CONCLUSION

Forgotten people?

Poverty, Risk and Social Security in Indonesia

Many of the people who are described in this book can be called poor – living below or close to the official Indonesian poverty line – and are living in a more-or-less continuous state of insecurity. Poor people however do not stand alone, but search out and receive – directly or indirectly – support from others. Moreover, they are not always ‘frozen’ below or close to the poverty line since poorer and richer periods might alternate as a result of seasonal fluctuations in income, lifecycles and alternating periods of misfortune and relative prosperity. Clearly, the poor described here are not living in isolation, but need and use other individuals and institutions to secure their living, access to resources, to gather wealth and status and to provide support in times of need. The book aims to understand these relational aspects of poverty and everyday responses of people living on the margins of society when they are confronted with misfortune and major and minor crises in their everyday lives. It deals with the many ways in which people try to secure their livelihoods over time, directly through their own efforts, or indirectly through support from others – often this locally organized social security is arranged in opposition to the state rather than with its support. In this way, it aims to overcome static approaches to poverty which tend to focus primarily on single and often individualistic elements such as income, poverty lines, material wealth and vulnerability.

A key feature of this book is its central aim to capture diversity. Diversity in poverty and livelihoods, in social security arrangements, in capabilities and networks, in risk-taking strategies among ‘the poor’, a category much more diverse than generalized statements would suggest. The actions and responses of poor people of different social economic backgrounds, occupations, ages and genders vary greatly. Central to this book is the idea that people follow diverse trajectories guided by individual and cultural preferences that are shaped within structural boundaries, which I call styles. As we have seen in Chapter 4, the concept of style offers an alternative to poverty studies focussed primarily on incomes and assets as well as to structural approaches which emphasise structural inequalities and the adverse consequences of capitalism and globalisation. Styles are both empirically recognizable as analytically distinct. By its focus on styles or pathways, this book offers a new conceptual way to deal with diversity in vulnerability and poverty. At the same time it criticises populist and neoliberal approaches to poverty which over-emphasise the capacity of poor people to change their lives on their own. The concept of style
integrates strategic and structural dimensions of making a living and securing support at a daily basis.

This book thus takes the middle road between studies focusing on the agency, capabilities and opportunities of the poor and critical approaches which emphasise structural inequality, adverse incorporations into the capitalist system and the negative effects of structural power differences. First, it highlights the material basis of poverty and the resource base and livelihoods of peasants and migrants and the diversity found within the livelihoods and the repertoires of mutual help and social assistance. Second, it describes the different combinations people make in linking their livelihoods to mutual relationships of support, social security arrangements and institutions of mutual help to show opportunities for social protection and room to manoeuvre for poor people living under adverse conditions. And third, it describes and analyses the intricate interplay of structure and agency, individual survival and social protection, individuals vis-à-vis the state over time and space.

Forgotten People? The Case of the Madurese

The story of the Madurese in the new Indonesia is largely a story of a changing Indonesia seen from below. The Madurese, as an ethnic group, are socially, culturally and economically excluded from mainstream developments in Indonesia. The Madurese belong to the poorest ethnic groups in Indonesia; they are underrepresented in the government bureaucracy and the higher ranks of the army and the police, they are relatively poorly educated and often referred to in negative terms such as unrefined, unreliable and uncivilized and are to be found in low-paid, dirty and manual jobs (De Jonge 1995, 2012, Niehof et al. 2005, Retsikas 2007:187, Smith 2011, Stenross 2011). Investigating Madurese making a living in modern Indonesia largely means looking at Indonesia from its fringes.

The lives of Madurese described in this book are stories of people dealing with poverty, risk, social exclusion and threats of violence. It shows the intricacies, insecurities and ambiguities of people making a living through a turbulent decade (1997–2009). At the same time, it is a dynamic story of people taking chances, seeking and creating forms of social protection and of active engagement in new opportunities in the frontier areas.

During the last decade of Suharto’s rule and the years of transition that followed, the relatively poor and lowly educated Madurese have not fared well. They have been confronted with ethnic violence (Davidson and Kammen 2002, Van Klinken 2006), social exclusion, increasingly negative stereotyping (De Jonge