*

For various reasons, some people died outside their own houses (at the hospitals, children’s houses etc.) In these cases, one of the first things that had to be arranged by the survivors was taking the corpse ‘home’. If the person died at the hospital or the corpse was there because of in a traffic accident or crime, the survivors had to confront the hospital bureaucracy, for instance, arranging for a hospital ambulance to bring the corpse home. This is not always an easy task to do especially because many people are not familiar with the formalities, or simply because there is no ambulance available at that time.

The day Munah\(^7\) (78) died in January 1998 at a hospital in Surabaya only two family members were present, namely, Munah’s daughter Elie and Munah’s granddaughter Din. It was agreed that Din would stay at the hospital to handle all the required formalities, especially the payments, and to arrange an ambulance. Elie went home to prepare for the burial and the first day selamatan. It was 3.30 a.m. when Elie got home, a few neighbours dropped in as soon as they knew that Munah had died. These neighbours helped Elie to clean up and re-arrange the house for the bathing ceremony, the layatan, and the selamatan. At 6 a.m., guided by Din, an ambulance from the hospital brought the deceased home.

Taking a corpse home, especially the victim of a traffic accident, is also complicated by the identification procedure. In June 1999, Ho\(^8\) (75) was hit by a motorcar on a big road

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\(^7\) Munah is one of the widows who did not live in the research sites (the city of Malang). She lived in an inner city neighbourhood of Surabaya, the biggest city in East Java about 70 km from Malang. I knew her and her family since I was small and therefore I had the access to follow her funeral in great details almost as an insider in the family including witnessing tensions and conflicts. Because of the richness of the data I could gain in her case, I decided to use her funeral as one of the main cases in this chapter although the funeral took place outside my research site.

\(^8\) Ho lived in a small town of Lawang that is situated 17 km from Malang. Like Munah, I have known Ho and his family for a long time because he was a friend of my parents. I mention his case in this
between Malang and Surabaya. Ho died instantaneously, and his body was brought by the police to a hospital in Malang. At that time, nobody in the assembled crowd recognised him, therefore his family could not be contacted. After several hours, the old man’s family worried about what kept Ho so long from his routine walk. When some neighbours told Ho’s family about ‘an old man who was hit by a motor car’, they decided to get information about ‘the old man’ in some hospitals in Malang. In that panic circumstance, they forgot to go to the police station. However, their attempts were unsuccessful, and they could only hope that Ho was all right. A few hours later, one of their neighbours came with a man from the hospital where Ho’s body was laid. According to him the hospital and the police could not identify the victim immediately because no Kartu Tanda Penduduk (the ID card) was found with the body.

It is also common to transport a corpse from the place of death to another place that is considered as the deceased’s home. Bu Nem (59) died in July 1999 at her oldest daughter’s house in one of the lateral alleys in Semeru. Her daughters took her body to her own house in Talun market that is located only a few hundred meters away. One of the daughters told me, “We should take our mother back to her own house so that she can leave the world in peace”.

These cases illustrate different problems of taking a deceased person home. Bureaucracy, formalities, miscommunication, lack of means and information etc. are various causes of the problems that have to be dealt with by the survivors. Even in this very first phase, the connection between family members and neighbours in the problem solving actions is visible, though the connection does not necessary manifest in a support relation.

Calling for a modin⁹

In relation with the death of a fellow resident and the funerary practices, a modin has various religious duties (Geertz, 1960:206-207): ‘(1) to prepare corpses for burial and to give advice to the survivors on the proper conduct of the funeral; (2) to see that the graveyards are kept up (the actual cleaning being done by a handyman who gets small donations from families have relatives buried in the cemetery); […] (8) to pray at selametans if requested to do so; (9) to give advice and consolation to people who have recently lost a relative by death […]’

chapter because of the unusual circumstance that relates to his death. Ho’s death can illustrate some difficulties confronted by the deceased family when a relative dies because of a traffic accident.

⁹ Modin (always a man) is a religious official at the neighbourhood or village level who is elected for life by his fellow villagers/residents. There are may be more than one modin in a village/ neighbourhood who have various religious duties related to death (burial, funeral), marriage, divorce, inheritance, religious tax, and different religious activities.
In the cases where the deceased is a woman, the family members (the husband and female relatives) can bathe the corpse by themselves. They can also invite a group of elderly women who are considered as having the required knowledge of preparing a corpse for burial.

In the case of Munah’s burial, her daughter and granddaughter had to invite a few elderly women from another neighbourhood because there was no such group in their own neighbourhood. An older female neighbour gave them advice about inviting this group of elderly women, since neither Munah’s daughter nor her granddaughter were familiar with the Islamic rules on funerals. This elderly neighbour was also the one who called for the group since she knew where to find them.

In Moslem neighbourhoods such as in the Semeru and Kacangan alleys, finding a modin is not a problem. When pak Nasikan (65) died in Semeru alley, a modin came within fifteen minutes of the death. Bu Itin, the widow, and her sons did not have to call for the modin by themselves because the death of pak Nasikan was announced immediately by a neighbour. Because the announcement was meant for all fellow-residents he used the loudspeaker of the nearby mosque.

*Spreading the word that a death has occurred*

The information about the death is expected to be spread both around the neighbourhood as well as to the relatives and friends who live outside the neighbourhood. In a neighbourhood like Semeru or Kacangan alley, the death of a fellow resident will be immediately noticed by the close neighbours. The closest neighbours can even come during the last hours before the death to console the family and to ask forgiveness from the dying. It is also common to invite a few people to pray for a dying person and the family may ask one of the close neighbours to call for these people. The involvement of close neighbours before the death also functions as a source of information about the calamity for the ‘more distant’ neighbours.

Let us return to the Munah case, when Munah’s daughter (Elie) came home early in the morning (3.30 a.m.) from the hospital. A few of close neighbours promptly dropped in and asked about Munah. They knew that Munah was brought to the hospital in a very critical condition two days before therefore, they were not surprised by the information about Munah’s death. From these few close neighbours, the information soon reached a wider group of neighbours by a ‘chain effect’.

When a death has occurred, the calamity becomes known to the wider range of neighbours. In some neighbourhoods like in Semeru and Kemirahan alleys, the death of a
fellow resident is usually announced through a loudspeaker (from a local mosque or from the neighbourhood head’s house namely, the RT or the RW). From this moment, both close as well as distant neighbours are expected to visit the bereaved family in a layatan (tulung layat, nglayat). However, this kind of public announcement is not really necessary since neighbours usually ask each other: “have you been nglayat to...(the deceased’s name)? Shall we go together?” These questions among neighbours are very effective in spreading the information on the calamity.

In order to inform relatives or friends who live outside the neighbourhood, the bereaved family sends a few people out. The persons who are sent out are usually young male relatives and/or neighbours, preferably those who can drive a car or motorcycle. In all the cases I observed, (public) telephone and telegrams were also used. Again, younger people, who are considered as more mobile, are often asked to make the telephone calls or to go to a telecommunication office to send telegrams.

As can be seen from the cases, after the deceased is brought home, the degree of neighbours’ involvement in the preparation of funeral increases. The family members (the widows and the other survivors) are no longer alone.

4. The Layatan and the Burial

Preparing for the burial, the layatan and the selamatan

Soon, the house, especially the guest room, will be re-arranged: the furniture will be moved and the floor plastic will be covered with mats or carpets. These tasks are mostly performed by male relatives and/or neighbours. If additional mats or carpets are still needed, the bereaved family can borrow them from a few neighbours.

In the meantime, a place and paraphernalia for the deceased’s last bath are also prepared. Many neighbourhoods have their own set of burial tools: a couch, a keranda (a frame of laths from bamboo or other wood to cover a corpse carried on a wooden stretcher), earthenware or plastic water containers, a special cloth to cover the keranda, a special umbrella for the burial procession etc. These tools can be borrowed by every bereaved family in the neighbourhood. Munah’s daughter told me, “One of our neighbours went to the ketua RT (the neighbourhood head) to inform him formally about my mother’s death. Soon, the ketua RT sent a few men to bring the burial tools. These tools are owned by the perkumpulan kematian (burial society) in the neighbourhood. In such occasion, many neighbours know exactly what to do, it helped us a lot because it was a confusing moment (rawet)!”
However, for the bath and the burial, there are many other things that should also be prepared such as, *kafan* (shroud), gravestone, flowers, *telisik* (wooden planks), soaps etc. Munah’s survivors bought these materials by themselves because the burial society in their neighbourhood did not provide them. According to Munah’s daughter, she asked a female neighbour to buy these materials.

In Semeru alley, the burial society not only lends out burial tools but also provides nine metres of *kafan*, the required number of *telisik*, and soaps as one package of support for a bereaved family. The RW head also contacts a cemetery caretaker for a grave and a few men to dig the grave. He said, “Providing this support package is better than giving the bereaved family a small amount of money as a kind of financial support. Within this package the burial society also offers a lot of assistance for the burial from lending out some tools, providing the *kafan*, *telisik*, gravestone, soap, naphthalene, cotton etc. to arranging a grave. Thus, the bereaved family can spare their energy for other things” 10

Unlike most of the bereaved families in the Semeru alley, Munah’s family had to look for a graveyard and to hire gravediggers by themselves. There was a quick family meeting among them to decide which cemetery would be the last place of rest for Munah. Elie’s husband, Mar, proposed to look for a grave at the Ngagel cemetery. Although the land’s price per square meter is very high, this Moslem cemetery is quite popular in Surabaya, because it is located inside the city. But the expensive price was less important for Munah’s descendants. They could afford it. For them, the problem was whether they could get a good location for the grave since this city cemetery was (and still it is) very dense.

It is obvious that looking for a graveyard, contacting a cemetery caretaker and hiring gravediggers are considered as men’s job. Mar and his son in law, Dwi, went to the Ngagel cemetery to find and buy a grave-plot. Neither the (male) distant relatives nor (male) close neighbours - not even the closest one - were involved in this task. Firstly because this task was related to a large amount of money 11, secondly, because there were close male relatives who had full access to financial resources, and thirdly because most of the (male) distant relatives and close neighbours who were present, had a lower socio-economic status. Thus, they were considered as less appropriate for such an important task.

10 It is common that residents of a neighbourhood in Java pay Rp 500 to Rp 1000 /month for the burial fund. In 1997 – 1998, the total cost of a burial support package in the Semeru alley will be between Rp 67.000 and Rp 77.000. The highest costs are for the grave diggers fee, the gravestone and the *telisik*.

11 The graveyard’s price was Rp 500.000

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After Mar and Dwi had bought the grave and hired some grave diggers, they asked a few male relatives and neighbours to go to the cemetery in order to keep an eye on the digging work. This kind of minor supervising task was regarded as appropriate for them.

**The bath**

When the place and paraphernalia for the bath have been arranged and *modin* or those who act as a *modin* is ready, the bathing ceremony will be started. Geertz’s (1960:69-70) description on the ceremony in the 60s is still very similar to what I observed during my field work at the end of the 90s: ‘The corpse is bathed in the front yard, protected from general view by hastily erected bamboo matting - although people feel free to look over the matting at will. Usually three different kinds of water, each in a different earthenware container, are used: one with flowers in it; one with money, a special kind of tree leaf, and various herbs in it; and one plain, without anything in it. In addition, there is a shampoo for the hair made of burned rice stalks. The *modin* pours the first dipper of water on the corpse, and then the other relatives each take a turn. [...] After the bathing the bathers wash their hands and feet in the water, which is left. The orifices of the body are plugged with cotton dipped in perfume, the body is wrapped in white muslin and tied in three places (feet, waist and top of the head) by the *modin*, and then about a half-dozen santris 12 begin to chant the Koran under his leadership. The chant takes place next to the corpse, which has now been placed in the main living room, and last from five to ten minutes’

Sometimes, assistance (to bathe a corpse) from those who are not the close (first degree) relatives is not welcomed and can cause tension. This is especially true when the corpse’s condition is poor because of a severe illness or an accident. A woman from Kacangan alley told me how her brother in law was upset when elderly women in their neighbourhood had offered their assistance to bathe his deceased wife. He insisted on bathing his wife by himself, only assisted by his daughters. He even prohibited other people’s presence during the bathing ceremony. The most important reason for this uneasiness was the bad condition of the corpse since the deceased had suffered from a long severe illness. The woman from Kacangan alley also said “If the body is in a bad condition, spreading a bad odour, having a strange colour or being swollen, which is not expected to be happen during the first few hours of death, people can think about such things as black magic. You know,

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12 This term can be used either for pupils at a traditional type of Moslem School (*Pondok, Pesantren*) or for devoted Moslem in general. For an elaborate analysis for this term see Geertz, 1960:126-130)
there are always people who pretend to assist but actually, are only curious and want to collect information for gossip". Along this gossip path, the bad condition of a corpse can also be interpreted as a sign of the family’s carelessness toward the sick person, bad relationship, conflict etc.

A similar reason came to my mind when Elie and Din repeatedly told me how ‘clean’ Munah’s body was, “Her skin was very light and soft, there was no bad odour at all. My mother died beautifully”. The only problem was the difficulty to close Munah’s mouth properly because she had to breathe through her mouth during her last days at the hospital. However, the family and the visitors found a positive way to look at it, they said that she died with a smile.

The procession and the burial

If all of the deceased’s first degree family members are present, the burial procession will soon be started. ‘[...] then the body is placed on the litter, a bamboo framework over which brand new textiles have been stretched with strings of flowers laid across them. [...] The litter is carried into the yard, where the descendants (usually children) of the deceased duck back and forth under it three times. This is to indicate that they are iklas—that their emotions have been quieted and have been flattened out into a true detachment, that they feel no psychological pain at the departure of the deceased, and that their hearts are already free. A few coins wrapped in paper are then distributed to each person at the funeral to symbolise the same idea; as they can give away money without feeling any remorse, so they can let the deceased go with no wish to cling to him emotionally. [...] A vessel filled with water is thrown on the ground and broken, also to symbolise iklas, and the litter moves off to the graveyard, carried by the men, while the women remain behind at the house, scattering salt so the soul will not come back and disturb them [...]’ (C.Geertz, 1960: 70)

Seven cars (beside the hearse) were used in Munah’s funeral procession to transport the funeral attendants. Two were owned by the bereaved family and the other five were friend and neighbour’s cars. Some of the neighbours participated in the procession with their motorcycles. Although renting cars is not a big problem in most of the Indonesian cities,

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13 There are cases of domestic murders which were exposed because of neighbours’ suspicions on the corpse’s condition.
14 According to Islam, women should not go to a burial since they are considered as emotionally weak. However, in all burials I observed, most of the female relatives went to the cemetery although most of the female neighbours (in contrast with the male neighbours) did not.
friends and neighbours who own cars often make their vehicles available as a form of practical assistance in an occasion like a funeral.

Only a few of senior male relatives and neighbours were allowed to sit in the hearse. These senior and respectable funeral attendants were expected to guide the procession and to pray for the deceased. The ‘heavier’ kinds of job such as to carry on the telisik (wooden planks) or the gravestone were performed by some male relatives or neighbours who were either young or had a lower socio-economic status. However, not all of the junior attendants have to perform these kinds of jobs. Among them there was a young Chinese man who owns one of the cars used in the procession. It was obvious that nobody expected this rich young man to do the heavy tasks. He was asked to take pictures. He not only owned a good camera but also offered to cover all the photographing expenses as support for the bereaved family.

Usually the grave preparation is finished at the time a funeral procession arrives at the cemetery so that the burial can be started immediately. Nowadays, especially for the city middle class, it is common to hire gravediggers through a cemetery caretaker. In Kacangan alley, young male neighbours often give assistance in the grave digging. In return, the bereaved family shall provide them meals, cigarettes and coffee. As I mentioned before, in the Munah case, the grave was prepared by a combination of professional diggers, neighbours and relatives. Although Elie’s husband and son in law hired professional diggers, they also asked a few neighbours and relatives to keep an eye on the preparation. According to Elie’s husband, “We would not let our neighbours or relatives dig the grave because that was a hard job to do. It must be more difficult to dig a grave in such a dense cemetery. We would like to avoid problems; if we were not satisfied with the quality of the diggers’ work we could say it directly and asked them to make it better since we paid them. But we could not do this to our neighbours and relatives, could we? Moreover, the cemetery caretaker had offered the special gravediggers from the very first moment...it must be a common business there, you know? We only asked a few of our neighbours and relatives to supervise the diggers. Just to control the quality of their work!”

The division of labour among the female attendants during the procession and the burial was also obvious in all funerals I observed. None of the women were involved in the grave preparation although they were responsible for preparing flowers for the burial. The funeral flowers should be a mix of special kinds of flowers and leaves. Usually, this mix can be bought in the local market or at the cemetery front yard. There are two kinds of funeral flowers that should be prepared: those that were combined in strings to be put at the top of the
keranda and those to be scattered in and on the grave. In Munah’s funeral, the family provided money to buy the flowers and some female neighbours helped to prepare them.

Many female distant relatives acted as confidantes for Munah’s daughters and grand daughters who were moaning during the burial. These female distant relatives were indeed appropriate to do this task because, on the one hand, they were emotionally less affected by the death, but on the other hand, their relationships with the bereaved family were close enough to console the moaned survivors intimately.

During the ceremony at the graveyard, almost all the activities are performed by men. Most of the present men try to do something, even if it is only giving vague suggestions about how things should be done. However, there are main performers especially the modin and those who take off the body from the litter and put it into the grave. Usually they are not the first-degree relatives of the deceased (father, son, brother etc.). ‘The ceremony at the graveyard is brief. The body is taken off the litter and put into the grave on its side, being handed down to three men standing in the grave. The body laid to rest on seven stones with its head pointed to the north. The strings on the shroud are loosened and the face exposed so that the cheek touches the earth, and then either the modin or some other santri jumps down into the grave and shouts the Confession of Faith three times into the dead man’s ear. The planks are then laid in place, the dirt pushed into the grave, and the grave markers erected. The modin reads the télkim, a set funeral speech addressed to the deceased, [...]’ (C.Geertz, 1960: 71)

After the burial, everybody leaves the cemetery and goes back to their homes or works. For the bereaved family and a small group of relatives and close neighbours the next work has been waiting, namely the preparing the death selamatan.

5. The Selamatan

Preparing the selamatan

As I mentioned before, the death selamatan series are held on the 1st, 3rd, 7th, 40th, 100th and 1000th day after the death and on the first and second anniversaries of the death. That means, for each deceased person, the survivors should hold eight selamatans within three years. Although these selamatans have a similar form, they are different and increasing in terms of the number of guests, the quality and quantity of the food; therefore, they are also increasing in the amount of work and costs. Regarding the differences, these selamatans can be categorised into: the smaller ones (the 1st and 3rd) and the bigger ones (7th, 40th, 100th, 1000th).
The smaller selamatans are usually less prepared than the bigger ones. The kinds of food are less varied and no other gifts are given to the visitors beside the *berkat* (a basket filled with various kinds of cooked food: rice, vegetables, noodles, fruits and snacks). The selamatans during the first days of bereavement can be regarded as one of the sudden burdens for the stricken family beside the death.

The preparation of a selamatan is commonly dominated by women since most of the work is related to food processing both for the visitors’ meals as well as for the *berkat*. This food processing work can be further categorised as:

(1) Buying the staple food and other ingredients. Although this task seems to be a simple one, I have observed tensions, even quarrels because of it. In carrying out this task, the sponsors in the *selamatan* are confronted with the problem of managing the available financial resources. If they want to delegate this task to a few of the assistants, they have to deal with the problem of trust and control. This problem becomes more complicated if they are helped by neighbours or relatives. How should they control the expenditures without jeopardising politeness and the good relationship? Munah’s daughter told me about problems in delegating this shopping task, “Many of our relatives and neighbours think that we are rich, therefore we do not have to control or worry about our budget. It is awful to say, but we were afraid that they would shop carelessly. Moreover, you know that we cannot always ask receipts since many stalls in the market do not give any. When we asked Markati (a female close neighbour) to buy staple food and ingredients for the *selamatan*, we also asked her to write down her expenditures. But we could do this because we know her very well!” A young widow in Semeru alley told me that she did the shopping work by herself, “I only had a small amount of money for the *selamatan* series, and thus, I had to spend it very carefully. Therefore I bought the staple food and other ingredients by myself in order to get the cheapest ones! If I asked my sister in law to do it, she would not care in bargaining the prices as much as I did.”

Beside tensions between sponsors and assistants, there were also tensions between sponsors in performing this task. Munah’s daughter Elie blamed her sister Len about the unequal amount of the contribution for the *selamatan* costs, “If we had to buy something, she would quietly leave the room, just pretending that she did not know it. What could I do? Have a quarrel with her? It was not right; it would disturb the deceased’s peace. So I bought it!” When I questioned Elie whether they made an agreement on the contribution or not, she answered, “We agreed that we would take turns in covering the expenses”
This kind of ‘budget complication’ is not uncommon since the selamatan expenditures are often loosely planned. Another variant of it is the unexpected cost. For most of the selamatans, especially the 1st one, the sponsors do not know exactly how many people will come. Usually they prepare food for 40 people. For Munah’s 1st day selamatan, the family had spent more than Rp 150,000 for the food. But, there were more guests than expected so that the family instantly had to order more food at the nearby restaurant. However, this solution is only possible if there are enough financial resources to spend.

(2) Cooking the food. This task is commonly considered as the core of selamatan preparation. Both the sponsors (including the assistants) as well as the visitors pay a lot of attention to the quality and quantity of the food. Every time I assisted a family for preparing a selamatan, they would ask me whether the food was appropriate or not (of course I never had another choice than giving a positive answer). When I asked them to what extent it would be a problem if the food was not appropriate, they (seriously) told me that it could be a sign that the family was not sincere in giving the selamatan for the deceased. They were also afraid that it would give a bad image (incapable, careless, stingy etc.) to the family.

Usually, some of the cooking activities were done before the selamatan day. Therefore some of the assistants had also come a couple of days earlier. These assistants are mostly the sponsors’ relatives. In most of the death selamatans I observed, these relatives were the most important assistants. Only the very close neighbours were involved in preparing food for a death selamatan. This is interesting in comparison with Sullivan’s (1992) and Keeler’s (1987) descriptions on ritual celebrations such as a wedding party, circumcision etc. where a lot of neighbourly assistance is provided in the kitchen. The difference is based on some reasons: first, the death selamatans are related to the delicate atmosphere of bereavement. Therefore, even assistance should be offered carefully. A wider range of neighbours may visit the stricken family during the first three days after the death for the layatan, but most of them are not expected to be involved in the kitchen. Second, a death selamatan (including the most elaborate and the last one) is usually a smaller event than a wedding party or circumcision, thus, a bereaved family is less likely to invite people to assist them as rewangs (assistants) like the sponsors of the bigger celebration events often do.

However, the number of assistants for preparing the food is different for each selamatan I observed. Dartik, a widow in Semeru alley was helped by her older sister, mother and sister in-law. She also hired a female neighbour for washing dishes and other kinds of cleaning works for Rp 15,000/day. Itin, also a widow in Semeru alley, was helped by her
sister, aunt and two nieces. Munah’s survivors were assisted by more than ten relatives (aunts and nieces), five female neighbours and two servants. It is worthy to note that all the assistants in Munah’s *selamatans* got Rp. 10,000 to Rp 20,000 /person at the end of the day. Munah’s daughters called the gift as the *uang becak* (transport cost), “We did not hire them. They are our relatives and good neighbours. We only paid their transport expenses”. However, everybody knew that the amount of money is (at least) twice as much as is needed for the ‘real’ transport expenses.

The women’s tasks in the kitchen also include serving the food at the *tahlilan* (Koran chant), preparing and distributing the *berkat* (gift for the attendants) and washing the dishes. The last task is obviously the most unpopular one, even a poor widow like Dartik hired someone else to do it since there was nobody in the family who was considered as suitable for it. Dartik was assisted by relatives who had a better socio-economic position than herself.

*The advisory tasks*

In each kind of work, from preparing the burial to cooking the food for the *selamatan*, there are people who function as advisors. These advisors are mostly the respectable seniors, in term of age and/or socio-economic status. People, including the sponsors, will regularly ask them about how a task should be properly performed, but their suggestions and advice are not always decisive.

In Munah’s funeral there were a few older men and women who could be regarded as advisors: Munah’s cousins, Munah’s sons in-law and an older female neighbour. In Dartik’s *selamatan*, her mother and older sister were the advisors. In Itin’s *selamatan*, the widow’s old aunt was the respectable advisor. This old aunt did not only tell other family members how to prepare the food and the *berkats*, but also told Itin, the widow, how to deal with her grief. For instance, she advised the widow to tidy up her closet and put her deceased husband’s cloths in another place. Mbah Niti, the aunt, said, “Itin should put her husband’s cloths in another cupboard so that she will not see them every time she opens the closet. Those clothes have brought too many memories on Nasikan (the deceased), the memories that

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15 The chant is usually performed by a group of male neighbours. Each family in the neighbourhood will send a male family member to attend a *tahlilan*.

16 The *berkats* are given to the *tahlilan* attendants at the end of the ceremony. A family who has send a male member to the *tahlilan* will get the *berkat* through this person. But some *berkats* are also prepared for families who cannot send somebody to the ceremony. In these cases, the *berkat* will be sent to them.
should be erased from her mind in order to continue her life. The death must be accepted....”.
At the seventh day of bereavement, Itin removed Nasikan’s cloths from the closet.

Managing the financial and human resources
The sponsors mostly do this task. These sponsors are usually the first-degree relatives of the deceased (spouse, children including formally or informally adopted children, parents, siblings). However, I also found cases where the funeral sponsors were not the deceased’s first-degree relatives. They were distant relatives on whom the deceased had depended financially. As I mentioned at the introductory part of this chapter, in Semeru alley there was a case where a next-door neighbour became the sponsor of a widow’s funeral.

Sponsors have access to the available financial resources. In most cases, they also provide the financial resources. Therefore it is their task (and privilege) to manage the money. When a funeral is sponsored by a number of people, they often do not put their contributions in a common fund, although they do make a pool of economic support given by the funeral attendants.

To finance Munah’s funeral several financial resources were used: Munah’s own savings, the daughters and grandchildren’s contributions and the economic support they had received in the layatan. Din, one of Munah’s granddaughters, was the only person who had access to Munah’s savings. Therefore it was decided that Din was responsible to manage this and also the layatan money. Din was trusted and considered the right person to manage a lot of financial resources because of her own good economic position. Moreover, she had worked in a bank. One of Munah’s daughters said, “Din has money and knows money”. Other family members managed their own contribution individually. This system regularly caused tensions among the sponsors since they continually had to decide ‘who pays for what?’

As the keeper of financial resources, Din could not avoid the responsibility to be selective with the expenditures or suggestions for expenditures. Sometimes, the other sponsors did not agree with her decision. Again, this was a source of tension among the managers of the funeral money. For instance, when Munah’s survivors discussed some expenditure for the near future there were quarrels because of a disagreement between Din and her aunt, Len. Din proposed to use some of Munah’s saving to upgrade Munah’s grave while in Len’s view the upgrading was not necessary. When Din insisted upon her idea, and was also supported by other family members, Len stigmatised Din as ‘bossy’.

In Dartik and Itin’s selamatans, the problems in managing the financial resources were different. Firstly, because there were fewer sponsors involved. In Dartik’s selamatan, the
widow was the only sponsor and in Itin’s *selamatan*, the widow and her oldest son were the sponsors. Secondly, because the amount of money to be managed was much smaller, for Dartik and Itin the most serious problem was the limited amount of money that could be spent for the *selamatan*. Dartik had to use a part of her working capital to pay all the expenses for the 1st, 3rd and the 7th days *selamatans*. She told me that, actually, she had no money for the bigger *selamatans*, “I don’t know exactly how to get the money for the 40th days *selamatan*, but I still have a few weeks to go. The only way I know is that I have to work again after the 7th days *selamatan* to get money both for the next *selamatan* as well as for our daily expenses. We have to continue our life, don’t we?”. According to Itin, her oldest son gave her money and asked her to manage all the financial resources, namely Itin’s contribution, her son’s contribution and the *layatan* money. Because of these two reasons, both in Dartik’s as well in Itin’s *selamatan* there were less conflicts of competence in managing the money.

A similar conflict of competence also happens when several sponsors have to manage the available human resources. Since either the sponsors or the assistants can have the preference with whom they like to work together and which task they like to perform (only the servants or those who are hired to help must accept any task they are told to do), the quality of personal relationship among them has affected the division of labour. Again, in Munah’s funeral I observed how sponsors (especially Munah’s daughters) liked to connect their popularity among relatives and neighbours with the number of assistants who helped them. Munah’s oldest daughter complained to me in a lowered tone, “How can I get this work done if everybody is too busy with helping my sister? If I ask them to do something they will say ‘yes’ but they don’t do it. Do you know why? Because I cannot give them second hand cloths like my sister does. You know... *ada gula ada semut* (where there are sweets, there are ants)!"

6. Various Facets of Support Intertwinement

*Some Affecting Factors*

Social processes such as urbanisation, changing values in society, commercialisation etc. are often perceived as having negative impacts on mutual help in Java. I agree that mutual help ideals and practices should be examined within the changing social context. However, I like to argue that, despite the changes, providing and receiving support are still an important part of people’s lives. As I have described in fourth section above, a funeral is one of the special occasions for providing and receiving support. C.Geertz’s (1960:69) study has also
demonstrated this: ‘More than any other single passage rite the funeral draws everyone. Class lines, ideological antagonism, and personal quarrels often modify the strictly geographical attendance at other selametans, especially in the town of Modjokuto, but everyone who lives near a dead man and anyone in the town who knew him at all well or is in any way related to him comes to his funeral’. From a research, which carried out in a poor neighbourhood in Jakarta more than two decades later, Jellinek (1991: 51) got a similar picture: ‘[…] at no time was co-operation so marked as at somebody’s death. People were never left alone in times of dire need and when a person died neighbours helped wash, wrap, and bury the body. When Bani’s child died at birth, all the women in the neighbourhood filed past the dead body, offering money and condolences. A bucket of sand was put beside the dead child into which money was placed. Chairs were gathered from neighbouring houses and placed along the pathway in front of the home. Men from nearby sat talking deep into the night. Previously, I had rarely seen neighbours show much sympathy to Bani’s family […] On occasion, neighbours said they were also thieves […] With the death of their first child, however, all was excused and kampung dwellers rallied to their support’.

If we can agree upon the importance of funerals as an arena for providing and receiving support among relatives, neighbours and friends, a question still has to be asked: what makes support relations work? Or in other words, what are the stimulants?

As I mentioned before, ideals, relationships and practices around mutual help and support do not exist in a vacuum. Thus, factors that can affect them are plural in terms of number, kind and level. It is not my intention to give a complete display of this complexity. Based on the cases above, I shall highlight three factors namely, social pressures, cost and reward and the absence of formalised intervention (the state, insurance company, funeral company etc.)

**Social pressures**

In Semeru alley, I stayed in a lodging house next to Itin’s house. At the day Itin’s husband died, my landlady came to the lodging house and asked all her tenants to offer condolences and a small amount of money to the widow. For me, this request was a good reason to involve myself in the funeral, but other tenants were less enthusiastic with it. They had two reasons: first, they did not like funerals and second, they did not feel a part of the neighbourhood since they were only anak-anak kost (tenants of a lodging house). However, they also felt that they did not have other choice. They had to visit the bereaved family.
This fieldwork experience is parallel with John Sullivan’s (1992:88) notes on funeral attendance in his research site: ‘Tulung layat itself is not a personal or familial matter: it is a communal practice involving serious social obligation and sanctions […] Nevertheless, though the communal pressures are great they do not guarantee that all rukun tetangga neighbours who could show up at the time, will do so. To be sure, no RT neighbour family will lightly ignore one of these events; none will fail through pure idleness to send a representative or practical token of support. The possibility of not learning about or forgetting such an event in the neighbourhood is remote. The failure of nearby kampung families to participate at an acceptable level stands out as a withholding of neighbourly support. The occurrence is rare and indicates serious conflict in the neighbourhood and community. The required minimum performance is a brief visit by a family member. Neither the execution of this duty nor its omission will pass unnoticed. Where animosity is known to exist, participants will enhance their reputations by fulfilling obligation apparently against their own selfish impulses: practical demonstration of their propensity to place the communal above the personal. Of course, if they do not, the omission will likely be seen and widely described as a gesture against neighbourly and neighbourliness.’

These social pressures are even more intense for the deceased’s relatives. The failure to come at one’s relative’s funeral also indicates a serious constraint or conflict, since the ‘daily’ tension and dislike are not supposed to be the reasons to avoid a relative’s funeral. Of course a few aspects such as a great distance or physical inability can be an accepted reason for being absent in a funeral. However, for first-degree relatives such as children, a journey that takes more than ten hours is not an excuse for not attending their parent’s funeral.

Cost and reward
In each funeral I observed, both the sponsors as well as the assistants were quite aware about the issue of cost and reward in what they were doing. Reward as often translated by both parties as the ‘expressions of thankfulness’ were varied from compliment, appreciation, food (berkat), money or other gifts in kind.

In Munah’s funeral, I could follow a few of the family quick meetings at the end of the day to discuss the amount of uang becak (transport money) that should be given to each assistant. In general, the uang becak was varied from Rp.10.000 to Rp.20.000 each person, but the exact amount was related to the amount she/he had received the day before and what she had done that day. Most of the assistants would receive the uang becak without an expression of surprise. The atmosphere was not much different from the moment when the
paid helpers got their payment. In Dartik and Itin’s *selamatans*, the assistants received a bigger berkat.

None of the assistants, except the paid helpers and the servants, will explicitly acknowledge that their involvement in the funeral is stimulated by the reward they shall receive. It would also be misleading to understand their support simply in that perspective. The reward is in many ways connected with cost that should be paid. Let us go back to Munah’s funeral for an example. Many of the assistants in this funeral were people who had a low income. Actually, they could not afford to take a few days off from their work to be assistants in the funeral. Some of them even had difficulties to pay the transport expenses. If Munah’s survivors would not give the economic reward, especially the *uang becak* (the transport money), they knew for sure that many potential assistants could not come, even though they would like to help.

When Munah’s 40th days *selamatan* was held at one of Munah’s children’s house in Malang (70 km from Surabaya), several assistants who had come in the 1st, 3rd and 7th days *selamatan* in Surabaya, did not show up. For them, the cost to go to Malang was too high. Even if the sponsor would give them enough transport money, they did not like the long journey to Malang. None of the neighbours and only half of the relatives and friends who lived in Surabaya came for this *selamatan*.

The example above told us that outside the ideals of obligation to help among relatives and neighbours, the real action is carried out within limitations. However, it must be underlined that the calculated cost and reward should not be thought to dominate people’s willingness to help the stricken family. It is impossible to measure and determine what one’s real motive to offer support is, but neither pure altruism nor pure self-interest will be easily be found in such a support relationship.

*The absence of formalised intervention*

Except for the victims of a traffic accident or crime, funerary practices in Java (and generally in Indonesia) are not intervened in by the formal or commercial institutions, though the influence of religious institutions is quite visible. People should arrange a funeral by themselves17. They probably rent a hearse, buy a coffin and flowers from a company but the company does not arrange the funeral. There are regulations regarding cemeteries (especially for those situated in the cities) but how people perform the burial is beyond these regulations.

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17 For an interesting description on the role of family members, neighbours and friends in a funeral see also Lewis, 1972.
For the Moslems for instance, the only guidance to take care of and bury a corpse is the Koran. There are formalities for a cremation, but they are only related to the procedures within the crematorium itself. If a death has occurred, the survivors are only obliged to report the death to the neighbourhood head who will give them a letter that declares the death. This letter is usually needed in order to divide the inheritance.

This situation will be extremely different if we look at other contexts, for instance in The Netherlands, where organisation of a funeral has become the domain of professionals. From the first moment of the death, several formal institutions play an important role: a doctor to declare the death, the hospital, the *uitvaartondernemer* (the funeral company), the insurance company etc. The funeral company shall arrange most of the funeral including the last care of the corpse. In this context, many things are regulated. Even the ways a corpse should be taken care are regulated by the state in the form of law (*Wet op de Lijkbezorging*).

Funerals are highly formalised with low involvement of family members, neighbours and friends.

In the absence of the formal and commercial institutions in Indonesia, the family members are the most important actors in a funeral. Nevertheless, neighbours and friends play a significant role as providers of practical and economic support. The intertwine of family and neighbourly support becomes unavoidable because it is needed.

*The complementary and substitutionary nature*

I have mentioned in the introductory part that when both family and neighbourly support are present, they should not be understood exclusively from each other. In other words, the intertwine of these two sources of support is important to gain a better insight on the ways they work. But how do the family and neighbourly support intertwine with each other?

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18 ‘*Steeds minder wordt de dood een huiselijke aangelegenheid waarbij iedereen betrokken is. Ziekenhuizen en uitvaartondernemingen nemen geleidelijk aan de functie van de familie over. Vanaf ongeveer 1960 wordt het steeds meer de gewoonte de overledene niet thuis op te baren, maar weg te brengen naar een rouwcentrum. De sporen van de dood zijn niet meer thuis waar te nemen, de familie ontvagt niet meer thuis, rouw en verdriet worden gekanaliseerd in onpersoonlijke rouwcentra. Daar kan op vastgestelde tijden ‘afscheid worden genomen’, gelegenheid tot condoleren is er dan meestal allen na afloop van de begrafenis of crematie.*

[...] Deze ontwikkelingen van afstandelijkheid en zakelijkheid mond in ‘de begrafenis heeft in stilte plaats gehad’, waarbij het sterven en begraven geheel tot eigen kring is beperkt en iedereen die daartoe niet is uitgenodigd, strikt wordt geweerd’. (Sax, 1991:31)
To answer this question, I shall examine two different forms of the intertwinement, namely the complementary and the substitutionary forms.

Generally, family and neighbourly support intertwine with each other in a complementary form. It means that, mostly, the two sources of support are mutually making up what is lacking. From the first hours of a death, relatives and neighbours often provide a similar assistance. For instance, when the information about the death has to be spread. While a relative is passing the information about the death to other family members who live outside the city, a neighbour goes to the local mosque to spread the same information around the neighbourhood.

As the most important support providers, family members are seldom totally absent at the time support is needed. However, in a few cases they are totally absent either temporally or permanently. I found the situation where family support is (almost totally) absent with a few old widows. Mbah Nah (64) was vegetables seller who lived alone in a small wooden stall in Semeru alley. She died in February 1999 after three weeks of illness. Since she was childless and none of her relatives could be found, one of her next-door neighbours, Bu Sarmini (53) became the sponsor of her funeral. Other people who lived nearby were asked to give a small amount of money for the funeral costs (Rp.1000 - Rp.2500). The burial was arranged by the neighbourhood head (the Ketua RW) and the 1st and 3rd day selamatans were arranged by Bu Sarmini. However, none of the neighbours would arrange the bigger selamatans. In this case, neighbours provided the support that is commonly given by family members because none of the widow’s family was members present. Therefore, the neighbourly support has a substitutionary nature toward the family support. Mostly, neighbourly support functions as a substitute of family support in a sudden crisis or an emergency situation. Mbah Nah’s funeral is the only case I could find during my fieldwork where neighbourly support became an important substitute of family support.

7. Concluding Remarks

Family and neighbourly support intertwine with each other since the first hours after a death has occurred. When the word about the death have been spread, those who care and are obliged to care about the calamity should respond to it in an appropriate way. Along with these growing responses, the work that should be performed for the funeral also increases. Therefore, at this moment the support intertwinement becomes more intensive.
In the chronological examination of different funeral practices, I showed how family members and neighbours provide either similar or different kinds of support (economic, emotional, practical) at each phase of the calamity. Nevertheless, unnecessary overlaps and disorganisation of helping activities are rare. Even the unavoidable tensions, dislikes, rivalries and conflict are managed quite well in most cases. To understand this, the hierarchical social organisation in most communal events in Java should be underlined. Roles are exercised and tasks are performed according to the hierarchy of duty. If various support providers are divided into a few categories (relatives, neighbours, friends etc.), the hierarchy of duty exists both inter as well as intra categories. In other words, there are delicate (unwritten) rules on ‘who provide what kinds of support to whom, when and how”. People are expected to know about their own domains within the intertwining of helping activities. These domains are commonly based on the quality of relationship (between the provider and the receiver of support), age, socio-economic position and kinds of task to be performed.

Several community studies in Java have shown the importance of funerals as an arena of receiving and providing support among relatives, neighbours, friends or even colleagues. I have discussed three different factors that affect support relations and flows in funerals. First of all, there are social pressures, which encourage people to help their relatives, neighbours or friends in distress. However, the action to help is taken within a number of opportunities and constraints. Therefore, support relations and support flows are also affected by the second factor, namely a calculation of cost and reward. Nevertheless this calculation is seldom explicitly acknowledged by both the providers as well as the receivers of the support. The third factor is the absence of formalised intervention such as funeral and insurance companies. From this point, it can be perceived that family members, neighbours (in some cases even friends and colleagues) either receive or provide support because there is no alternative way to cope with the problems (a corpse should be buried, messages should be sent, funeral ceremonies should be held etc.). By helping their relatives or neighbours, people are protecting themselves by creating possibilities to be helped in the future and preventing a worse distress in their (social and physical) environment.

The last point to be mentioned is that, generally, family and neighbourly support present as a complement toward each other. In spite of that, in a sudden crisis neighbourly support can be a substitute for the family support that is absent at that moment. On the contrary, family support is unlikely to be a substitute of neighbourly support since family members occupy a higher rank within the hierarchy of duty. Thus, family members have bigger responsibility to provide support than neighbours or friends.