In the introduction of this book, I discussed what I see as a major bias in social security studies. Many of these studies deal with a range of institutions and mechanisms for support and assistance that exist to protect people against the consequences of adversities. However, rather than looking at agency and the reasons why people take risks or seek to protect themselves, they focus on institutions and community arrangements that potentially offer support in times of need (Hüsken and Koning 2006:11, Lont 2006). Similarly, disaster studies tend to focus on protection and external risk reduction instead of considering the individual and collective risk-reduction practices of people (Bankoff 2009, Hilhorst and Bankhoff 2004, Van Voorst 2014, Van Voorst and Handgraaf 2012). Implicitly, most of these studies appear to depart from the assumption that people prefer security to risk, and that social relationships and village institutions are oriented towards enhancing some form of social security rather than disrupting it.

In this chapter, I intend to draw a more nuanced picture by taking a closer look at Madurese people in East Java, both rich and poor, who are involved in risk-taking practices that potentially endanger their livelihood base. Why do people ‘at risk’ (Blaikie et al. 1994, Wisner et al. 2012) take on large risks?

Poor people are generally assumed to be risk-averse and security optimizing. This emphasis on the presumed human need for security rather than insecurity is also clear in human needs approaches and studies on social welfare. Macarov quoting Goodin (1988) writes:

> All societies hold as dogma that social welfare deals with needs, rather than wants. [...] Although there is no good, clear-cut reason to give meeting needs systematic priority over satisfying desires, almost all social welfare programs define themselves as meeting needs – and indeed attempt to defend themselves from the charge that they are answering ‘mere’ desires.

MACAROV 1995:17

This observation is still widely accepted. However, during fieldwork in East Java and East Kalimantan, I became increasingly dissatisfied with explanations of poor people and peasants being risk-aversive and primary focussed on physical needs and security. Although this assumption no doubt holds for a
proportion of the population, and might help to explain some of their actions. I noticed that nearly all villagers sometimes take risks and some deliberately increase risks even when their livelihood base is neither stable nor secure. Moreover, there is a specific category of people, both in East Java and East Kalimantan, who actively take risks rather than search for livelihood security. These people are at the centre of the analysis in this chapter. They take not only profit-enhancing risks, but also ones that endanger the security and the continuity of their households' livelihoods. How can we understand this 'excessive' risk-taking given the above-mentioned assumptions?

This chapter provides examples of Madurese villagers in Krajan, in upland East Java, who deliberately take and combine risks. Locally, the term 'orang nakal' is used for these people, which can be translated as something like wayward, wicked or naughty people.\(^1\) I prefer the word wayward, as orang nakal are people who do not follow mainstream norms and values of society, are ignorant about livelihood security and deliberately take huge risks. These risks are not the customary risks related to farming and entrepreneurship, but excessive risks that, at least at first sight, are not oriented towards establishing a sustainable livelihood or long-term social security but seen rather as potentially devastating, putting livelihood security at risk. The focus of this chapter is the practice of excessive risk-taking rather than outcasts in society. It will, however, be shown that risk-taking and deviancy do often, but not necessarily, go together.

In this chapter, I want to show that deliberate risk-taking is not an exceptional event for poor people, but an attractive livelihood style for some villagers who search for an alternative to complying with the village norms and social pressures that urge huge investments in social security and reciprocal relationships. I describe gambling and risk-taking in the village of Krajan, elaborated with some examples taken from case studies. Taking into account the examples of wayward people, I will discuss whether the assumption of inherent risk-aversion in poorer households is justified. I will focus on the local and everyday practices and notions of people in terms of experiencing, avoiding and deliberately engaging in risks.

Whereas the risk-taking in the examples provided in the introduction, such as in vegetable farming (Hefner 1990, Lewis 1992) are accepted and embedded culturally, Vel's (1994) description of Manu Wolu, a bird-nest collector on

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1 *Nakal* is difficult to translate into English. A common translation is naughty (often used for children, but also for men who flirt with women, who gamble, or who do not behave according to morals, who are petty gang leaders and the like). Throughout this book, I use the term *nakal* to refer to people who are daredevils or somewhat wayward.