CHAPTER 4

Styles Matter
Coherent Diversity in Livelihood and Social Security

Closely-knit webs of social relationships, village institutions and arrangements for support are important for the Madurese in East Kalimantan. They can be of help in the event of misfortune or an emergency, but they do not offer sufficient, stable, steady and long-term social security for all. On the contrary, access to support varies between households, social classes and regions. In most cases, when Madurese villagers are confronted with an emergency or adversity, they first have to rely on their own resources; either directly by using any savings, cattle or land they might have or indirectly by turning to others for help or loans which can be later repaid through labour. To maintain these options, villagers have to balance short- and long-term household needs, and individual and household consumption, with investments in mutual help and social relationships.

In this chapter, I take a closer look at the ways people deal with the tensions which arise out of choosing between these options: between individual consumption and saving, and investments in social relationship and village social security in general; and between wages in kind and village resources, and cash-generating opportunities and outside opportunities. I look at the different ways in which people organize their livelihoods and social security, and the inherent logic in anticipating and reacting to various forms of setbacks and adversities. For the poorest Madurese, options are naturally limited and they have little room for manoeuvre. Nevertheless, even among lower social classes, different mixes of social security exist, and these mixes show similarities with those of other classes. As described in the introduction, I use the concept of styles to analyse patterns in these different mixes.

The guiding questions for this chapter are: how do people cope with contingencies and emergencies, and how do they balance investments in livelihood and in social security? What patterns or trajectories can be found in the diverse ways of coping and preparing against emergencies? What rationales are behind the specific mixes of social security? In answering these questions, I first explore the concept of style. Secondly, I present a number of cases that illustrate these styles within the complexities of everyday life and illustrate the different orientations, choices and limitations of people. Thirdly, I present an overview of the major social security styles found in Krajan and how these are spread among the population. Finally, I will discuss the concept of style in a broader perspective.
From an analytical perspective, social security can be viewed as a recurring tension between individual spending and collective investment. With regard to individual and household security, villagers have to choose potentially conflicting options such as investing their labour, time or capital in communal activities and mutual help, or in livelihood activities for direct consumption and personal accumulation. Investing in social relationships, arrangements and village institutions requires trust as there will only be a return on the investment if the majority of the network’s members are willing to return the favour. Further, short-term interests and immediate needs contrast with long-term concerns and less certain future needs. This rises to the surface when, for instance, choosing between waged labour with direct cash returns but with only weak ties with the employer, or taking a babun share of a later harvest, which is less certain but involves a much closer tie with the landowner and, as such, enhances the opportunities for future support.

Investments against insecurity can be made in social relationships and networks (by gift giving, marriage and making friends) and by engaging in reciprocal mutual help relationships; or by individual and household accumulation and savings in the form of cash, cattle or gold. Accumulation and investment options are confined by practical financial and social limitations and are not simply a matter of free choice. Nevertheless, this wide range of options results in diverse, complex and, to a certain extent, unique combinations of social security arrangements. Notwithstanding this diversity, we see patterns in this complexity of options, here referred to as ‘styles’.

**Styles: Balancing Livelihood and Insecurity**

Based on local definitions and categorizations, I distinguish four major patterns in ways of dealing with insecurities that I call ‘styles of social security’. A style is a coherent and distinctive manner of acting and doing things. It can be argued that social security styles reflect solutions for making a living, about a ‘good’ and secure living, and about the best ways for people and households to prepare for the future. We can see a style of social security as a general mode of ordering life: a somewhat systematic and ongoing attempt to create congruence in all domains of everyday life. A social security style can thus be defined as an observable pattern in the actions and perceptions of people and households in making a living while dealing with the insecurities, threats and risks that endanger their livelihood. Analytically, it helps to explain structured heterogeneity.

In the process of trying to obtain and maintain a secure and stable livelihood, people have a specific style of doing things. These styles are the outcome