GENDERING ASIA

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FOLLOW THE MAID

Domestic Worker Migration in and from Indonesia

Olivia Killias

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Mohon maaf lahir dan batin.
Zurich, February 2018

Introduction

The afternoon was already drawing to a close when I got into the back of a car, together with three Indonesian women who were about to be escorted to their Malaysian employers on that day of April 2008: Santi, Jamilah and Rini.[1] Each of them had a fully packed bag in the boot of the car, the only luggage they were to take with them to the homes where they would spend the next two years.

Alex, the Malaysian agent who was about to place the women with their employers, was driving the car. His wife Brenda sat next to him, and on her knees she held a business case with the personal documents and work contracts of each of the women in it. We left the island of Penang by taking the bridge to the mainland and then drove for a long time: we took a highway, left it, took some smaller roads, passed through suburban regions, drove past industrial zones. During the drive, Santi, Jamilah and Rini kept completely silent – the ambiance was tense, full of expectation and anxiety.

From time to time, Alex looked at the three women through the back mirror and addressed them in Malay. He reminded them of the most important rule: 'Once you're there you'll have to work well, okay?' Addressing Jamilah, he said: 'If the old grandmother is grumpy (*cerewet*), just don't pay attention to her, she's always like that, even with me she is nit-picking all the time! Just stay silent (*diam*), okay? The important thing is that you always stay polite'. And, addressing Santi more specifically: 'And you, don't speak to men! Your employer doesn't like it, okay? Don't speak to anyone!' The women nodded: 'Yes, sir'.

After a while, we stopped on the pathway next to a two-storey house that appeared to be the home of Santi's employer. Santi was asked to get out of the car and to take her bag. Everything happened very quickly:

1. Except for well-known public figures, all names in this study are pseudonyms.

agent Brenda walked Santi to her new employer, while Alex stayed in the car with the two remaining women.

Santi's employer-to-be was an elderly Chinese Malaysian woman. She was waiting for us under the porch of her house. Santi had been recruited to replace her current domestic worker, a young woman from Java who had been working for her for several years and planned to go back. Brenda asked the current domestic worker to come over to meet Santi: 'You explain the work to her, okay? Otherwise we won't let you go home,' she joked. Santi was then escorted inside by a young woman who had not been introduced to her. Still standing in front of the house, the elderly employer was very eager to ask questions, but Brenda kept it short. She handed her a copy of the work contract and told her that she would get Santi's passport in two weeks' time. After that, Santi was left with her employer, and we drove off, to escort the other two women to their future homes.

After months in which Indonesian women had been 'prepared' for employment in paid domestic service, after weeks of bureaucratic delays and hours spent waiting, what struck me about this interaction was the haste with which Indonesian women were ushered to their Malaysian employers. It seemed like an incredibly short period of introduction before Brenda left Santi with her new employer – they had never met each other before. Since Malaysian immigration regulations require Indonesian domestic workers to live-in with their employers, Santi was expected to live and work for her employer for a standard period of two years – her employer's home was thus *both* Santi's place of work *and* her place of residence. Working in the privacy of 'homes' involves intimate everyday coexistence, something which clearly differentiates it from other workplaces and gives employers control over aspects of the worker's life that are not at all related to her work (Hess 2005: 151; see also Anderson 2000). In this context, the role of agents cannot be neglected; little described in the literature, so-called 'maid agents' are important actors in the globalisation of care as they not only set the standards of recruitment and placement but also socialise employers as to the expectations they can have of their domestic workers (Tyner 1999; Liang 2011).

Understandably, Jamilah, Santi and Rini were nervous before meeting their employers, as so much of their experience as domestic workers in

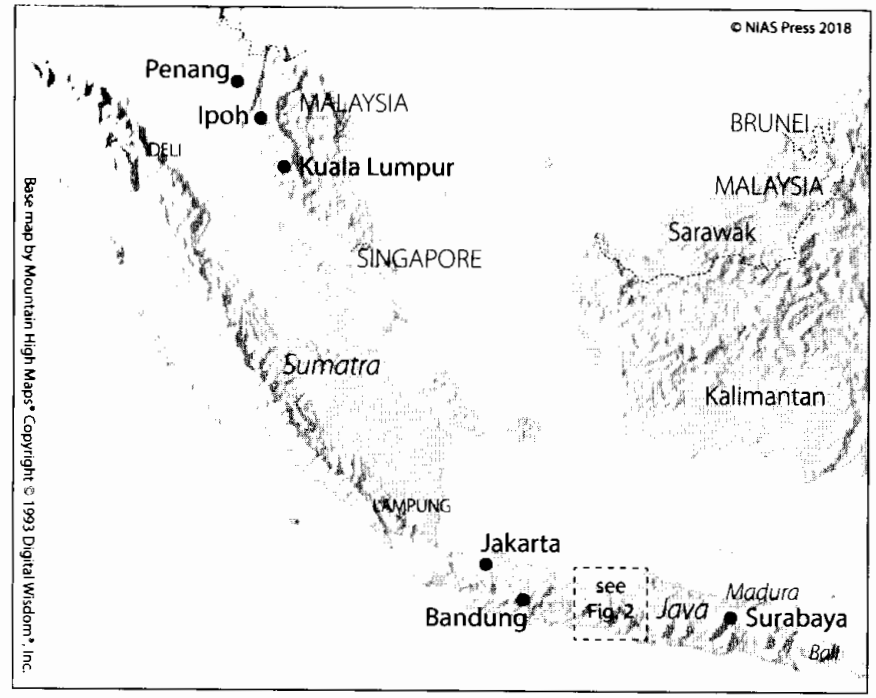

Figure 1: Research sites in Indonesia and Malaysia.

this country would depend on the kind of employer they would get. The women with whom I had spoken in Indonesia had often said *tergantung majikan* – it depends on the employer. Migrant women's dreams of a better future but also their anxieties about possible abuse, nourished by the continuous 'horror stories' featured in the media (Gamburd 2000), gave this moment in which they were escorted to their employers a particular significance.

In this book, I literally follow the paths of migrant domestic workers from one specific village in upland Java through the process of recruitment, training and placement with families in terraced houses in leafy middle-class Malaysian suburbs – and back.

While the situation of migrant domestic workers in destination countries is relatively well documented, the ways in which these women's mobility is both enabled and controlled by various state and non-state actors in the migration process is much less understood (see Lindquist, Xiang and Yeoh 2012). Indeed, scholarship on migrant domestic workers

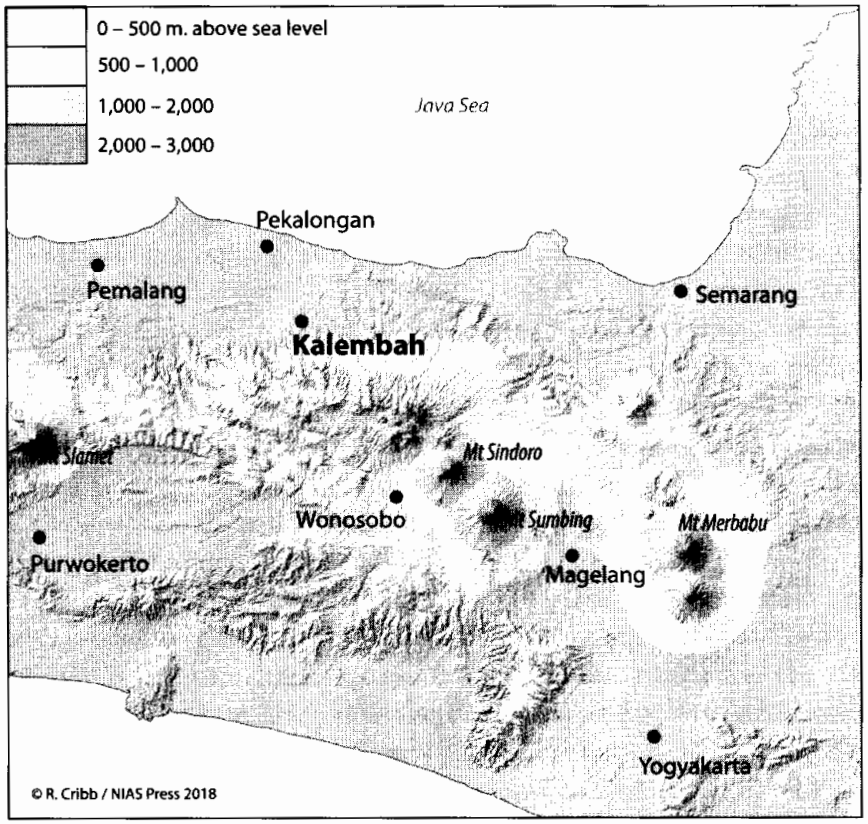

Figure 2: The village I have called Kalembah and its environs. Based on a map kindly supplied by Professor Robert Cribb, Australian National University.

in Asia has put the main focus on domestic workers' situation in places of destination (see e.g. Chin 1998; Parreñas 2001; Lan 2006; Constable 2007 [1997] and 2014; Liebelt 2011), and, to a lesser extent, origin (Gamburd 2000; Parreñas 2005b; Chan 2017; Nurchayati forthcoming). In line with other recent anthropological research dealing with care migration (see especially Hess 2005), I instead highlight the *process* whereby women become domestic workers, tracking their migration paths along the transregional care chain, from a village in Indonesia through various transits to Malaysia and back again. In doing so, I draw on a growing body of literature dealing with various aspects of transnational labour migration from Indonesia (see e.g. Cremer 1988; Spaan 1994; Tirtosudarmo 1999; Robinson 2000; Ford 2002; Haris 2002; Silvey 2004a; 2006; 2007; Rudnyckyj 2004; Hugo 2005; Lyons 2005; Anggraeni 2006; Williams

2007; Lindquist 2010; 2013; 2015; 2017; Kloppenburg and Peters 2012; Bach 2013; Chan 2014; Palmer 2016; Prusinski 2016; Fanany and Fanany 2017; Nurchayati forthcoming).

Indonesia has become one of the main labour-sending countries in the world. Since the early 2000s, every year hundreds of thousands of women have left their homes to work in the care sector within Indonesia, in Malaysia, but also in Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong or the Gulf states. Malaysia is one of the most important destination countries, and between 2006 and 2016 more than two and a half million Indonesian women left for Malaysia as domestic workers through the state-sanctioned labour emigration programme.[2] The sheer numbers involved show that these women have become crucial actors in contemporary processes of globalisation – a phenomenon that Saskia Sassen has called 'the return of the serving classes' (Sassen 2000: 510).

The Indonesian state started to promote labour emigration as part of its development plans in the late 1960s, but it was only after the Asian economic crisis in 1997 that it openly encouraged labour emigration on a large scale, and the first 'National Law on the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers Overseas' was voted in parliament in 2004 (Palmer 2016: 22). Women migrating for jobs in paid domestic service represent the overwhelming majority of migrants who have left Indonesia through the state-sanctioned programme of labour export over the last two decades: until 2010, between 60% and 80% of all migrants who left Indonesia were women who got employed in the 'informal' sector – in other words, in paid domestic service.[3] These numbers have subsequently decreased as the government has attempted to limit the numbers of women employed in the 'informal' sector, and has temporarily banned the sending of Indonesian domestic work-

2. These numbers are drawn from the statistics of the BNP2TKI (National Board for the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Overseas Workers). They are especially impressive since a ban by the Indonesian government stopped Indonesian women from migrating to Malaysia as domestic workers for almost two years between 2009 and 2011 (see Elias 2013).

3. The Indonesian government differentiates between employment in 'formal' and 'informal' sectors (Lindquist 2010: 125). The 'informal' sector of employment refers to employment in domestic service, while the formal sector covers all other sorts of employment (ibid.).

ers to Saudi Arabia, one of its most important destination countries.[4] Nevertheless, the demand for domestic workers has increased rather than decreased (Oishi 2017: 40) and overall, over the last decade, the Indonesian government has sent between 100,000 and 500,000 women abroad every year for employment in domestic service – which shows that Indonesia has become one of the main 'labour brokerage states' alongside the Philippines (Rodriguez 2010; see also Guevarra 2010). As the opening vignette of this chapter makes clear, Indonesian domestic workers do not leave Indonesia and enter destination countries as independent individuals; they are collectively recruited, trained, certified, and briefed by a vast array of actors from the moment they leave their villages in Indonesia up to the moment when they come back. By zooming in on the process of 'the making of the maid' (Lyons 2005) across different sites and stages of the migration process, this book uncovers the transregional articulations and practical implications of contemporary care chains, and thereby points to the historical transformation of paid domestic service in Southeast Asia.

Frictions in global care chains

Sociologist Arlie Hochschild has coined the expression 'global care chains' to describe 'a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring' (Hochschild 2000: 131). In Hochschild's conceptualisation, the expression 'global care chain' has been primarily used to describe the transfer of 'motherly' care, whereby a woman living in a 'First World' country (USA) delegates care work to a migrant woman from a 'Third World' country (The Philippines), while the latter leaves her children in the care of yet another woman, either paid or unpaid (Hochschild 2000). The literature on global care chains has pointed attention to the physical and emotional labour involved in care, arguing that global care chains extract 'emotional surplus value' (ibid.: 136) from families in one site and transfer it to another. While the literature on global care chains has been criticised for essentialising motherly care and obscuring the various ways in which migrant women themselves might frame care and migration (Mckay 2007), the concept of the care chain retains its usefulness because it links seemingly unrelated situations

4. Statistics by the BNP2TKI (2013).

in geographically dispersed places and thereby reveals the highly unequal consequences of the international division of reproductive labour (Yeates 2004; Ibos 2012b).

By zooming in on a specific care chain, in this book I move beyond an exclusive focus on the women directly involved in care work (both paid and unpaid) to bring into view the whole range of intermediaries that make the chain work: brokers, recruitment agents, state bureaucrats, maid agencies. In other words, I am interested in the *infrastructure* of care migration (Xiang and Lindquist 2014). In fact, a striking characteristic of the operation of global care chains lies in their relative opacity (Ibos 2012b); employers of migrant domestic workers, for instance, often ignore the presence of other nodes in the chain, both in the sense of invisibilised care work performed elsewhere by other women and in relation to the intervention of intermediaries such as commercial recruitment agencies in countries of origin (ibid.). As is the case with conventional commodity chains, the intricate transnational articulations of care chains often obscure the full range of actors involved, thereby also making it difficult to hold them accountable. Part of this book's objective, then, is to explore these articulations, which often remain unseen.

The number of actors involved in – and making a profit from – domestic worker migration in and from Indonesia indicates that paid domestic service involves more than two parties. This is interesting, in that paid domestic service has often been envisioned as a relationship between two women, the 'maid' and the 'madam' (Mendez 1998: 144). Paid domestic service, however, has been transnationalised and bureaucratised, and intermediaries such as brokers and agents have an increasing – although not necessarily novel – stake in the employment of Indonesian women as domestic workers, both within Indonesia and beyond.

Following Anna Tsing, I wish to explore, ethnographically, the global connections of the care chain by focusing on the 'sticky materiality of practical encounters' (Tsing 2005: xx). In *Friction* (2005), Tsing writes against powerful narratives of 'global motion' that describe 'the flow of goods, ideas, money and people as (...) pervasive and unimpeded'. Instead of uncritically assuming effortless global mobility and connection, Tsing suggests that we look at *friction* in global encounters (ibid.: 5). The migration of Indonesian domestic workers shows impressively

that migrants do not 'flow' (Xiang 2008: 175), that labour mobilisation always also involves moments of *im*mobilisation, and that globalisation has not brought about the demise of the nation-state. Quite the contrary: domestic worker migration from Indonesia is regulated by law and governed by a whole array of actors, state and non-state, within and beyond Indonesia (see also Lindquist 2017). Through a focus on the practical encounters of global connections, this book reveals the moral, social, economic and legal processes by which Indonesian village women are turned into maids – and ultimately sheds light on the making of a transnational working class, including the struggles, negotiations and ambivalences involved in the process.

Migrant temporalities

Focusing on the *process* of migration for domestic work involves taking into account not only a spatial but also a temporal dimension. Time is, indeed, a key element in the legal regulation of migration, as visas and residence permits always tend to be bound to a particular temporal limit (Cwerner 2001). Considering temporality as a key dimension of migration allows us to take seriously the fact that many migrants across the globe move temporarily. The *temporary* nature of labour migration in Asia is one of its most defining features (Xiang, Yeoh and Toyota 2013), and Indonesian migrant domestic workers are both encouraged to leave *and* to return to Indonesia at the end of their work contracts (Constable 2014). In the context of neoliberal globalisation, state-sanctioned, short-term contract-worker programmes like the ones sending Indonesian women abroad as domestic workers have become increasingly popular, especially in Asia (Rodriguez 2010; Xiang, Yeoh and Toyota 2013). As Robyn Rodriguez has argued, such temporary contract-worker programmes have, more and more, come to be seen by governments and international organisations 'as the solution to the contradictions between global labour demand and immigration restriction' (Rodriguez 2010, xxxiii). In these programmes, entry is predicated upon compulsory return, and most receiving states in Asia have implemented strict temporary migration regimes or so-called 'no return, no entry' policies (Xiang 2013: 2; Xiang 2014a). At the same time, migrants are also *kept* from returning *before* their work contracts expire; return is compulsory, but its timing is also strictly defined by the work contract. In the case

of Indonesian domestic workers in Malaysia, this means that they are bound to their employers for a standard period of two years, and in this context 'bonded labour' emerges as a useful lens through which to analyse processes of labour (im)mobilisation.

Because of temporary contract-worker programmes, most domestic workers from Indonesia do not settle abroad permanently; rather, they migrate again and again – or 'on and on', from one destination to the next (Liebelt 2008). The fact that most transnational domestic workers migrate 'again and again' mitigates some of the criticism which has been voiced of the anthropology of migration. It has been argued that there has been a tendency to over-emphasise the importance of 'mobility' (Hage 2005). While it is certainly questionable how much people who have permanently settled in a different country are shaped by this one-time move, the migrant women who are at the heart of this book usually migrate more than once in their lives, they are kept from permanently settling abroad, and the process of migration itself involves more and lasts significantly longer than simply taking a plane. The migration *journey* is made of various moments involving different temporalities (see Griffiths, Rogers and Anderson 2013). These include the time before departure with its sense of urgency; the long days of waiting in transit; the rushed transfer to foreign employers; getting through the two-years of the work contract; and the anticipation of return. Thus, time is an important aspect of the migrant experience. As far as the migrants themselves are concerned, there is also a right (and a wrong) time to migrate, and this is closely linked to women migrants' lifecycles.

The making of the maid

Open the website of any so-called 'maid agency' in Malaysia, Hong Kong or Singapore and you will see dozens of 'biodata' profiles showing portraits of young Indonesian women in complete uniforms sporting identical haircuts, holding their hands in front of them, and always smiling. Along with these carefully designed pictures, employers can read the women's profiles. The standardised photographs underline the focus on the labouring body and contribute to the idea that choosing a domestic worker is a matter of physical measurements – apart from these, it is suggested, domestic workers are all the same, and thus easily replaceable.

However, the process of becoming a maid does not take place overnight, and maid agencies emphasise the training that prospective domestic workers must undergo in their home country. The Malaysian maid agency Philimore Maids puts the following advertising on its website: 'We believe in developing quality maids. We train the maids in all household activities such as cooking, cleaning or ironing. Most important is mental training'.

From the training that Indonesian village women have to undergo in order to become 'quality maids' to contracts that produce a very specific employment relationship by forcing migrant women to live-in with their Malaysian employers, I focus on the process of what Lenore Lyons has called 'the making of the maid' (Lyons 2005). The migrant domestic workers at the heart of this book have grown up in an upland Javanese society, a society that is known to be less stratified than lowland Java (Hefner 1990). In Kalembah, as I have called their village, women have traditionally worked on the local tea plantation, they inherit as much land as their brothers, and after marriage husbands 'follow' their wives, in line with the norm of uxorilocal residence. Despite maid agencies' representations of Javanese women as naturally docile and submissive, there is nothing about these women that makes them 'naturally' suited for employment in domestic work. By revealing how much work is invested in the making of domestic workers who correspond to the (assumed) expectations of middle-class employers, I examine the implications of the recruitment and placement process on contemporary domestic labour in Asia.

Trafficking victims, criminal brokers

In 2014, *TIME* magazine named Erwiana Sulistyaningsih an 'icon' and one of its '100 Most Influential People in the World'. Erwiana Sulistyaningsih, a young Indonesian woman, started to work as a domestic worker in Hong Kong in 2013, where she suffered terrible mental and physical abuse at the hands of her employer. Images of her bruised body circulated worldwide, while Erwiana awaited her employer's trial to confront her with charges. Both within Indonesia and beyond, media representations of migrant domestic workers have focused on scandalous cases of physical and sexual abuse, circulating images of battered bodies both on- and offline (Ford 2003: 33; see also Ford 2002). Such images

represent women's bodies as 'passive objects of violence' (Andrijasevic 2007: 41), and ironically they are often used to exert tighter control over migrant women in the name of protection (ibid.). The figure of the victim is a depoliticised one, mobilised by different actors in a humanitarian discourse which calls for protection (Lindquist 2013: 137; Hess 2005). It is precisely the representation of migrant women as potential victims that is used to justify their confinement in camps in Indonesia, for example, as domestic-worker training is presented as a key strategy to combat women's abuse abroad (Robinson 2000).

As Annuska Derks has noted, in the public debate about scandalous cases of migrants' abuse concepts such as 'forced migration', 'slavery' and 'trafficking' have been widely – and often interchangeably – used to denote various degrees of coercion, exploitation, and violence (Derks 2010a). In contrast, I describe the workings of labour control through the mobilisation and immobilisation of labour at different stages of the migration process in ethnographic detail and trace the genealogies of the contemporary migration regime to colonial indentured labour (Killias 2010; see also Lê 2010). In particular, I show how Malaysian immigration laws back up terms and conditions of the work contract by providing employers with instruments of control otherwise not available (Derks 2010; Killias 2010). In contrast to the modernist assumption that contracts *necessarily* bring about better working conditions for women in paid domestic service (Mendez 1998), I thus show how contracts are used to immobilise and subordinate labour (Killias 2010; see also Steinberg 2003; Lan 2007). In doing this, I develop a critical understanding of the control of mobility and its discursive legitimisation which draws on insights from critical migration studies (e.g. De Genova, Mezzadra & Pickles 2015). In other words, I do not seek to claim that instances of abuse and exploitation do not occur, or that they are not worthy of our attention. Rather, and in line with Sabine Hess (2005: 13), I believe that the ubiquity of images focusing on extreme cases of physical and sexual abuse tends to be instrumentalised to legitimise the control of migrant women, and to trivialise the power relations involved in the 'normal', everyday labour arrangements of migrant domestic workers.

In public debates about migration, the figure of the migrant victim is often opposed to another familiar trope which deserves to be prob-

lematised, namely the trope of the 'unscrupulous' broker. As Adam McKeown (2012) has shown, the criminalisation of the figure of the broker has a long history, and it has ultimately contributed to obscuring actual practices of labour brokerage, which remain little understood in contemporary processes of migration. By zooming in on different moments of Indonesian women's labour migration, I explore practices and discourses of brokerage and also show how some migrants get involved in brokerage themselves, thereby challenging the common distinction between the 'migrant victim' and the 'criminal broker'.

Indonesian domestic workers in Malaysia

Some of the most high profile cases of abuses of Indonesian domestic workers have taken place in neighbouring Malaysia, and as a consequence, the 'maid issue' has become a highly political, publicly debated topic (Chin 2008; Elias 2013; Killias 2014). Malaysia, one of the main labour-receiving countries in Asia, has long been and still is one of the main destinations for Indonesian domestic workers. While migration for domestic work is a relatively new trend, there is a long history of exchange and contact between the contemporary nation-states of Indonesia and Malaysia, and migratory movements between the two states date back at least five centuries (Hugo 2007).

Over the last ten years, there have been between 250,000 and 350,000 Indonesian domestic workers employed in the most intimate, well-guarded spaces of middle-class Malaysian families – namely, private homes. Their presence has provoked deep-seated anxieties; the Indonesian domestic worker cooks, eats and often sleeps next to the children of her employers, the children she looks after call her *bibi* (auntie), and she refers to them as being 'like her own' (*seperti anak sendiri*). At the same time, she is a working class, foreign national, and hers is only a temporary presence – even if temporary can mean for years. Domestic worker migration brings women of different class and national backgrounds into the private homes and families of Malaysian citizens. As Sara Dickey has argued, domestic service is characterised by a constant paradox of intimacy and distance, which comes about because of 'an intimacy based on the worker's closeness to the family and a distance based on class and other hierarchies' (Dickey 2000: 469). In Malaysia, the *proximity* of the Indonesian domestic worker to the family she works for is evidenced by daily physical coexistence,

while the *distance* is more and more framed in terms of a national divide between Indonesia and Malaysia. Indeed, recent territorial disputes, as well as clashes over the demarcation of national cultural heritage, illustrate that, in more recent years, a 'widening gulf' (Liow 2005: 169) has characterised the relationship between the two states. Concurrently, Indonesian migrant workers have increasingly been portrayed as foreign 'aliens' in Malaysian public discourse (Spaan, van Naerssen and Kohl 2002). In this context, the presence of Indonesian domestic workers looking after the children of Malaysian families has been problematised more and more (see Killias 2014). In Indonesia, too, the question of whether the state should encourage its citizens to seek work in neighbouring Malaysia has become a hotly debated political issue, leading to temporary bans on domestic worker migration to Malaysia.

By exploring domestic work arrangements between Malaysian madams and Indonesian maids, this book complicates our understanding of the inequalities that exist *between* women in paid domestic service. As Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1992) has made clear in a widely cited article, gender is *not* 'the sole basis for assigning reproductive labour' (1992: 2); interlocking systems of oppression of gender, race, and class construct certain workers as 'naturally' suited for domestic work. In Malaysia, Indonesian women are constructed as 'maids' both vis-à-vis Malaysian employers and vis-à-vis migrant domestic workers of other nationalities in Malaysia. Hence, Indonesian women's domestic labour in Malaysian households allows us to explore 'inequalities *among* women in the global South' (Lan 2006: 4, emphasis mine).

By focusing on domestic worker migration within Asia, this book de-centres conventional – and even 'critical' – migration studies, since much of the theoretical debate in migration scholarship has developed out of a focus on migration to Europe and North America (De Genova, Mezzadra and Pickles 2015: 60).

Following the maid: stages and sites

This book is based on 14 months of 'multi-sited' (Marcus 1995) ethnographic fieldwork. The main part of my fieldwork took place between August 2006 and August 2009, and I returned for shorter visits in 2013, 2014 and 2016. When not stated otherwise, the ethnographic material presented in this book refers to the period between 2006 and 2009.

Below I introduce some of the main stages and sites of ethnographic inquiry on which this book is based, and I reflect on the negotiation of my position as ethnographer as I sought to follow the care chain.

My fieldwork started in the village in upland north Central Java which I have called Kalembah. In Kalembah, I spoke to return migrants, to women who aspired to work abroad, to families who had a relative working abroad, to local brokers – and also to villagers who were not directly involved in migration. Karina Ayu Rarasasri Gumilang, a graduate from Gadjah Mada University, provided me with valuable research assistance during some of these periods of fieldwork in the village and accompanied me on two of my research trips to Jakarta. Hoo Chew Ping, a graduate from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, assisted me with interviews in Hokkien during fieldwork in Malaysia at a later stage.

In the course of fieldwork in the village, sites other than the ones I had initially been thinking of, namely the points of 'departure' and 'arrival' of these women's labour migration, proved to be important as well. I became especially interested in the places where women stopped on their way to Malaysia, particularly the camps where they were kept and trained for several months before being sent abroad. Along with the identification of such potentially interesting sites of research came the awareness that mobile research required additional negotiation and was logistically not always easy to organise, not least because of research permits that were specifically linked to particular places. The main difficulty, however, came from the fact that the care chain was organised around a series of disjunctures, and that therefore, by travelling *between* sites, I transgressed boundaries.

An example of such a difficult boundary transgression was my visit to a recruitment agency in Jakarta. I had tried for months to convince Supomo, one of Kalembah's most successful brokers, to take me to the recruitment agency for which he recruited workers. Every time I asked him about it, he seemed reluctant. Only after a year, and after having met me several times, did he agree to introduce me to the director of the agency in Jakarta. We agreed to meet directly in Jakarta. A taxi dropped my research assistant Karina and me off in front of a big fence that indicated the entrance to the agency. When we had passed through the fence, we found ourselves in a vast, leafy square. Many cars and motorcycles were parked in the square, and men in leather jackets stood

around, smoking. Others were sitting at small tables under the patio of the main building, having coffee or gambling. There was no other woman around, and all eyes were on us. Supomo saw us coming and waved to us. He then introduced us to an assistant of the director, and invited us to sit down in a small office. While Supomo was sitting on a chair behind us, visibly anxious and ill at ease, the director's assistant welcomed us by telling us that he had many friends with the police, and that now that he had my name card, he could track me down, wherever I was. Sitting in front of this man, I started to understand why Supomo had been so hesitant about introducing me to this agency. While he was an influential man back in Kalembah, it became increasingly clear that he didn't have much to say at the recruitment agency's main office in Jakarta, and the management obviously wanted to maintain tight control over the circulation of information.

Later on, we met with the director of the agency himself. Karina, a Muslim, had to swear before Allah that we were indeed scholars and not some 'filthy NGO activists'. The director then told us that we were very welcome to go to the training camp and speak to the workers. We explained that we especially wanted to meet Nastiti from Kalembah, who was residing at the camp at that time. We had to walk about ten minutes from the central office to reach the camp, situated even further away from the main road. When we arrived at the camp, we were met with intense inhospitality. Despite the director's promises, we were not allowed to enter the living quarters of the workers and could only see the noisy, crowded studying area, where some women were cooking in one corner while others were sitting on the ground and studying Arabic. A male teacher supervised them.

Nastiti and some other women from the area of Pekalongan were called to the front of the camp through a loudspeaker: 'Maids from Pekalongan to the front *now!*' the camp overseer screamed into the microphone. The women arrived, and we asked whether we could talk in one of the offices. The camp overseer reluctantly allowed us to do so, but she watched us from the window and asked every few minutes whether we were done. Years later, I learnt from Nastiti, when we finally met again in Kalembah after she had come back from Saudi Arabia, that the overseer had required one of the workers who attended this spontaneous meeting to secretly record our conversation with a mobile phone,

and staff of the agency later on listened to the audio record. Since the context of intense surveillance had made it impossible for us to have any meaningful conversation, we did not talk much and, aware that they were being watched, none of the workers said anything about the agency that could have harmed them.

The experience of being so closely monitored as researchers made the level of seclusion that women experience while staying in recruitment camps more palpable to us. Furthermore, the management's anxiety to keep absolute control over what information left its premises revealed the fact that it was acutely aware of the scandalising media reports that had revealed appalling living conditions in recruitment camps. Such media reports had contributed to discrediting recruitment agencies in Indonesian public opinion, and in some cases they had had direct consequences for the management of recruitment agencies portrayed in the reports – hence the desire to control the circulation of information.

At a later stage of my research, I was able to carry out research in three additional recruitment agencies, and I stayed in two training camps, carrying out ethnographic fieldwork for several weeks. The fact that these other recruitment agencies granted me access can be explained by the fact that, in each case, I was introduced by personal acquaintances of the management. Not surprisingly, the social status of the person who connected me to an agent was absolutely key in determining the kind of access I was allowed. Through these experiences, I came to realise that brokers like Supomo had little to say in recruitment agencies. Even if people look up to a broker in his village, in Jakarta he becomes just one among so many other *calo*.[5]

During several months of following workers, brokers, and recruitment agents, I carried out participant observation in a variety of sites: I picked tea leaves on the plantation, talked to return migrants, travelled in brokers' cars, attended domestic worker trainings, waited in the corridors of government offices, and fought against bed bugs in the dormitories of training camps.

Once I went back to Kalembah, I started to tell people about my plan to go to Malaysia. I told villagers that I would like to meet their relatives who were working there as domestic workers. Many of my informants were afraid that my visit to Malaysia might provoke the anger of their

5. A *calo* is a rather pejorative term for 'broker' (see Lindquist 2009b).

Figure 3: Mega and her friends in front of the KLCC (Petronas) towers in downtown Kuala Lumpur. Photo courtesy of Mega.

relative's employer, a fear that was not completely without reason, as we will see below. However, after some initial hesitation, those who had family in Malaysia were willing to help me to get in touch with their relatives.

It then turned out that many families did not have any information about where their relative was staying in Malaysia or how she could be contacted, and it required a lot of time to get together addresses or phone numbers. Some had not heard anything from their migrant daughters or wives since the day they had departed, and started to hope that I would be able to find these women and bring back good news. It was a difficult balancing act to acquire information while trying not to create expectations that I could not fulfil. A few families had pictures and letters from their relatives abroad, which they showed me. I especially remember one photograph showing the woman I have called Mega, in her thirties, together with three other Indonesian women. They were posing in front of the famous KLCC towers in Kuala Lumpur, wearing trendy clothes and make-up. They seemed to be having a good time, enjoying an afternoon of shopping in the global city.

After my arrival in Malaysia, I tried to contact the 15 workers about whom I had been able to get some information, among them Mega. Since Indonesian domestic workers in Malaysia are required by law to live-in with their employers (Chin 1998: 142), the task of contacting employers and negotiating a meeting with them and/or their employees was far from easy. I had to adapt to a completely new context of doing research. People had little time and were apprehensive about letting me into their homes; they required formal documents such as letters of support from the local university before even considering the matter. In short, it was a very different situation from the one I had experienced in Kalembah, and it required a renegotiation of my role as ethnographer. As George Marcus put it, '[i]n practice, multi-sited fieldwork is ... always conducted with a keen awareness of being within the landscape, and as the landscape changes across sites, the identity of the ethnographer requires renegotiation' (Marcus 1995: 112).

Mega, the woman in the photograph mentioned earlier, was on my list of contacts. I was able to call her directly, as she had a mobile phone, and during our conversation she told me that we could meet anywhere, but preferably outside of her employer's place. We agreed to meet in a shopping mall in Kuala Lumpur. On the day of our appointment, it was only thanks to an excellent taxi driver that I eventually managed to find that particular shopping mall, which turned out, in fact, to be a small, local grocery store. The setting for our appointment surprised me somewhat at first, but later on I understood that in the years Mega had been working for her employer, she had simply never gone out on her own any further than that grocery store, which was situated about 20 metres from her employer's home.

When Mega and I met, she was extremely excited and urged me to walk quickly to a nearby bus stop where we could sit. There she asked me about the pictures that I had taken of her daughter, and I gave them to her. She started crying when she looked at the image of her ten-year-old girl in school uniform. She told me that the last time she had seen her, during a short visit home, her daughter had refused to talk to her for days. Mega called home about once a month, and her daughter would regularly ask her why she didn't want to come back. We were still sitting at the bus stop and had only been talking for a few minutes when Mega explained that she had to hurry home to her employer. 'I told her that I

Figure 4: Daughter (in school uniform) and extended family of Mega in Kalembah. Photo: Olivia Killias.

needed to buy some fruit in the local grocery store, so I can't stay very long; otherwise she will get suspicious'.

This encounter with Mega was very different from what the photograph she had sent back home suggested, and from what she might have been telling friends and family back home, namely that she had many Indonesian friends in Kuala Lumpur and that she was leading a fairly independent life as a domestic worker in Malaysia, owning a mobile phone and spending afternoons shopping in the city. In reality, she had been to the KLCC towers, accompanied by her employer, three or four times over several years, and the other women in the picture were the domestic workers of her employer's friends. Mega was mostly working in isolation in her employer's home. At the same time, in Mega's eyes, her situation was good enough; although she clearly did not lead a life of shopping in the global city, she owned a mobile phone and had a good working relationship with her employer. Moreover, when her employer's friends or relatives came for dinner from time to time, they brought their Indonesian domestic workers along. Mega cherished these opportunities for socialising with

fellow Indonesian women: 'We understand each other. Sometimes, working as a maid can make you stress out, or it can get very boring. But among ourselves, we understand each other. That's why we are able to continue.' For all these reasons, Mega had agreed to renew her two-year contract several times. She did not want to return to Java just yet.

Even though it was the first time we had met and our encounter only lasted a few minutes, Mega talked very openly to me about her life as a migrant. After our encounter at the bus stop, she often called me to chat. I had similar experiences with the other women from the village with whom I was able to talk in Malaysia; somehow trust was established almost instantly, based on the fact that I had gone to their villages, that I had met their families, and that I had brought along pictures that attested to what I was saying. As Ulf Hannerz put it, 'to some extent, personalising encounters in the modern, multi-sited field comes not so much from deepening particular interactions as from the identification of common acquaintances – from placing the ethnographers in the translocal network of relationships' (Hannerz 2003).

When interacting with the Malaysian employers of the women originating from Kalembah, I could not make use of such prior common acquaintances. Instead, my familiarity with their workers' families and friends back on Java provoked suspicion and incredulity. I realised that this was partly related to the fact that the care chain was based on the isolation of individual domestic workers. From the very moment a woman entered a recruitment agency in Jakarta, she was deliberately cut off from her former social networks, and the phone numbers of kin and friends in Malaysia were confiscated. Later on, in Malaysia, maid agencies claimed that a worker's contact with other Indonesians in Malaysia was a source of bad influence and increased the chances that she would run away. Hence, by showing up at employers' doors with pictures of their maids' family in hand, I connected two sites, those of 'home' and 'work', which had been deliberately disconnected. In that context, the presence of the mobile ethnographer who had been both 'here' and 'there' represented a potential threat; nobody was supposed to make this 'link' between the home back in Indonesia and the workplace here in Malaysia.

Subsequently, not all of the employers I contacted agreed to meet me or to let me meet their employees. I have done interviews with employers standing in front of their house fence, without being allowed even to see

their domestic worker. I have talked to women from a distance of about 15 metres because they were locked in their employer's house and could only speak through a small window while I was standing on the other side of the high fence surrounding the house. Two women from Kalembah were working practically next door to each other in Kuala Lumpur, but neither of them had been aware of this fact for two entire years.

In short, multi-sited fieldwork – including over a hundred qualitative interviews that were part of it – has allowed me to recognise that transnational domestic labour is organised along a chain with different stages, sites and actors involved, and that it is all more complex than a simple 'maid-madam' relationship. Finally, travelling back to Java at the end of my fieldwork also allowed me to hear how return migrants remembered their years of work abroad. The implications of these experiences on their lives in the village became clearer, and so did the reasons why so many women decided to migrate again.

Structure of the book

The structure of the book roughly follows the sites and stages of the migration process, each chapter being dedicated to a particular 'moment' of Indonesian women's journeys as domestic workers.

In Chapter 1, 'The Indonesian migration regime', Indonesia's brokerage of short-term contract labour to wealthier parts of Asia and the Middle East is considered in the context of a longer history of labour mobilisation, and in particular colonial indentured labour. Ethnographically grounded in pre-departure briefings taught by state bureaucrats, which are compulsory for all migrants before they can leave Indonesia, the chapter reveals the ambivalence of state bureaucrats towards the transnational migration of women. On the one hand, the frequent cases of abuse portrayed in the national media have triggered heated debates about the legitimacy of the state's encouragement of overseas labour migration, and have led to a stark politicisation of the state's labour export policy and the temporary halt of emigration to certain destinations. On the other hand, however, pre-departure briefings frame migration as central to national development (Killias 2012; see also Chan 2014). This discourse needs to be seen in the context of a broader ideology of improvement, which has been skilfully analysed by Tania Li (2007; see also C. Jones 2010; Rudnyckyj 2010). Migrant women are instructed about their work

contracts abroad, but also about the right way to educate their children or to spend their remittances. These remittances are framed by state bureaucrats as a means to develop Indonesia, still an 'underdeveloped' country in the eyes of its own elite, so that it will one day join the ranks of the 'developed world' – represented, among others, by the countries that Indonesian women travel to in order to work.

Next, in Chapter 2, 'Leaving the tea fields', I introduce the Javanese village of Kalembah in upland Central Java and discuss how and why women leave the tea fields of the local plantation for greener pastures. The gendered requirements of the global labour market have profoundly affected the migration patterns of villagers in Kalembah: women migrate in much larger numbers than men. This empirical fact is reflected in different migration fees for men and for women, and in gendered forms of indebtedness (Lindquist 2010). While many women leave for work beyond the village, there is a right time to leave, and the timing of migration is intimately related to women's lifecycles. Young, unmarried women leave the village 'in search of adventure', as they say, and many find temporary jobs in paid domestic service on Java. These forms of internal migration have become so dominant in Kalembah that they can be read as rites of passage into female adulthood. Women are socially considered 'ready' to travel abroad once they have married and given birth to their first child. As such, this chapter introduces migration not only as a spatial but also as a temporal phenomenon.

In Chapter 3, 'On the road: Male realms of brokerage', I show how gendered ideals about mobility have enabled men to act as brokers for domestic worker migration. Most agencies recruiting women for overseas employment are situated in Jakarta. For the large majority of migrants from Java, the road to Riyadh or Kuala Lumpur must pass through Jakarta or some other major Indonesian city. Consequently, transnational migration involves an initial *internal* migration, from rural areas in Indonesia to the main interaction nodes of the Indonesian migration industry – the training camps of recruitment agencies, the special migrant-worker health centres, the certification agencies, the government's pre-departure briefings, and the embassies of destination countries. Yet the social inappropriateness of a woman travelling unescorted into the unknown prevents women from leaving their villages alone (Spaan 1994: 103). Male brokers, by contrast, are essentially mobile and they connect women willing to leave the village

with recruitment agencies in cities such as Semarang and Jakarta. Brokers 'protect' women throughout this internal migration and are hence essential actors in labour migration (Lindquist 2009b; 2010; 2015; 2017).

In Chapter 4, 'At camp: Maids in the making', I follow migrant women into the training camps of commercial recruitment agencies and describe how Indonesian women are trained to become maids in liminal spaces that have all defining features of 'total institutions' (Goffman 1961). Often housed in former hospitals or schools, surrounded by high fences and barbed wire and guarded by male security staff, training camps effectively separate women from their former social networks and, more generally, from their former lives. Explicitly designed to 'train' women for employment in paid domestic service abroad, camps are experienced as spaces of confinement, but also of liminal transformation: immobilisation in these camps is, by definition, temporary, and life in the camp also provides women with moments of sociability and friendship. By zooming in on camps as total institutions, and more specifically on moments of transition within the camp, I show that training camps are also sites of ambiguity and contestation.

In Chapter 5, 'Doors closed: Indonesian domestic workers in Malaysia', I analyse why the appearance of the anthropologist at the doors of middle-class Malaysian employers disturbs the distinction between 'home' and 'work' that is produced in the migration process, among other things by the interventions of so-called 'maid agents'. I relate the extreme control that employers exert over the mobility of Indonesian domestic workers and the moral panics surrounding 'runaway maids' to the broader labour migration regime and its continuities with colonial indentured labour. In particular, the illegalisation of domestic workers who run away from their employers reveals how immigration laws back up the work contract and function as instruments of labour control: if her work permit gets cancelled, the domestic worker loses the right to reside in Malaysia. Discussing how these policies fit into the broader historical transformation of paid domestic service in Malaysia, I argue that, in this context, the practices of experienced migrants immigrating 'illegally' in order to circumvent the 'legal' regime of contract labour migration can be interpreted as an act of resistance.[6]

6. Following De Genova (2002: 420), I deploy quotes in order to 'denaturalise the reification' of the distinction between 'legal' and 'illegal' wherever these terms modify 'migration' or 'migrants'.

In Chapter 6, 'Return – and new departures', I focus on the fact that, both for the women involved and for their close kin, labour migration is but a temporary activity. Indonesian domestic workers are both socially expected and legally required to return 'home' to their villages after their contracts abroad expire. The ideology of return shapes the transnational ties between migrant women abroad and their families who remain in the village, and women are expected to prepare their return as soon as they have left. Modern, brick houses materialise a migrant's will to return in contexts where transnational ties are few and fragile. At the same time, I problematise 'return' by showing how it is sometimes delayed and contested by women who challenge their belonging 'back to Java' (see also Constable 1999; 2014; Bach 2013). In fact, many return migrants remain in the village only temporarily, seeking new employment, often in new foreign destinations. Moving across countries as temporary contract domestic workers, with no possibility of claiming permanent residence anywhere, these women instead become 'permanently circular' (Parreñas 2010: 306; see also Constable 2014).

CHAPTER 1

The Indonesian Migration Regime

Colonial legacies and postcolonial transformations

Every morning, in front of the tall, grey building housing the National Board for the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Overseas Workers (BNP2TKI) in East Jakarta, dozens of small buses owned by private labour recruitment agencies stop to drop off prospective migrant workers for the compulsory one-day pre-departure briefing organised by the Indonesian government. Hundreds of migrants, the overwhelming majority of whom are women migrating as domestic workers, gather in classes according to their country of destination. Some are wearing black veils and long black dresses, others sport short hair and white shirts displaying the name and the logo of their recruitment agency. Their uniforms have been made to fit the 'fashion' of their destination countries, be it Saudi Arabia, Malaysia or Taiwan.

During the pre-departure training, prospective migrant workers are instructed on four different subjects by instructors from the BNP2TKI. The subjects taught are 'personality and spirituality' (*kepribadian dan kerohanian*); 'working conditions' (*kondisi kerja*); 'HIV AIDS, sexual diseases and trafficking' (*HIV Aids, penyakit menular seksual dan trafficking*); and 'the work contract' (*kontrak kerja*). Coming from all over Indonesia, the women (and a few men) attending the pre-departure briefing are spending their last days in the country before flying abroad. At this point, they have been trained by a private recruitment agency, chosen by a foreign employer, their documents have been processed and their flight tickets have been booked.

Rina was one of the instructors of the programme when I encountered it. An Indonesian state bureaucrat in her early forties, she had been working for the government for several years, and she was a motivated

and hard-working officer. She was convinced that transnational labour migration could help many Indonesians to better their lives. She was firmly decided, in her position as a member of the BNP2TKI, to do her best to help migrants achieve this goal. But what does a 'better' life mean? In one of the classes preparing prospective migrant workers for employment in Malaysia, this is the very question that Rina asked her audience:

> What would you call a successful TKI (Indonesian Overseas Worker)? Would it be the one who brings back a lot of money and sports a funky hairstyle? No. So what does success (*sukses*) mean? You all say: mum, pray for me so that I can become a successful TKI. But what is success like? Bring back a lot of money, help our parents, build a house ... Maybe we need to agree on what success really means first – it means you have finished your contracts (*finish kontrak*)! If you finish your contracts, you will not encounter any problems with your employer. You know what your work is, your wages are paid according to your contracts, you have no problems with the law of your destination country. This is what it means to finish your contract. The first criterion to define whether someone has succeeded overseas is the contract.

Rina paused for a moment and looked around. She was a gifted speaker, and she had managed to attract her audience's attention. 42 women and five men were attending her class, all wearing short haircuts and white shirts. Everyone was listening in rapt attention. She continued:

> I want to share a story with you that may warm your hearts. This is the story of Hani. I met Hani in this very place, at a pre-departure briefing. She was already old, 49 years old. I asked her why she still wanted to go abroad at that age. She ended up telling me her story. She used to be a peasant before registering as a TKW (Female Indonesian Overseas Worker). Her husband worked as a day-labourer (*serabutan*). Hani and her husband had only enjoyed primary-school education. They had four children, two girls and two boys. Then Hani's husband died. He had cancer. Before dying, he told her his last wish: that his children should get a good education so that they could have a better life. Hani knew that she had to respect his last wish, otherwise her husband would not be able to rest in peace. So she tried to figure out how she could fulfil his last wish. She did not even have enough money to buy food for her kids. So she decided to leave. She became a TKW and went to work in the Middle East for 14 years. I was shocked: 14 years! But guess what:

> Hani's oldest child has successfully studied economics at the University of Indonesia ... and is working in a company by now.
>
> I thought: I need to learn from Hani's story. A woman with only primary-school education left her four children with no one to look after them, so that she could become a domestic worker ... I really could not believe what I heard. I try to discipline my kids every single day so that they study, but it is so difficult. How can we be good parents? There is only one sincere answer to this question: do not try to answer this question now. Try to imagine how much Hani sweated while working, how many tears she cried for her children in 14 years. There was one time when one of Hani's kids had to be hospitalised while she was working abroad. He was in a critical condition, but Hani could not return to Indonesia. She was crying while she told me this story; at the time, she could not eat, not even one bowl of rice, she said. She could only cry, because she wanted to give her children everything. She thought to herself that if her son survived, she would go back to Indonesia after the end of her contract. And she did.
>
> When I met Hani, I told her: 'But you have earned enough money now, so why do you want to leave again?' She replied: 'Well, I want to see my other child'. I was shocked: 'What other child?' It turned out that during the time that she had worked in Saudi Arabia, one of her employer's children got very fond of Hani. After the death of Hani's employer, this child treated Hani as if she were her own mother.
>
> So whatever the kind of work you do, if you do it with sincerity (*dengan tulus*), it will be good. In the end, what I want to tell you is this: if you want to change your life (*mengubah hidup*), be aware that you are not limited by your educational background, nor by the kind of work that you do, as long as it's *halal*. And you will not be limited by what other people say. God will stand by you.
>
> You can decide whether we will meet again in this classroom ten years from now. You can also decide to become a second Hani. It's your choice. I hope that Hani's story has touched your hearts and minds.

Rina's audience was clearly moved by the sacrificial story of Hani, who had migrated for the sake of her children's future. Hani had improved the lives of her children, her family, and by extension, she had contributed to the development of the Indonesian nation.

I have chosen to start this chapter with Rina's speech because it shows that the emigration of Indonesian women and men is encouraged by a well-institutionalised regime of national labour export, and two of

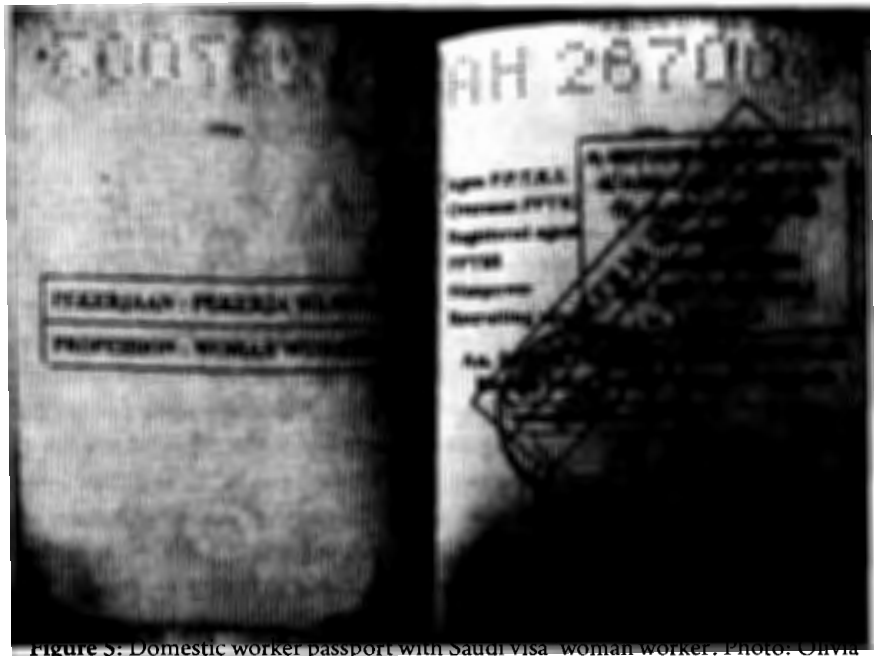

Figure 5: Domestic worker passport with Saudi visa 'woman worker'. Photo: Olivia Killias.

its most defining features are its *contractual* and its *temporary* nature. Rina's emphasis on the contract as the most important key to success underlines these two aspects of domestic worker migration from Indonesia. At the same time, Rina also addressed some of the contradictions and ambiguities that characterise public accounts of Indonesian women's transnational labour migration: in order to migrate overseas, many women leave behind families and children – and, arguably, the reproduction of the Indonesian nation. This circumstance, and cases of abuse regularly portrayed in the media, have led to repeated public outcries and the temporary halting of emigration to certain countries. By connecting the state's emphasis on legal contract labour migration with a mother's sacrifice for her children, Rina's talk illustrates ongoing shifts in the conceptualisation of migration in Indonesia today.

The Indonesian state's efforts to regularise labour emigration need to be viewed in relation to destination countries' increasingly stringent immigration policies. Indonesian workers are sent abroad under a regime of *temporary* contract labour migration, and return to Indonesia

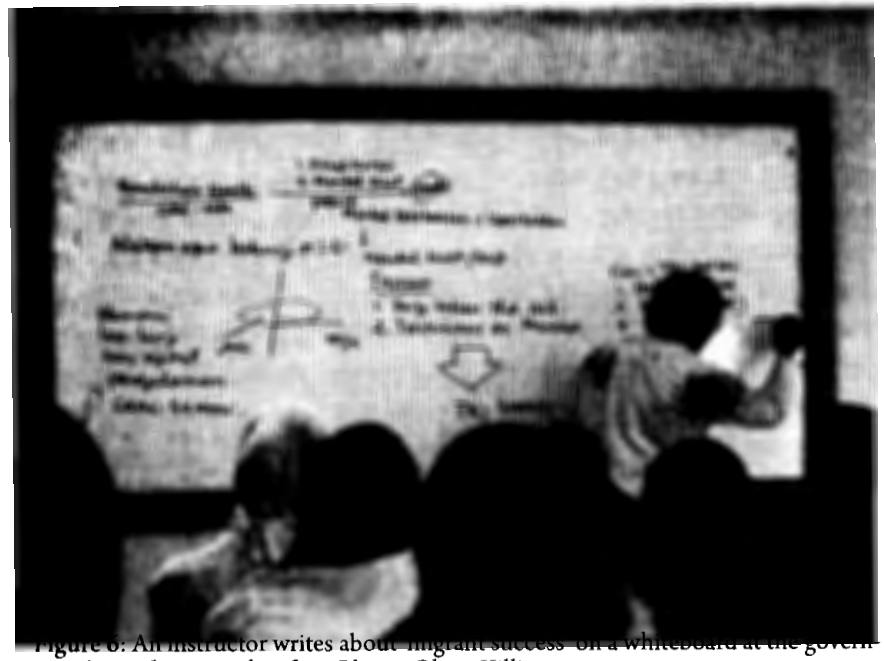

Figure 6: An instructor writes about 'migrant success' on a whiteboard at the government's pre-departure briefing. Photo: Olivia Killias.

is a key dimension of it (Xiang, Yeoh and Toyota 2013). Such a regime of contract labour migration rests on the premise that workers will work temporarily and 'come back home as soon as their jobs are done' (Rodriguez 2010). Guaranteeing that workers respect their contracts, remain 'legal' and come back after their two-year terms in destination countries has thus become a priority for state officials in sending countries. In her ethnography of the 'migrant bureaucracy' in the Philippines, Rodriguez has defined state power in the context of transnational migration as the state's monopoly over the issuing of documents required for migration, such as skills certificates or police clearances (Rodriguez 2010: 48–49). This 'authorising power' (ibid.: 42) also plays a key role in the Indonesian context, and with growing state involvement in the brokerage of workers for the global labour market, the legal dimension of migration becomes increasingly important (see also Palmer 2016).

In this chapter, I start by historicising the Indonesian state's politics of labour export, and I trace the genealogy of the current labour migration regime back to colonial indentured labour. Importantly, the contempo-

rary 'coolie' is not a male plantation worker, but a female domestic worker, and the fact that it is mostly women who migrate for jobs overseas has consequences for the type of state interventions considered legitimate. In the second part of the chapter, I describe the state bureaucracy's ambivalent discourse on Indonesian women's transnational labour migration and explore the tensions within it, by focusing on encounters between Indonesian state bureaucrats and migrant workers in pre-departure briefings. These briefings are spaces of encounter in which state bureaucrats bring their expertise to bear on and directly interact with prospective migrant workers.[1] In the briefings, Indonesian women are encouraged to contribute to and participate in development in post-authoritarian Indonesia.

Before continuing, it is important to note that I do not understand 'the state' as a unified centre of power with one, clearly defined will. Wayne Palmer has shown that within the Indonesian state bureaucracy different departments compete with each other for political influence in the realms of labour brokerage, making it clear that the state consists of multiple actors with diverging interests (Palmer 2016). The term migration *regime* captures these spaces of conflict, and it also points to the increasing interdependence between nation-states and various non-state actors, such as private recruitment and placement agencies, international organisations and non-governmental organisations, in the governing of global migration (Düvell 2002). As Sabine Hess has argued, focusing on a migration *regime* has the advantage that it

> makes it possible to include a multitude of actors whose practices relate to each other but are not ordered in the form of a central logic or rationality; that means to speak of a 'regime' makes it possible to understand regulation as an effect of social practices and not presuppose it in a functionalist manner. Rather, the concept of 'regime' implies a space of conflict and negotiation. (Hess 2012: 430)

I have thus chosen to speak of the Indonesian migration regime, because it allows me to point to the political and shifting nature of the governing of migration (Liebelt, 2011: 2; see also Dinkelaker 2013).

1. Rachel Silvey (2007) has described the special migrant airport terminal in Jakarta as another site of encounter between state bureaucrats and migrant domestic workers.

The colonial genealogies of labour brokerage

Indonesia has become one of the main labour-sending countries in Asia. Roughly between 60 and 80 percent of the migrant workers who have left Indonesia since the 1980s through the 'legal', state-sanctioned migration regime have been women, and more than 80 percent of these women have been employed overseas as domestic workers. While the Indonesian state has sought to increase the number of 'formal' workers – mostly men – and to simultaneously reduce the numbers of 'informal' workers being sent abroad, there are currently still over 100,000 Indonesian women who migrate abroad for a job in paid domestic service every year, a number which is likely to increase considerably again once the moratorium on the sending of Indonesian workers to Saudi Arabia, in place since 2011, will be lifted.[2] Through the remittances sent back each year, the importance of domestic worker migration for the Indonesian economy has become incontestable; the figure of the migrant domestic worker has become a key figure of neoliberal globalisation in Indonesia, and migrants are celebrated as the 'heroes of foreign-exchange earnings' (*pahlawan devisa negara*).

The Indonesian state's politics of 'labour brokerage' (Rodriguez 2010) have to be understood in the broader context of contemporary neoliberal globalisation (Sassen 2003). As Saskia Sassen has argued, neoliberal globalisation has brought about a new demand for labour in the upper and the lower circuits of global capital, and has given rise to what she has called 'the resurgence of the "serving class" in contemporary high-income households and neighbourhoods' (Sassen 2003: 262). This 'serving class' mostly consists of migrant women: women, in other words, 'so often discounted as valueless economic actors, are crucial to building new economies and expanding existing ones' (Sassen 2003: 256).

Asian countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines or Sri Lanka have been competing in providing workers for the lower circuits of global capital by institutionalising regimes of labour brokerage for the last

2. The moratorium was put into place after an Indonesian domestic worker was beheaded after having been sentenced to death for killing her abusive employer. Ever since, agents have continued to send migrant workers to Saudi Arabia illegally; in the light of this, at the time of writing, pressure on the government to lift the ban has been increasing (*Republika*, 15 October 2017).

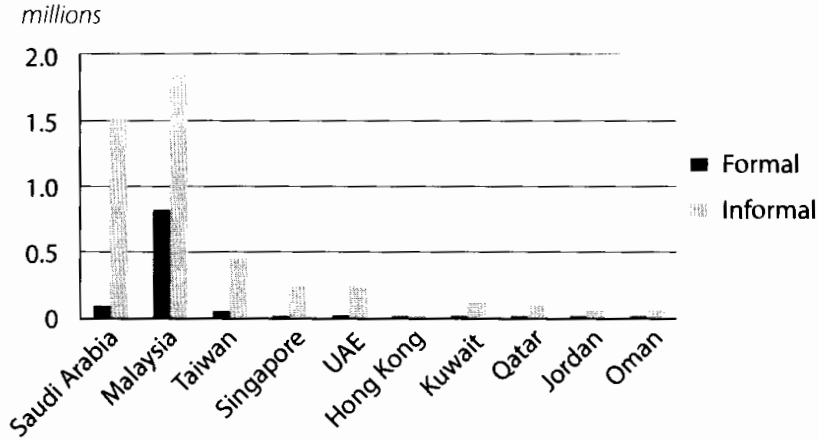

Figure 7: Labour emigration from Indonesia to the ten most important destination countries during the main period of fieldwork (2006–2012), by sector (formal/informal).

Note: No comparable statistics were available for the period after 2012. The informal sector by and large corresponds to paid domestic service.

four or five decades, with the Philippines emerging as a particularly extreme case which has established itself as a 'model' labour brokerage state. While uneven economic development between countries clearly determines migration in important ways – wage differentials between Indonesia and Malaysia have ranged from three to ten times, for instance (Hugo 1993) – such wage differentials do not explain why certain countries (like Indonesia and the Philippines) promote labour emigration more than others. Not all poorer countries in Southeast Asia have promoted labour emigration to the same degree, and 'it is not the poorest countries that supply the most migrants ... [hence] wage differentials are a necessary condition but not a sufficient condition for international migration' (Massey et al. 1998: 175; Goss and Lindquist 1995).

The politics of labour brokerage in countries such as Indonesia have resulted from export-oriented economies that most former colonies have inherited from colonial exploitation. Christine Chin has pointed out that after the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference former colonies were encouraged to adopt export-oriented economies in the name of 'development' (Chin 1998: 95). Most of these newly independent states emerged from colonialism with economies geared towards the export of

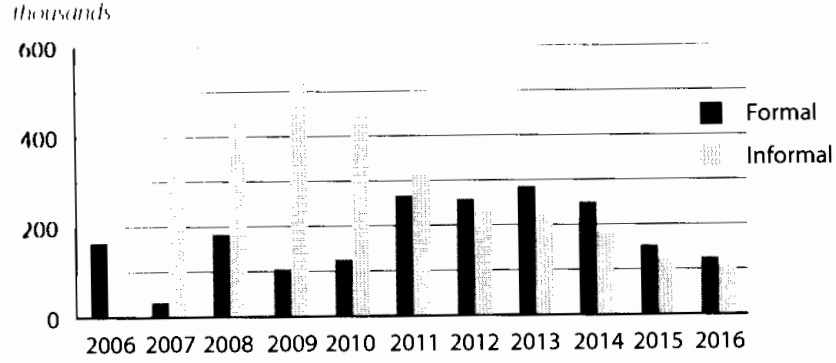

Figure 8: Labour emigration from Indonesia by sector (2006–2016).

Note: The decrease in numbers of 'informal' workers (i.e. domestic workers) sent abroad is crucially related to the ban on the sending of migrants to Saudi Arabia, in place since 2011.

natural resources such as tin and rubber (ibid.). Yet natural resources are much more vulnerable to price fluctuation than manufactured goods, and are heavily affected by the economic stability of formerly colonised states (Chin 1998: 96). It is in this context that transnational labour migration was increasingly promoted by states such as the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. In this context, what has been termed 'labour brokerage' emerges as a state policy tied both to national development and global competitiveness. As Rodriguez puts it for the case of the Philippines:

> Labour brokerage is a neoliberal strategy that is comprised of institutional and discursive practices through which [states] mobilize [their] citizens and send them abroad to work for employers throughout the world while generating a 'profit' from the remittances that migrants send back to their families. (Rodriguez 2010: x)

Indonesia's contemporary regime of labour brokerage draws on transnational expertise on migration for development, on authoritarian technologies of labour control, but also on colonial forms of labour mobilisation. To understand the attitude of the current government in Indonesia towards transnational labour brokerage, we thus need to grasp the ways in which former administrations have dealt with labour migration, including the Dutch colonial government, which ruled over Indonesia for over 300 years. As Riwanto Tirtosudarmo put it:

> ... the legacy of past experiences of the [Indonesian] state's response to migration, both during the colonial and post-colonial periods, has been crucial in shaping the perception, and in turn the responses, of the current political and bureaucratic systems on migration and population issues in general. (Tirtosudarmo 1999: 212–213; see also Lindquist 2010: 121)

Institutionalised, state-controlled migration programmes started in Indonesia under Dutch colonial rule. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the rapid demographic growth on the island of Java and subsequent peasant unrest became an issue of major concern for the colonial government (Tirtosudarmo 1999: 213–214). As Tirtosudarmo has pointed out, the migration policy that was developed to tackle the problem, and which was intended to improve the 'welfare' of the indigenous population on Java, involved state-sponsored permanent resettlement of families from the most populated areas of the island – which remains one of the most densely populated rural areas on earth – to less populated islands such as Sumatra, Kalimantan and Sulawesi (1999: 213–214). In 1905, a first group of 155 Javanese families was relocated to Lampung in south Sumatra, a number that had increased to 30,000 colonists by 1930 (Tirtosudarmo 1999: 214).

Simultaneously, thousands of individual Javanese men were being recruited by private firms to be sent to work temporarily in the newly opened mines and plantations on the Outer Islands of the East Indies, and, to a lesser extent, in more distant destinations such as British Malaya and New Caledonia (see Houben 1992; Kaur 2004; Maurer 2006). These Javanese migrant workers were generally referred to as 'coolies' or 'indentured servants'.

Historically, 'indentured labour' generally referred to a particular form of 'legal bondage' (Bush 2000: 28), a legal bondage that involved men and women who migrated overseas to work on contracts that bound them to their employers for a period of between three and five years (ibid.: 28). An 'indenture' is a legal contract; in the specific historical context of labour migration to the colonies, it was 'a contract by which a person agreed to work for a set period for a landowner [...] in exchange for passage to the colony' (Oxford American Dictionary). According to Bush, globally there have been two main historical flows of indentured labour. The first phase, in the 17th and 18th centuries,

mainly involved Europeans, who were transported to the Caribbean and North America. The second phase lasted from the late 19th to the early 20th century and involved 2.5 million non-Europeans (mainly Asians). The advent of this second phase of indentured labour occurred after the abolition of slavery and was 'closely related to the commercial concerns of European colonialism', including the need to provide a new supply of 'cheap and well-controlled labour' after the abolition of slavery (Bush 2000: 28–29).

Bush has pointed out that there were some important differences between slave labour and indentured service, such as the fact that indentured servants consented to migrate overseas and to work for a contractually defined, *limited* period of time, but he has also demonstrated that indentured service contained elements of coercion. Indentured servants had 'no choice of master or of the work to be done; and fierce public laws tied them to the master's service' (Bush 2000: 28; see also Engerman 1986: 268–269). The indentured servant became contractually indebted to his employer in order to cover his migration fees, and employment upon arrival was thus guaranteed. 'Free' migrants, by contrast, had to cover their migration fees and look for a job themselves, but they could choose their employers and their sector of activity, and they could leave their employment if they found their working conditions unsatisfactory (Bush 2000: 32). Finally, Bush argued that violence was more likely to be used by an employer of indentured servants, because such an employer 'had to pay for the service in advance, leaving him with the problem of obtaining a good return from the labour he could extract'. Accordingly, employers tended to 'force work out of their employees through a regimen of punishment and penalty' (Bush 2000: 32).

The case of Javanese coolies sent to work in mines and on plantations during the boom of the colonial estate industry clearly belongs to the 'second phase' of indentured labour. The expansion of the estate industry in the Dutch East Indies started after the colonial government opened the export of agricultural products to private companies and promoted foreign investment (Stoler 1985: 16). The largest and most famous plantations were opened in the province of Deli, on the east coast of Sumatra (ibid.). Within a few years, the 'Dollar Land of Deli' emerged 'as one of the most lucrative ventures of the Western colonial empires' (ibid.: 14). As Ann Stoler explained:

> Within 50 years the East Sumatran estate industry's production of rubber, oil palm, tobacco, tea and sisal accounted for one third of the export earnings of the Dutch East Indies, providing many of the raw materials on which the expansion of industrial capitalism in Europe and America was based (ibid.: 14–15).

The success of the estate industry, often depicted as an 'entrepreneurial success' (Stoler 1985: 14), was only possible at the cost of 'a pervasive and coercive form of labour control' (ibid.). Plantation workers were mostly brought in from outside Sumatra and were therefore new to the area. While in the early decades of estate expansion Western entrepreneurs depended mostly on Chinese transnational networks to provide 'coolies' from the Straits Settlements, they later tried to counter the increasing influence of these well-organised middlemen and started recruiting labourers from Java (Hayashi 2002: 13; see also Kaur 2004). Plantation owners professionalised and systematised the recruitment, certification and transportation of workers, and within a few decades a burgeoning migration industry had developed on the island of Java (Hayashi 2002). Consequently, tens of thousands of landless Javanese looking for non-farm employment were recruited and sent as indentured servants to work on the plantations. In 1930, it was reported that 84 percent of the coolies employed on the plantations on the Outer Islands were Javanese, with only 13 percent being Chinese and three percent 'local' (Tirtosudarmo 1999: 226).

Jan Breman (1989) has vividly described the situation of Javanese coolies employed on plantations on Sumatra, thereby giving colonial indentured servants a human face. Often subject to extreme forms of discipline and punishment, these workers were bonded to the companies for which they worked by debt and penal sanctions that 'backed the rules and regulations spelled out in the state-prescribed Coolie Ordinance' (Breman 2002: 334; see also Stoler 1985; Houben and Lindblad 1999). It was only under major economic and political pressure following the economic depression of 1929 that large enterprises in the East Indies started to 'shift from contract to free coolie labour, i.e. serving under normal labour contracts without penal sanction' (Schiller 1946: 186). Political pressure – including an American ban on the import of products of bonded labour – as well as a decreasing demand for coolie labour in the wake of the economic crisis of the 1930s led to new developments

in the colonial labour regime. Indentured labour was officially abolished in the Dutch East Indies in 1932 (ibid.).[3]

Despite this abolition, the contemporary Indonesian labour migration regime presents uncanny similarities with colonial indentured labour. In particular, two aspects of the regime liken it to indentured labour: the practice of wage deduction and the fact that Indonesian domestic workers are bound to work for employers whom they have not chosen for a fixed, non-negotiable period of time. Hence, far from being a completely new phenomenon related to the current phase of globalisation, the politics of contemporary labour brokerage draws on colonial practices of labour mobilisation and in particular indentured labour as it existed under Dutch colonial rule. The continuities and ruptures with colonial practices of labour mobilisation will be further explored in Chapter 5, where I discuss the implications of the current migration regime on Indonesian domestic workers' labour arrangements in Malaysia.

New Order legacies

The migration policy of the colonial regime that involved the resettlement of Javanese farmer families to the Indonesian Outer Islands – which was later on known as the *transmigrasi* programme – was revitalised and expanded under the New Order (Tirtosudarmo 1999: 217). Although it never resettled as many transmigrants as originally planned, under Suharto the programme moved millions of people from the inner islands of Indonesia to its periphery (Tirtosudarmo 1999). In the 1980s, the programme reached a peak: it moved almost 2.5 million people between 1979 and 1983. In Stephen Castles' terms, 'it can be seen as the world's biggest "demographic engineering" project' (2002: 7).

Although the Suharto government always presented the resettlement programme as an instrument for poverty alleviation, it was also, as Rebecca Elmhirst put it, 'a means of securing the power of the centre in the nation's margins and facilitating the penetration of corporate capital into isolated regions' (Elmhirst 2001: 293; see also Li 2000). Through this programme, the New Order government sought to 'modernise' indigenous populations (so-called *masyarakat terasing*)

3. Interestingly, on Javanese plantations, indentured labour was abolished much earlier – after the Agrarian Law of 1870, plantation workers on Java were 'free' labourers (see Semedi 2006: 5).

and their economies, and to integrate them into the wider nation. As Tirtosudarmo pointed out, this process of modernisation involved 'the destruction of tropical forests and habitats of native populations', whose lands – formerly used for subsistence agriculture and hunting – were distributed to settlers from Java, Madura, and Bali (Tirtusudarmo 1999: 217). Furthermore, the resettling of ethnic Javanese, who were traditionally conceived of as 'more supportive' of the national government, was seen as an instrument of national security (Elmhirst 2001). It helped to strengthen the role of the Javanese military in the region and hence to suppress political dissidence by indigenous groups (Castles 2002: 8; Tirtosudarmo 1999: 216).

Internal migration has thus long been on the Indonesian state's agenda (Tirtosudarmo 1999). Yet the policies of the New Order regime have also opened the Indonesian labour market to transnational flows of labour and capital and they have played a major role in making Indonesian workers competitive on the global labour market, both as factory workers at home and as migrant workers abroad. From its very beginnings, the New Order government restructured the economy, opened the country's borders to foreign investment, and sold natural resources to multinational companies. These strategies led to the construction of factories and mills and the creation of huge industrial zones, especially on Java and Sumatra (La Botz 2001: xiv). Soon, attracted by the cheapness of labour and the 'virtually union-free environment' (ibid.: 35), firms such as Nike, Gap, Old Navy, and Banana Republic had their goods produced in Indonesian factories (ibid.: 35).

As Dan La Botz put it, this 'cheap-labour-economy was enforced by 35 years of a military dictatorship that used harassment, firings, beating, kidnapping, torture, imprisonment and murder to keep workers in their place' (2001: xiv; see also Ong 2000). In other words, while the New Order regime succeeded in increasing the rates of formal employment and improving living standards, it simultaneously 'eliminated organisations that had any claims to represent workers' (Blackburn 2004: 181). Labour issues were taboo, and taking industrial action was dangerous: one could be charged of affiliation to communism (ibid.: 181). Since the Communist Party had been formally banned in 1966 after a massive anti-communist purge in which hundreds of thousands were killed, this accusation was an extremely serious one (ibid.).

In this context, multinational firms set up factories in which 'nimble-fingered' women worked in assembly lines. Factory workers were mostly young and female. Gendered and racial stereotypes about the 'natural' suitability of young Asian women to assemble small pieces served to legitimise this fact, but multinational firms were not in truth after 'nimble fingers'; they were after cheap and, more importantly, unorganised labour (Ong 1987; Wolf 1992).

In terms of international labour migration, the authoritarian legacy of the New Order is important to mention, because Indonesia's contemporary regime of labour migration was first conceptualised in the late 1960s by the New Order government (Palmer 2016: 22). Labour emigration was seen by the political elite as a promising instrument for economic development and political stability, and as a source of foreign exchange income (ibid.: 26). However, as an oil-exporting country, Indonesia only started to officially promote international labour migration on a large scale in the early 1980s, following 'declining commodity and oil revenues' (Chin 1998: 97). The New Order government implemented a series of policies in the 1980s and 1990s that gave rise to a growing recruitment industry and 'enabled private intermediaries – both public and private, which was typical of the New Order era – to maximise their ability to profit from their involvement in recruitment' (Palmer 2016: 63).

From the very beginning of its labour-export policy, Indonesia had to compete with the already well-institutionalised deployment of Filipino migrant workers overseas (Hugo 2005: 69). Very soon, however, there was 'a realisation that Indonesia has a comparative advantage over countries like the Philippines in providing unskilled workers (including domestic workers) at relatively low cost' (Hugo 2005: 69). In order to strengthen its global competitiveness as a labour-sending state, Indonesia repeatedly resorted to deliberate currency devaluation between 1985 and 1992 (Massey et al 1998: 174). Massey et al. argue that such currency devaluations help to promote labour emigration in two ways. On the one hand, for workers, the attractiveness of labour emigration is boosted by the dramatic increase of foreign wages' real value. On the other hand, employers need to pay less to attract workers from that country than from other, competing labour-sending countries (Massey et al 1998: 174). After the Asian economic crisis of 1997 and

the sharp devaluation of the Indonesian rupiah, the Indonesian government moved from being 'somewhat indifferent' to international labour migration (Hugo 2005: 69) to actually promoting migration as a state policy and intervening more directly in its regulation.

In 1997, the economic crisis, referred to by the acronym *krismon* in Indonesia (from *krisis moneter,* 'monetary crisis'), precipitated the fall of President Suharto, who had reigned over the country for over 30 years. In May 1998, mass demonstrations across the country put an end to the military dictatorship of the New Order. The ensuing economic and political turmoil affected the ways in which international labour migration was handled by the state. Rachel Silvey has described how the less repressive political context in Indonesia after the fall of Suharto allowed a growing number of non-governmental organisations to take up migrant workers' cases, bring them to the attention of the media, and lobby the government to intervene (Silvey 2004a: 149; see also Tirtosudarmo 2004). A series of government measures has been taken in the post-authoritarian aftermath: a separate migrant worker airport terminal was launched in 1999; the first national law governing labour emigration was passed in the Indonesian Parliament in 2004; and the National Board for the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Overseas Workers (BNP2TKI) was established in 2007 (Silvey 2007: 271).

Reforming migration in post-authoritarian Indonesia

Part of the state-led effort to regularise labour migration, Law 39/2004 is referred to as the 'National Law on the Placement and the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers Overseas' and is the key piece of legislation regulating labour emigration from Indonesia.

As Wayne Palmer has explained, the legislative process leading to this law was difficult and long, with four different draft bills proposed (Palmer 2016: 58). Despite protests from migrant worker unions, the Ministry of Manpower influenced the drafting process heavily, allegedly after ministry officials, recruitment agents and lawmakers had 'exchanged political and financial favours' during backroom deals (Palmer 2016: 58; see also Arnold 2007: 27). As a result, the interests of private recruitment agencies form the core of Law 39/2004: with the implementation of the law, the Indonesian government forces all prospective migrant workers to register with a licensed, private commercial recruitment agency (Arnold

2007: 27). This makes it clear that private recruitment agencies constitute a powerful pressure group, one that exerts great influence over the whole labour-export business. According to Tirtosudarmo, 'the collusion between the bureaucracy and the labour recruiting agents is an open secret and certainly hampers the genuine improvement of government regulations on migrant labour issues' (Tirtosudarmo 2004: 322; see also Palmer 2016: 58).

Any attempt to emigrate independently – that is, outside this state-sanctioned recruitment scheme – is considered a form of 'illegal' migration (Killias 2009a; Sim 2009). Hence, while 'illegal' migration is generally conceived of as 'illegal' *im*migration and is thus considered from the perspective of the destination country, Indonesia, as a labour-sending state, has implemented a law that contains the possibility, at least theoretically, of rendering 'illegal' its own *emigrant* citizens. Migrants who organise their migration independently are breaking the law. This includes those migrants who already know an employer in the destination country and wish to arrange their migration and working conditions on their own. Hence, even if migrant workers have worked abroad before, have followed the required training, and speak the language of the destination country perfectly, they have to go through the whole bureaucratically-regulated, costly process again in order to be able to leave Indonesia legally. Experienced migrant women have complained about these bureaucratic procedures time and again. The certificate of proficiency that workers receive after passing the mandatory test laid down by the Ministry of Manpower is valid for only three years, i.e. approximately one employment term. In which other labour sector do workers have to get a new diploma every time they change employers?

As Salma Safitri from the NGO Solidaritas Perempuan[4] put it:

> The law sets up a rigid and thickly layered process: eleven government institutions are involved, ten documents have to be completed, eight stages of recruitment have to be passed. In this country, everyone knows that each time you approach a government official's desk, you have to pay. (Quoted in Anggraeni 2006: 201)

4. This Indonesian-based NGO works on women's issues from a feminist perspective and has done a lot of work on the overseas migration of Indonesian women. 'Solidaritas Perempuan' means 'Women's Solidarity'.

Indonesian labour activists have criticised Law 39/2004 from the moment of its inception and have pushed for legal reforms.[5] A key element of criticism relies to the fact that private, profit-oriented agencies play such a crucial role in labour recruitment. In fact, licensed recruitment agencies process the necessary documents for the workers' migration and take care of their mandatory training. All relevant documents for migration, such as the special migrant-worker passports or the required health certificates, can *only* be processed through licensed agencies, and they have to be processed anew for each employment term.

In the case of emigration to (South) East Asia, agencies also advance the money to cover workers' recruitment, training, and migration fees. This debt is contractually defined and usually transferred from the Indonesian recruitment agency to the foreign employer. In 2008, Malaysian employers withheld six months of their Indonesian domestic workers' wages in repayment of this debt; this amounts to one-quarter of the earnings for the usual two-year contract. This wage-deduction (*potong gaji*) has been implemented for (South) East Asian destinations such as Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

Indonesian bureaucracy is not only involved in transnational labour migration before departure – *return* to Indonesia is another key moment of state intervention (Silvey 2007; Kloppenburg & Peters, 2012). Looking at the everyday practices in the special migrant-worker airport terminal in Jakarta that is no longer in operation, Rachel Silvey (2007) has argued that national state officials in this border zone discriminate against migrant domestic workers because they are women and because they are working class. Starting in the luggage-claim area, airport officials approached return migrant workers and told them to follow the sign 'Terminal TKI'. Gathered in this separate zone, return migrant workers were registered, instructed to put their money in particular banks, and finally escorted home by one of the very few licensed bus companies (Silvey 2007). At no point in this process were returned

5. As this book goes into press, the Indonesian parliament has approved a new law regarding the placement of Indonesian migrant workers overseas which will replace Law 39/2004. In this new law, it is expected that the position of the government as the *main* actor within labour recruitment will be strengthened (Jakarta Globe, 25 October 2017). The extent to which this new law will change recruitment practices is of course a key question for future research.

migrant workers given any choice as to the ways in which they would like to return to their villages, nor were they allowed to be picked up by their families.

Despite major political shifts in Indonesia after the 1998 *reformasi* period and the fall of Suharto, the legacy of 33 years of suppression of labour activism is not without consequence in relation to the ways in which (migrant) labour issues are dealt with in Indonesia today. The main assets of Indonesian domestic workers on the global labour market remain their low wages and their assumed docility. Like plantation owners in colonial times or managers of multinational companies delocalising their factory production to Indonesia, many employers in Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan or Singapore choose Indonesian domestic workers rather than Filipinas simply because they are paid lower wages. In addition, Indonesian domestic workers are quite effectively kept from organising collectively by their recruitment agents, which further contributes to their image as docile workers and therefore to their popularity with employers (see Sim and Wee 2004; Killias 2009a).

Migration for development: expert interventions

In rationalising the labour emigration of its citizens, the Indonesian government is often said to 'follow' the Filipino 'model' of labour export. As Rodriguez has pointed out, 'Philippine migration officials and bureaucrats have increasingly become experts in the global field of "migration management", and they travel to countries such as Indonesia and Thailand to share their expertise' (2010:145).

Expertise has come to play a crucial role in the contemporary management of migration. In the pre-departure briefings introduced at the beginning of this chapter, state bureaucrats are expected to bring this expertise to bear on the education of prospective migrant workers. It is assumed that pre-departure briefings – required by Law 39/2004 – will raise migrant workers' awareness regarding their rights and their duties, and the possibilities for them to protect themselves from abuse abroad. However, during these briefings prospective migrant workers are not only instructed about their work contracts – they are also advised on how to spend their remittances, or to raise their children. In other words, much more is at stake than just 'technical' advice – as the motivational speech by Rina has illustrated well. In other classes entitled 'personality

and spirituality' (*kepribadian dan kerohanian*), instructors reinterpret Islamic teachings to promote individual piety as key to self-discipline, hard work and ultimately success.

Consider the following speech by Azizah, a civil servant in her 50s:

> As women we contribute to this country, too – as the heroes of foreign remittances. To Allah, it does not matter what kind of work we do, all kinds of work are equal. Allah looks at the ways in which we work and the ways in which we worship; that is what matters to Him. We have to be thankful to be healthy, to be alive, and never mind what kind of work we do abroad – the only important thing is that our work is *halal*. Work is worship. Work is the message. Work is our vocation.

By framing women's work as worship, Azizah implicitly addresses the public debate that has been raging in Indonesia about the legitimacy of the state's open encouragement of women's transnational migration as domestic workers. Part of this debate relates to the fact that domestic work is perceived as a lowly occupation that sullies the image of the nation abroad. When Azizah stresses the fact that before Allah all work is equal, she legitimates migrant women's projects of migration – and, of course, the state's politics of 'labour export'.

Yet Azizah's intervention at this pre-departure briefing also draws on a broader rhetoric of 'spiritual reform', which has been skillfully analysed by Daromir Rudnyckyj (2010). Rudnyckyj argued that the *krismon*, the monetary crisis of 1998, has called in the end of national developmentalism in Indonesia, as increasingly neoliberal programmes have been imposed on the country by international donor agencies. Subsequently, the state has ceased to be seen as the main agent in national development; instead, development is 'transferred to citizens themselves, who are empowered to become individually responsible to bring about the kind of economic growth that the nation-state has become unable to guarantee' (Rudnyckyj 2010: 4).

The proponents of 'spiritual reform' reframe *reformasi* as a matter of 'individual and moral reform' (2010: 110); values such as self-control, responsibility and entrepreneurship are defined as 'Islamic', and it is argued that such values will enable one to become both a better Muslim and a more productive employee for the neoliberal economy (2010). This connection between individual piety and work ethic can also be

identified in the following quote from Azizah's speech to the migrant women:

> Continue to work hard, to work with intelligence, and to work with sincerity, and your hearts will be at peace. If we are forced to work, we feel like our body does not want to move. We cannot find the strength to get up in the morning. There are always two emotions within ourselves: a negative emotion and a positive emotion. The emotion that inspires and can give us motivation is called Allah. He is the reason we wake up in the morning and he makes us stand up with sincerity. Working for Him is the only way to carry out my duties with honesty.

Clearly, individual religiosity enables women to become 'good' workers. The importance of self-discipline and the notion of accountability – not just any kind of accountability, but accountability to God – were also well illustrated by the following statement by Azizah: 'Allah knows when I do something immoral or dishonest. Why? Because Allah knows everything'. Even the strictest of employers cannot see everything.

The parallels between the motivational speeches in the pre-departure briefings for prospective migrants and Rudnyckyj's ethnographic materials are in no way coincidental, as staff of the BNP2TKI have undergone training with 'spiritual reformer' Ary Ginanjar. Ginanjar was the main figure in Rudnyckyj's ethnography *Spiritual Economies* (2010). Jumhur Hidayat, then director of BNP2TKI, had arranged for his staff to get training with Ary Ginanjar's ESQ (Emotional Spiritual Quotient) after he himself had experienced it in 2006: 'This training changes the mindset of people. Many of us still think they are rulers who deserve to be served. This ruler mentality exists at all levels of society, also within the leadership. But this era is long gone, and ESQ can uncover that. Public service must take place' (*ESQ News*, 8 November 2011). Embedded in this explanation of Hidayat is a familiar critique of the 'old' ways of state officials, associated with the excesses of the New Order (Rudnyckyj 2010: 70–72), and the simultaneous desire to reform public service into a more accountable one. ESQ was chosen to encourage reform within the BNP2TKI by schooling its employees.

When he started his two-day workshop for staff of the BNP2TKI in 2011, Ginanjar was quoted as addressing them in the following way:

> My heart is beating very fast today, because we are having this training at the BNP2TKI. Yours is a very noble task: to place and to protect hu-

> man beings. God glorifies all humans [...]. Ladies and gentlemen, all of you who work at the BNP2TKI are God's chosen servants to protect migrant workers abroad. (*ESQ News*, 8 November 2011)

Through their training, BNP2TKI state officials and, by extension, prospective migrants are encouraged to contribute to and participate in national development.

The promotion of labour migration by the Indonesian state is currently taking place in the context of a broader, global paradigm shift in which migration has increasingly come to be seen as 'a *tool* for development' (Kunz 2008: 1392). While internationally, in the past migration has rather been seen as the result of a lack of development, with poverty being the main cause for migration, since the 1990s, 'world-wide remittance flows have exceeded total development aid and have become the second-largest – and for some countries even the largest – financial flow to developing countries after foreign direct investment' (ibid: 1390). From the early 1990s onwards, international organisations such as the ILO and the IOM, but also the World Bank and the IMF, have represented migration and migrant remittances as inherently positive, and as instruments to fight poverty and enable development (ibid.). The World Bank, for instance, declares that 'remittances are beautiful', 'vital to the economy', or 'a powerful tool to reduce poverty' (Kunz 2008: 1396). As Rahel Kunz has argued, the implications of this 'migration–development nexus' are not gender-neutral: the paradigm of migration as development produces gendered representations and stereotypes, for instance of women migrants as making better use of remittances and sending back more money than men (ibid.). Such representations in turn inform policy making and social expectations of migrants.

In the Indonesian context, migrant women clearly have a key role to play in what Rudnyckyj has called the 'afterlife' of development (Rudnyckyj 2010; see also Rudnyckyj and Schwittay 2014). The contents of pre-departure briefings taught by state instructors in fact reveal that the ways in which development is conceptualised have changed: in the wake of the demise of large state development programmes in Indonesia, migrant women are encouraged to engage in migration for development, and thereby to become better Muslims, better workers and better mothers.

Figure 9: Women leaving the BNP2TKI building in East Jakarta. Photo: Olivia Killias.

The spectre of trafficking

Sukses, women attending the pre-departure briefing were told again and again, was important for both their families and their nation of origin, Indonesia. In order to 'succeed', workers were encouraged to remain 'legal' by always complying with the state's and their employers' demands, and 'legality' was often also associated with morality. This is how Azizah spoke to prospective migrants about the risks of illegalisation in the seminar on 'HIV AIDS, sexual diseases, and trafficking' (*HIV Aids, penyakit menular seksual dan trafficking*) at the BNP2TKI:

> *Azizah*: Have you already been instructed about the work contract? This is very important. Your work contract is a legal document – from the moment you register with your recruitment agency in Indonesia until you're working overseas. But never ever run away from your employer! Why shouldn't you run away from your employer? Is it risky to do so? Very risky! First of all, you'll lose everything and you'll be the only one to blame for that; you will have no clothes, no money, no home. Perfectly in line with your work contract. If you run away, will

you still get your wages? No! If you run away, will your employer still take responsibility for you? No! If you run away, all the documents that you brought from Indonesia will become legally void ... Running away is no good. What is it like to be an illegal migrant? You have no legal documents. You are hunted by the police wherever you go. You cannot go out of your workplace. And what happens if you get caught by the police, what do you think, miss? Right, they will put you in jail! Once in jail, they'll ask you to pay a fine. Where will you get the money from? So?

Worker: They'll take us to Batam![6]

Azizah: They'll take you to Batam! And what will they do with you? Right, they will sell you ... What for? To have sex with different men. Is prostitution a sin or not? It's a terrible sin.

Striking in this short excerpt is the conflation of illegal migration with trafficking, something that has been observed in other contexts as well (Anderson and Andrijasevic 2008). While Azizah rightly pointed out that running away from one's employer leads to illegalisation, one can see that state bureaucrats equate state-organised migration (and respecting the terms and conditions of the working contract) with law and order – outside of which migrants are at risk of trafficking, smuggling and prostitution (see also van Schendel and Abraham 2005: 9).

As Diana Wong has argued, 'the language of trafficking derives its power to moralize and criminalize from its semantic proximity to terms such as prostitution' (Wong 2005: 70). This emphasis on 'trafficking' in the pre-departure briefing has to be seen in a wider context in which 'trafficking' has been constructed as a major 'problem' in Indonesia in the new millennium (Lindquist and Piper 2007: 146), but it also reveals that legal migration is cast as a moral issue.

Despite recent state interventions in transnational labour migration, Indonesian state officials continue to claim that 'illegal' labour migration from Indonesia is on the rise and that it must therefore be brought under state control. When the case of Siti Hajar Sadli, an Indonesian domestic worker who had been badly abused by her Malaysian employer, was published in the Indonesian press a few days before the presidential

6. Batam is an Indonesian island strategically located at the core of the Indonesia–Malaysia–Singapore Growth Triangle. It has the reputation of being a major sex-tourism destination for Singaporean businessmen (see Lindquist 2009a).

elections of 2009, this triggered intense political debate. Various parties promised to bring about more protection for migrant workers overseas, and the sending of domestic workers to Malaysia was halted for two years. One Indonesian government official stated that future measures taken by the government to protect its citizens abroad would include better control of 'illegal' migration to Malaysia because, he affirmed, 'illegal' migrants were more easily abused by their employers (Radar Jember, 16 July 2009). The fact that Siti Hajar Sadli, like many of her compatriots, had migrated to Malaysia through the 'legal,' state-sanctioned migration regime seemed completely irrelevant. As I will show, such discourses by state officials need to be viewed in the context of a broader public debate about the legitimacy of women's transnational labour migration.

Images of broken bodies: gender, migration and the nation

Generally, the media coverage of migrant-worker issues in Indonesia has focused on very dramatic forms of physical and/or sexual abuse of migrant women. Photos showing Indonesian domestic workers' half-naked bodies covered with bruises circulate in all major newspapers as well as online. As Michele Ford has argued, migrant women are hence represented as 'good women' at risk of sexual exploitation and as victims of unscrupulous middlemen who treat them as 'commodities' (Ford 2003: 96–97). Susan Blackburn (2004) has made similar observations. She points out that the aspect of (migrant) women's work that triggered the most impassioned reactions from the Indonesian media, public, and activists was sexual exploitation:

> In other words, no one is surprised if women are overworked and underpaid (or even unpaid); concern arises when they are, in addition, exposed to moral jeopardy (as when they have to travel home at night) or actually raped and dishonoured in a public way that reflects upon their families and even the nation. (Blackburn 2004: 169)

The fact that abuse, and rape in particular, is understood as an issue of national dishonour in Indonesia can be observed clearly in media reports on abuse cases. One newspaper, for instance, made an explicit connection between the abuse of domestic worker Siti Hajar Sadli and national dishonour when it reported her case on its front page with the following title: 'Malaysia dishonours Indonesia' (*Malaysia lecehkan*

Indonesia) (Rambu Kota, 16 June 2007). On a similar note, a state bureaucrat was quoted in a newspaper in November 2010 as saying that the latest case of abuse of an Indonesian domestic worker in Saudi Arabia 'hurt the dignity of the nation' (Tribunnews, 15 November 2010).

By reporting almost exclusively on scandalous cases of domestic-worker abuse abroad, and especially by publishing pictures framing the women's injured bodies, media reports 'reaffirm a stereotypical view of migration as dangerous for women' (Andrijasevic 2007: 42). As Rutvica Andrijasevic has pointed out in her analysis of anti-trafficking campaigns, visual representations of migrant women as victims deploy 'techniques that frame women's body in a voyeuristic manner' and consequently re-install the 'stereotypical rendering of feminine bodies in terms of passive objects of violence' (ibid.: 41–42). Such a representation of migration as being inherently dangerous for women implicitly 'invites the perception of home as safe' (ibid.). Consider the following example:

In September 2010, Indonesian media reported the case of a young Javanese woman who had been sexually abused by her employers in Malaysia. The woman ran away, was rescued, and was taken to a hospital. The case was taken up by the Indonesian media and, among other stations, by the commercial TV station Liputan 6. A whole show entitled 'Winfaidah from Lampung, abused and raped in Malaysia' (*Winfaidah berasal dari Lampung yang disiksa dan diperkosa di Malaysia*) was dedicated to the case. Winfaidah's father and sister – herself an ex-migrant domestic worker in Malaysia – were invited to Liputan 6's studio to talk about the abuse. Simultaneously, a camera team visited Winfaidah, who was still in a Malaysian hospital. The show culminated in the scene that had been shot in Winfaidah's hospital room. The voice of a female journalist, holding the camera directly on the face of the victim, told her that her father and sister were currently on the TV show, watching her. Winfaidah, still visibly weak and traumatised, started crying. The camera filmed the young woman while she sobbed in her hospital bed. Suddenly, the film stopped, and we were back in the studio. The journalist asked Winfaidah's father what he was feeling: 'She is longing for you so badly. What do you say, how do you feel?' The father remained silent. Winfaidah's sister translated the question into Javanese and, visibly uncomfortable, pressured him to answer. After a long silence, the father finally said: 'I am reassured to have seen her, but it's very sad'. The

journalist asked again: 'Will you allow her to go to Malaysia after this?' 'No,' he replied.

The close-up images of Winfaidah in her hospital bed and the subsequent interview with her father positioned Winfaidah as a sacrificial daughter who needs paternal protection. Yet the awkwardness of the interaction between the TV host and Winfaidah's father, and in particular the silence of the latter, conveyed another message, too – namely, that this working class father of rural origin, who had allowed his daughter to migrate overseas, was unable to protect her. This rendering of the story legitimised intervention by the patriarchal state, a narrative that was reinforced by newspaper articles showing how Indonesian Ambassador Da'i Bachtiar visited Winfaidah in hospital. What was on display on the talk show, then, consolidated the stigmatisation of Indonesia's migrant working class as rural, backward and uneducated. The representation of violence was, in Winfaidah's case, in itself a form of symbolic violence.

Sensationalist media reports exposing the physical and sexual abuse of Indonesian women abroad have a fairly long history; they have been taking place in Indonesia since the 1980s (see Robinson 2000). Kathryn Robinson has described how such reports led to a major public outcry in the country in 1983, with several politicians and Muslim leaders engaging in a heated debate on whether Indonesia should continue sending its female citizens to work in the Middle East (ibid.: 256). Interestingly, the press reports 'focused on the fact that the workers in question were women, usually uneducated, and inexperienced in the world, implying a particular obligation on the part of the government to offer paternalistic protection' (ibid.: 261).

As Kathryn Robinson has pointed out, the consequence of this controversy was that all prospective migrant workers at the time were required to sign an agreement with the Ministry of Manpower, acknowledging that they would not talk to the media about any problems they encountered (ibid.: 267). Furthermore, from then on the government required recruitment agents to set up training camps to train workers before sending them abroad (ibid; see also S. Jones 2000: 81). These training camps continue to exist today and have come to play a crucial role in the migration process. As Robinson has pertinently put it, the problems that workers encountered were 'thrown back on the women, drawing on the rhetoric of their lack of skills as the cause of problems'

(ibid.: 269). Cases of abuses were thus framed as technical problems that could be resolved by training.

Protecting the dignity of the nation

Shortly after the publication of the Winfaidah case discussed above, a journalist from the Javanese daily *Jawa Pos* interviewed member of Parliament Heri Prasetyo about the case. The newspaper reported on the interview in the following way:

> Among those who are looking for work abroad, many do not have any skills (*tidak memiliki keterampilan*). Consider all of these women who thrust themselves into becoming domestic servants! ... This is the reason they are not appreciated (*kurang dihargai*). As a consequence, many of them are victims of abuse by their employers. He [Heri Prasetyo] asserted that training camps need ... to replace their old and outdated equipment (*teknologi peralatannya yang kuno alias tertinggal*). (*Jawa Pos*, 22 September 2010)

Thus, abuse is explained by workers' supposed 'lack of skills', and the solution is seen in the modernisation of the equipment in training camps. A political issue – the protection of migrant workers' rights abroad – is very literally 'rendered technical', to borrow Tania Li's formulation (2011). Following Li's analysis, in this process of 'rendering technical' the issue of labour migration is depoliticised. Migrant women are defined as in need of training and development, and a call is made for the intervention of (technical) experts.

Domestic worker training has to be situated in a wider field of 'expertise in femininity' in Indonesia (C. Jones 2010). From colonial times onwards, family life and gender roles in the Dutch East Indies have been identified 'as terrain for public discussion and technical improvement', and they have been moulded into fields of expertise (C. Jones 2010: 274). In technical manuals and in the preparatory courses at the Colonial School for Girls and Women in The Hague, Dutch women were, in colonial times, educated about domestic work and the proper management of native servants (Locher-Scholten 2000: 95–97). Later on, during the New Order, the infamous organisation Dharma Wanita (lit. 'Women's Duty') required Indonesian civil servants' wives to participate in regular meetings where they were instructed about their roles as wives, mothers and reproducers of the nation (Suryakusuma 1996). As Carla Jones has

explained, 'meetings took the form of a class and focused on the virtues of housewifery, cooking, interior decorating, dress, and beauty, most of which could only be expressed through managed consumption, all in the service of producing and reproducing a developing nation' (C. Jones 2010: 275).

Carla Jones' work focuses on fee-based seminars in 'respectable femininity', which have become increasingly popular among middle-class women across urban Java in post-authoritarian Indonesia. A key difference between the programmes just described and domestic worker trainings that I analyse in this book lie in the fact that domestic workers are not trained to run their own households, but they are trained to serve others and hence the focus is on docility and subservience. Furthermore, the fee-based seminars described by Jones are of a voluntary nature, while prospective migrants have no choice in how much training they would like to take. However, there is a key tension that is inherent in all of these classes that educate women in domesticity – namely a tension between 'conceiving femininity as a *natural* expression of an inner self versus a *result of tutelage*' (ibid.: 271, emphasis mine). Jones argues that:

> Only when we acknowledge how much *work* – ideological, cultural, political and economic – it takes to create the illusion of the natural can we see the alternatives that have been silenced in the process' (ibid.: 279, emphasis mine).

It is precisely this *work* that I would like to expose in the subsequent sections of this book.

Despite the success of its own labour-export policy, the Indonesian government has announced repeatedly over the last thirty years that it wants to shift its labour-export policy from unskilled to mainly skilled migration (see e.g. Cremer 1988), and that it does not want Indonesia to be associated internationally with unskilled domestic workers.

On a similar note, since his election in 2014 and in the wake of various high profile cases of Indonesian women's abuse abroad, president Jokowi has repeatedly announced that he wants to stop the national 'export' of domestic workers to preserve the country's dignity (*martabat bangsa*), thereby prolonging a patronising national discourse on domestic worker migration that is as old as Indonesian women's migration as domestics itself (see e.g. Robinson 2000; S. Jones 2000; Silvey 2006). Tellingly, the moral anxieties surrounding transnational migration are

deeply gendered. Nobody worries much about the dignity of Indonesian men travelling to Malaysia to work on plantations. The state paternalism directed at migrant women is rooted in the fact that women are 'perceived as the symbolic property of their nations' (Oishi 2017: 37).

Despite the moral anxieties surrounding women's emigration, the considerable number of women sent abroad as domestic workers reveals that, in a span of only 30 years, transnational domestic worker migration has led to the Indonesian state becoming one of the major labour-sending countries in the world (Hugo 2005: 69). Yet state officials construct domestic-worker migration as a necessary evil, and one that will be eradicated on the path to national development. There is clearly uneasiness among Jakarta's governing elite – who employ local domestic workers in their own homes – with the fact that Indonesia has become one of the main suppliers of migrant domestic workers in Asia. When one looks at the ways in which 'Filipinas' have repeatedly been stereotypically represented as maids, one can partly understand these apprehensions on the part of the government. The Philippine government has protested on two occasions against the definition of 'Filipina' as 'domestic worker' in dictionaries, including the renowned Oxford Dictionary (Asis 2005: 23).

An Indonesian recruitment agent told me the following regarding the state's plans to replace the sending of women as domestic workers with 'skilled' (and male) migrants:

> The government wants to curb the number of *informal* workers sent abroad ... so domestic workers will be replaced by formal workers. I very much support these endeavours, because a lot of other countries think we just export *babu* [colonial term for domestic worker]. I do hope that one day the standard of our migrant workers will reach a higher level (*meningkat*).

In Indonesia, the rhetoric of development (*pembangunan*) has characterised state discourses for decennia, in particular during the New Order (Li 2007). As an integral part of national development plans, international labour migration is cast in terms of national progress. This conception of migration as national development on a linear line of progress is well exemplified in the terms used in this statement. The reference to *babu* relates to the past; the future, however, is characterised by progress ('a higher level'). This emphasis on progress is prevalent in

state officials and agents' discourses alike: migrants are *not yet* ready to be sent abroad, Indonesia is *not yet* a developed country, but in the future modernity and progress will come around.

As we have seen, the Indonesian government has been claiming that it wants to end the sending of domestic workers for about as long as it has been sending women abroad as domestic workers (Robinson 2000: 253; see also Hugo 2005). The problem with the claim that Indonesia should reduce or even stop the sending of women as domestic workers is that they are at odds with a demand for workers precisely in this sector – domestic service (Jones 2000: 81). With the increasing ageing of the population in Asia, this demand is unlikely to go down in the years to come (Oishi 2017). It remains to be seen whether the Jokowi government will act on its promise to completely stop sending Indonesian women abroad as domestic workers. Domestic worker migration has certainly, however, been subject to increasing state intervention over the last thirty years. Much of this intervention has translated into increasing the requirements which prospective migrants have to fulfil.

While NGOs have often demanded that the Indonesian state take a greater role in transnational labour migration, it is questionable to what extent state power has enhanced migrant workers' access to better working conditions, better wages, and justice. As Rudnyckyj explained, NGOs 'might be complicit with the government's goals to increase remittances from migrant labour in that [it] brings about the rationalization and efficiency of the broader migrant labour economy' (Rudnyckyj 2004: 429).

As far as Indonesian domestic workers migrating abroad are concerned, this 'rationalisation' and 'efficiency' are achieved by the tight control of workers from their very point of departure in Indonesia, and an increased emphasis on the legal dimension of migration. It is in the context of global demands for short-term contract workers and anti-trafficking regimes that the 'legal'/'illegal' dimensions of migratory movements have come to play the crucial role that they do in Indonesian national politics today (see also Lindquist 2010). In the next chapter, I will explore how the Indonesian migration regime and its emphasis on legality have translated into discursive and material practices of migration in Kalembah, a village in an upland region of northern Central Java.

CHAPTER 2

Leaving the Tea Fields

Women in search of work on Java and beyond

I started my fieldwork in that most classic of ethnographic contexts: a village. The Javanese village of Kalembah has approximately 4,000 inhabitants and is situated in an upland region in the district of Pekalongan, around 35 km from the port town of Pekalongan in northern Central Java. It lies between 400 and 800 metres above sea level. The cool temperature of the mountain region makes it suitable for the cultivation of coffee, cloves and tea. Far from being isolated, this village has witnessed the circulation of labour, goods, and capital for decades, as it had long been integrated into the global economy through a nearby tea plantation, which still exports all its tea to Europe and Japan (see Semedi 2006). It has therefore had a long history of participation in processes of globalisation, and it probably never corresponded to colonial representations of the 'Javanese village' composed of 'cultivators living closely and harmoniously together in a community with a high degree of institutional self-sufficiency' (Breman 1982: 189).

During most of my fieldwork in the village, I stayed in the house of Nastiti and her family. Nastiti's house was situated in the higher parts of the village, and it was closely located to the fields of the tea plantation. Nastiti had worked as a tea picker on the plantation, but more recently she had worked as a domestic worker in Saudi Arabia several times. Her husband worked as a security agent on the plantation, and both of their teenage children still went to school when I first met them. During one of my first days of fieldwork in the village, in July 2007, I was sitting on the porch of Nastiti's house, chatting with some of her neighbours. Nastiti herself had gone to the market in a nearby town. School had just finished and children in Kalembah were off for two weeks before starting their new classes. In the next few days, many of the teenagers who had just completed junior high school would go to Jakarta to seek

employment; others, the ones belonging to wealthier families, would go to Pekalongan to enter senior high school. Others again would settle down and marry. As we were talking, Nastiti came back from the market with bad news: one of the pupils who had just completed junior high school in Kalembah, Yani, a girl of 16, had committed suicide. She had drunk a bottle of rat poison.

The news quickly spread, people went to see what had happened, and the police and the village head all rushed to her parents' home, an isolated house along the road that leads down into the valley. After a few hours, the voice of the muezzin announced her death through the loudspeakers of the mosque. She was buried the next morning, but the talk about her death went on in the village for many days. People said that she had committed suicide because her parents had married her off to a man while she was in love with another. As we were discussing the tragic event with some of Nastiti's friends, one of her neighbours, a woman in her forties, declared: 'If someone breaks your heart, you should leave to work in Saudi Arabia rather than commit suicide'.

This commentary on Yani's suicide has to be understood in the context of a village witnessing women's transnational labour migration on an unprecedented scale. With an increasing global demand for workers in domestic service, women who leave behind Kalembah and its tea fields now tend to migrate for employment as domestic workers - both in urban Java, and abroad. In this chapter, I explore this shift from feminised plantation labour to feminised labour migration, and situate these developments in a broader history of labour, land and capital in this part of upland Java. I analyse how women's migration is socially negotiated in the village, how it is often framed as resulting from unhappy marriages or divorce, and how the scope of migration is related to women's lifecycles, thereby illustrating why we need to see migration not only as a spatial, but also as a temporal phenomenon.

Women's plantation labour

Before the establishment of the plantation in the second half of the nineteenth century, most of the local population in the hilly area in the southern region of Pekalongan consisted of migrants who had moved into the hills in an attempt to flee from hardship in the lowlands – in particular from the consequences of the colonial forced cultivation scheme

known as *Cultuurstelsel* (Semedi 2006: 42). According to Semedi, this newly arrived population lived in small hamlets and 'started a new life based on a combination of wet rice cultivation, where location permitted, as well as dry land farming and exploiting of forest plants' (ibid.).

The abolition of the *Cultuurstelsel* and the introduction of the new Agrarian Law in 1870 provided for local farmers to own land, but at the same time it classified village communal land as 'waste land', and claimed it as state property (Semedi 2006: 43–45; see also Breman 2015). Until then, communal land (and the sugar palm trees that naturally grew on it) had represented an important source of cash for villagers, as well as an alternative source of land for cultivation for collective use. As soon as 1875, however, the colonial government rented out this 'waste land' in a long-term lease to a private plantation company (ibid.).

In 1875, the Dutch entrepreneur Van Hall arrived to open the first coffee plantation in the area, which was replaced by a tea plantation in 1901. The establishment of the plantation seized large sections of land on which local inhabitants previously depended (Semedi 2006: 47). While some local villagers permanently moved away to other areas where they hoped to find unused stretches of land, others became plantation coolies, alongside coolies brought in from lowland Java (ibid.). Tea pickers, the bulk of the workforce employed on the tea plantation, were, from the beginning, exclusively female. In the capitalist economy of the colonial tea plantation, 'nimble-fingered' women were presented as naturally better suited for picking tea (Semedi 2006) and their gender justified paying them lower wages. Despite the heavy physical work that they performed, female tea pickers were paid much less than men employed in the arguably more 'comfortable' labour in the factory – in fact, under Dutch rule, a female tea picker was paid one third of a male worker's wage (Semedi 2006: 175). Besides the gendered inequalities produced by the plantation economy, life on and around the plantation was also sharply racially segregated, with Dutch personnel living in separate living quarters, earning wages far above the wages paid out to local staff, and employing a whole army of servants in the interiors of their homes (ibid.).

In 1957, several years after Indonesian independence, the plantation was handed over to the Indonesian government. However, from then on, an overt collaboration between the army and plantations across the archi-

Figure 10: Tea pickers on the plantation. Photo: Karina Ayu Rarasasri Gumilang.

pelago developed, resulting in what Semedi has called the 'militarisation of plantation life' (Semedi 2006: 152). Allegedly to quell the 'threat' from Darul Islam rebels who had been active in the region, the army progressively took on a greater role in securitising and controlling the plantation. In the subsequent anti-communist purge in 1965–1966, three trucks with plantation workers accused of being communists were deported from the area (ibid.). Most of them were later freed, but the leaders of the local unionist movement spent several years in prison, and one of them died in detention (Semedi 2006: 116–117; 157). There was no more proper labour union on plantation grounds after 1966, and strict loyalty to the New Order's ruling party *Golkar* was expected of all employees of the plantation (ibid.).

The fall of Suharto in Indonesia coincided with the Asian economic crisis of 1997–1998. Indonesia was heavily affected by this economic crisis, and wages on tea plantations across Java dropped drastically in the wake of *krismon* and a sharp drop in global tea prices (Semedi 2006: 203; see also Wattie 2002). By the early 2000s, the average monthly wages of tea pickers working on the tea plantation next to Kalembah equalled 76,782 IDR (US$8.95), equivalent to approximately 51 kg of rice – barely enough to support a tea picker and one child just above the poverty line (Semedi 2006: 203).

Increasingly, Javanese villagers who had been employed on the tea plantation for generations believed that there was no future for their children on the plantation, and that their children should not become plantation workers (Semedi 2006: 198). In their eyes, there was no 'decent' life possible living on wages from the tea plantation only (ibid.:203). In other words, 'the century-old domination of the plantation as a regular cash provider for farming households in the surrounding hamlets now starts to weaken' (Semedi 2006: 212).

Furthermore, global warming and sinking tea prices on the international market have led, over the years, to a slow replacement of tea in favour of rubber. Since the management of rubber is viewed as physically hard work, and has to be carried out partly at night, mostly men are employed in the sections of the plantation that have already shifted to this new crop. As a consequence, it has become more difficult for women to find employment on the plantation. Sari from Kalembah was still working as a tea picker, but she said that there was not enough work there any more:

> They are felling all the tea trees now to plant rubber ... So there are not enough tea leaves and too many tea pickers ... And now they need a lot of men. They tell us that at a later stage, once the rubber trees have grown bigger, women will be needed again. But for now they are just planting the trees, and therefore they need male workers. Like me, in this situation, I can pick about ten kilos of tea leaves, and I get 3,000 IDR (US$0.30) for that. That's just enough to give some pocket money to my children, and even for that it may actually be not enough.

Earning so little for hours of hard work picking tea leaves, Sari had started thinking about going abroad as a domestic worker. In fact, migration started to emerge as an attractive alternative to work on the tea plantation. A former tea picker who later became an overseas domestic

worker in Saudi Arabia told Pujo Semedi that 'my tea field is now abroad' (Semedi 2006: 207).

The increasing dependence on non-farming employment (and migration in particular) has also been noted in other rural contexts (see e.g. Rigg 2003; Kelly 2011) and the situation of Kalembah stands out as representative of broader trends in rural Java (see Breman and Wiradi 2002; Silvey 2003; Peluso 2011). It reveals that migration needs to be understood in the context of broader social transformations rather than just as the result of individual migrants' decisions (Xiang 2014: 186). Clearly, the history of the tea plantation is also a history of militarisation, of violent confrontations, and of the suppression of labour activism. Despite instances of resistance, throughout recent history, the management of the tea plantation has intended to produce a reliable, docile and loyal labour force (Semedi 2006: 83).

A village on the move

A bureau de change announcing the daily exchange rates for the Saudi riyal and the Malaysian ringgit, banners advertising the services of local recruitment agencies, and, in the more intimate spaces of living rooms, pictures from foreign places all clearly indicate that migration, and globalisation processes more generally, are shaping everyday life in the village in important ways. Nowadays, everyone in Kalembah knows someone who is currently employed in Jakarta or abroad, and many are affected in some way or another by migratory movements, be it as migrants, brokers, moneylenders or simply as relatives and neighbours who 'stay behind'.

When I started my fieldwork in 2007, the village had just elected a new *kepala desa* (village headman); the old political leader who had ruled over the village for decennia had been unexpectedly replaced by a young, ambitious man. He had a relatively modest background, and so did his wife, but – and this seems to have been critical to his electoral victory – both had been involved in international labour migration: he had acted as a broker for a recruitment agency, and his wife had been abroad three times, twice to Malaysia and once to Saudi Arabia. Hence, the new political leadership was one that embraced international labour migration – migration, then, was definitely not associated with underground activities, but, at least on the village level, with formal state authority.

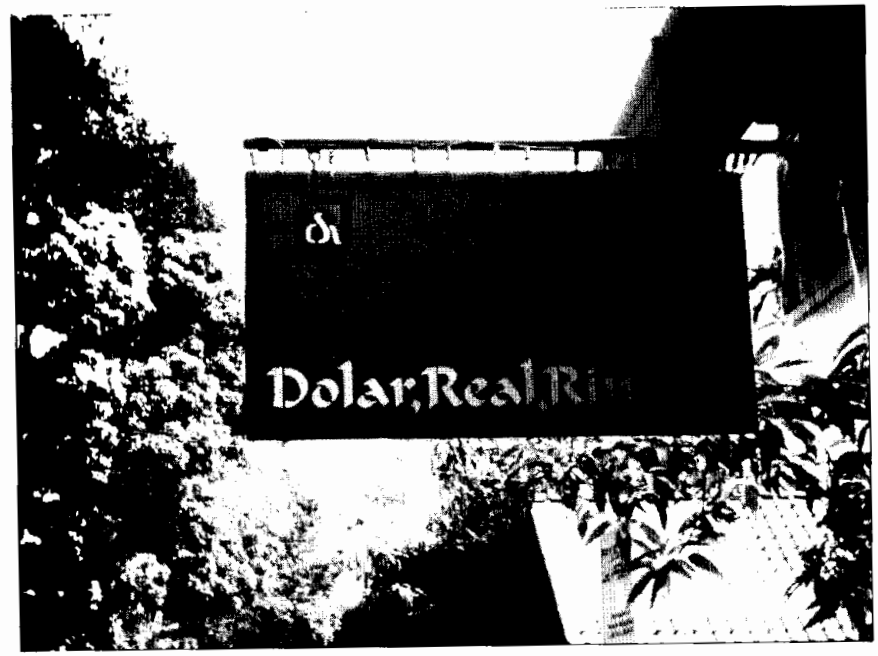

Figure 11: A bureau de change in Kalembah. Photo: Olivia Killias.

Rahaja, an older man who has worked in the factory of the local tea plantation his whole life, observed how things have changed since the first villagers started to work in Malaysia in the mid-1990s:

> Many people migrate because they do not want to be left behind (*mengejar ketertinggalan*). Look at Kalembah. It's a good example: many women have gone to work abroad, and now transformations are occurring faster than ever (*perubahannya pesat*). Before people started to go to Malaysia, well, life was just as it was (*hidupnya begitulah*). But now people are talking about building houses, buying motorcycles and so on, and that's all because of migration.

Surya, a woman in her mid-30s, confirmed this view. She told us that the lifestyles of her peers influenced her decision to migrate abroad for the first time: 'I wanted to earn my own money so that I could build a house, like my friends and neighbours'. Surya emphasised the fact that it was not 'poverty' that 'pushed' her abroad, but rather her aspiration for a modern house, which could not be achieved solely through earnings from work on the tea plantation. On a similar note, Hisana, one of

Surya's neighbours, recounted how upset she became when her Saudi employer commented on what a poverty-stricken nation Indonesia was, and how poor she must have been to come to work as a domestic worker. She told us:

> I am not poor! I can eat, my children can eat, everyday. We have enough. But I wanted to seek experience (*cari pengalaman*), and also to be able to pay for higher education for my children.

Such statements reflect a crucial empirical fact, namely that women who engage in transnational domestic worker migration belong to different strata of local society: as elsewhere on Java, women from wealthier families migrate just as well as women from the poor and middle classes (Breman and Wiradi 2002). In fact, migration for domestic work does not have the negative connotations in contexts of origin such as Kalembah that it often does in contexts of destination – in their village, migrants are generally viewed as successful people who have seen the world. This positive image of migration is also illustrated by the fact that both the current village head and his wife have themselves been directly involved in transnational labour migration.

Every month, people from Kalembah leave for destinations as varied as Jakarta, Pekalongan, Sumatra, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and Taiwan, under different migration regimes. It is hard to give any accurate figures about the exact number of people who have left Kalembah, since migrants are not registered in the village administration; women and men who have left Kalembah to work abroad are still registered as residents, and nowhere is it stated that they have left, no matter how long they have been away. The fact that no village record is kept of villagers' migration, either to other parts of Indonesia or abroad, is interesting, since it points to the fact that village officials consider the absence of labour migrants to be *temporary*. This belief reflects an important empirical aspect of this migration, namely that the bulk of migration originating in Kalembah is *temporary* and *circular* in nature. Despite the importance of migration, people continue to live in the village, and most of those who leave do so only temporarily. Indeed, as Tania Li has argued, the attention paid to migration has sometimes occluded the fact that 'the total number of people living in rural areas is bigger than ever, and they will be there for decades to come' (Li 2014: 3).

Both within Indonesia and globally, more and more migrants travel for work temporarily rather than to settle in one single destination (Hugo

2005: 54; see also Leuwol 1988). Hugo writes that these migratory movements are still not understood very well, since 'most conventional collections of information regarding stocks of migrants such as population censuses either exclude temporary residents altogether, or if they collect information from them, it is not processed or tabulated' (Hugo 2003). As a consequence, much of the scientific data collection, methodology and theorisation of migration 'is anchored in a permanent settlement migration paradigm' (ibid.).

Gender, mobility and debt

While there are no official statistics available in the village administration in Kalembah, my ethnographic data shows that since the mid-1990s a large majority of out-migrants in the village are women. In fact, even though landless men had engaged in circular labour migration between the village and the *Jabotabek* area at least since the late 1980s, many had been driven back from the cities after the 1997 economic crisis (Breman and Wiradi 2002). Men employed on the local plantation as *mandor*, in the tea factory or as security personnel were considered 'lucky', most importantly because they received stable income. While some men found temporary employment in the sections of the plantation that had recently shifted from tea to rubber, most men in and around Kalembah were struggling to make a living from insecure forms of day-labour around the village. Furthermore, while some men have migrated to Jakarta, Malaysia or Saudi Arabia, their female counterparts migrate in much larger numbers, both to Javanese cities and to countries such as Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Taiwan. In virtually all these cases, women migrate to take up jobs as domestic workers.

What we find in Kalembah reflects broader trends. The fact that it is mainly women who migrate is related to the gender-specific requirements of the global labour market. As Nicola Piper has explained:

> The demand for jobs with gender specific restrictions is a crucial determinant that channels women into certain types of job. Prevailing gendered ideologies make it unthinkable to employ a male domestic helper, resulting in policies disallowing the import of men for this area of employment. The demand for such workers is itself rooted in the gendered division of labour in dual income households where men do not shoulder their share of responsibility for domestic chores and childcare. (Piper 2004: 221)

Thus, current demands from the global labour market tend to channel young, rural Indonesian women into migration while preventing men from migrating. Gender-specific labour requirements are reflected in gendered migration circuits, and also in the ways in which women and men pay for their migration journeys. As Johan Lindquist (2010) has described in the case of migrants from Lombok migrating to Malaysia, women in Kalembah migrate overseas 'for free'. Wahyu, for instance, told me that his wife 'did not pay a single penny' before arriving in Malaysia – her wages were, instead, deducted for five months after she started working for her Malaysian employer. Men, however, have to pay considerable fees *before* migrating, both to Malaysia and to Saudi Arabia. In a discussion with Adi and Merdi, the two men discussed with me why men were 'left behind' in the village while their wives travelled around the globe. Adi told me the following:

> The problem is that men have to pay a lot, Olivia: six, sometimes up to eight million IDR (US$600–800). That's for Malaysia. So this is the reason why men do not migrate: because of the money factor.

Hence, men need to collect significant initial capital to migrate overseas (*harus modal sendiri*): approximately US$600–800 for a job in Malaysia, and US$1000 for employment in Saudi Arabia. Women, by contrast, migrate to Malaysia (and the entire Asia-Pacific) by becoming indebted to their recruitment agency. This debt is later transferred to their employers. In the case of migration to the Asia–Pacific, domestic workers have their wages fully deducted for several months. In the case of migration to Saudi Arabia (and the Middle East) in the mid-2000s, women still needed to pay small migration fees; however, these amounted only to about 500,000 Indonesian rupiah (US$50). Hence, gendered labour recruitment creates different types of dependencies for men and women: while men are obliged to become indebted in their village in order to be able to migrate, women can easily migrate without resorting to local moneylenders. Lindquist argued that:

> For men debt becomes localized through social relationships in the village, thus binding him to fellow villagers and family members, rather than the sponsor or labour recruitment agency. If the migrant chooses to back out, the agency never loses money, since relations of debt remain centred on moneylenders and sponsors who lend money to potential migrants. (Lindquist 2010: 130)

Local brokers explained that in the case of female migrants, future employers overseas were willing to pay large sums to cover most of the expenditure incurred by the recruitment, training, and migration of their domestic workers. Employers' willingness to *advance* capital was justified by the fact that female domestic workers were not allowed to leave their employers' home – in other words, it was directly and explicitly tied to the immobilisation of migrant women. Tellingly, this relation between debt and (im)mobility is not new – in fact, Anthony Reid (1983:12) has argued that in Southeast Asia debt has been for centuries 'the most important source of bondage' (see also Derks 2010a). In contrast, contemporary employers refused to advance as much capital for Indonesian men, brokers argued, because migrant men were generally *mobile*, as in the case of Indonesian drivers in Saudi Arabia. The wife of a local broker, herself a former migrant domestic worker in Saudi Arabia, explained that employers overseas did not want to advance the migration fees for men, because with men

> they are afraid that a man will be disobedient, unafraid, will look for another job, run away. With women this is not an issue: women just stay inside the house. And the fences there are high. So you cannot run away. So for women, no problem.

These justifications tell us that the gendered conditions of the global labour market result in distinct migration regimes. As Johan Lindquist puts it, 'while capital flows "down" in the recruitment of women, for the recruitment of men capital flows "up", from the migrant to the sponsor and the Indonesian recruitment agency' (2010: 128). It is the ease with which migrants can access capital at the level of the village that determines the ease with which they can engage in overseas labour migration; access to capital is easier – and quicker – for women than for men.

Even though many women from Kalembah engage in domestic worker migration, mobility is still essentially viewed as a male attribute. Indeed, it is both uncommon and socially inappropriate for Indonesian women to travel long distances by themselves. In her study of Eastern Indonesian women's travels, Catharina Purwani Williams (C. Williams 2007) has shown that access to geographical mobility is determined by gender, and that women face particular constraints when they travel. Hence, Williams argues, 'some groups of women can be, and in some

places are, perceived as out of place [when they are] on the road' (ibid. 2007: 45; see also Tsing 1995: 217).

Although women have considerable mobility around the village, there are times for walking around. This is illustrated by an experience which Karina and I had early in my fieldwork. Following social conventions, Karina and I always came back home before sunset. Once, however, an interview in another hamlet lasted longer, and we had to walk back home through the forest after nightfall. A heavy storm broke out just then. The electricity went off and we were walking in complete darkness. As we arrived at the first house after the forest, we sensed that we had clearly overstepped a boundary: walking around the village during daytime was fine, but walking back home at night was asking for trouble. Talking about this *faux pas*, one of our neighbours asked us whether we were *berani* (brave, but in this context 'defiant'). We were strongly advised not to walk at night anymore.

Village women took care, I found, to render their journeys socially acceptable in various ways. For example, while in Kalembah, they generally wore casual t-shirts and sarongs or short pants, but whenever they travelled longer distances, such as to the market in the next town or even further, they wore long sleeves and dresses and *always* covered their heads with a *kerudung* (veil). Also, over longer distances women were always escorted by a man (see e.g. Semedi 2012), just as migrant women are escorted by male brokers to recruitment agencies in Semarang, Surabaya or Jakarta.

In the case of border-crossing domestic worker migration, women migrants as well as their relatives seemed to cope with the apparent inconsistency between transnational migration and local ideals of femininity by emphasising the 'virtuous' nature of women's labour in the migratory context, namely its *domestic* nature. Hence, women's journeys were socially accepted because women migrate *exclusively* for employment in domestic service. Unlike in Southern Lampung (Sumatra), where paid domestic work is seen as a degrading activity (Elmhirst 2007), in Kalembah it is argued that paid domestic work is appropriate for young women. In factory work, young women would be 'too free' (*terlalu bebas*), as one friend told me. Parents expect employers to guard their daughters' morals and to keep them from entertaining amorous relationships. It is thus the *domestic* nature of the work – and the physical isolation that

it entails – that renders these women's mobility socially acceptable in Kalembah.

Adventurous girls – migration within Java

While most women who migrate abroad are married and have children, younger, unmarried women migrate to cities within Indonesia to take up work as *pembantu* (lit. 'helper'), as local domestic workers are called on Java. Hence, women's mobility expands from employment around their native villages to large cities in Indonesia and then to jobs in Riyadh or Kuala Lumpur. In Kalembah it has become commonplace for young girls to seek employment as domestic workers on Java as soon as they are done with high school; some of them even leave after having completed elementary school. There is a flourishing labour market for domestic workers within Indonesia; the ILO estimates that between 2.4 and 2.7 million domestic workers are employed within the country, of whom around 75 percent are women (ILO 2013: 33). On Java, many middle- and upper-class families employ one or more live-in domestic workers to look after their house and children (see Weix 2000).

Migration patterns from Kalembah tend to confirm Ernst Spaan's observation that international labour migrants from Indonesia are often a bit older and more often married than the people migrating within Indonesia (Spaan 1999; see also ILO 2006a: 9). Age, and in particular the stages of a woman's lifecycle, structure the mobility of migrants and also determine the ways in which such mobility is socially interpreted (Rodenburg 1997: 57; see also C. Williams 2007: 45). On the one hand, there are age limits in recruitment: agencies recruit women between 21 (the legal minimum age) and about 35 years old. Receiving countries define age limits, too: Malaysia only allows foreign women up to 45 years old to be employed as domestic workers. On the other hand, migration 'may be integrated into wider identity projects and form part of local subjectivities' (Osella and Osella 2000: 117) – in this case, 'local' migration can be interpreted as a rite of passage into female adulthood and a precursor to transnational labour migration. By working as *pembantu* on Java, unmarried girls are trained in carrying out reproductive labour, and through this experience they become 'marriageable' (see also Ong 1987: 87, for an interesting parallel with rural Malaysia). Labour-sending con-

texts reveal important insights into the articulation between 'local' and 'transnational' migration.[1]

During *Lebaran*, I was able to meet many of the young, unmarried women from Kalembah who were employed as domestic workers in Jakarta. In Indonesia, *Lebaran* or *Idul Fitri* marks the end of the Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting. It is the main Islamic celebration, and in Indonesia it is also the main national holiday. It is well known that most Indonesians will return to their place of origin for *Lebaran*, a practice that is referred to as *mudik* and which always leads to interminable traffic jams on the streets and to fully-booked and overcrowded buses, boats, trains and cars. The fact that migratory movements *within* Indonesia take place on a large scale and involve millions of people (e.g. see Hugo 2008) becomes suddenly very visible just before and after *Lebaran*, as a real big-city exodus takes places. *Lebaran* affects Kalembah too: migrants who are working in Indonesian cities come back to the village for the celebration.

Karina and I were able to meet 17-year-old Utami during the *Lebaran* festivities. Utami left to work as a domestic worker immediately after completing elementary school. When we met her, she had worked both in Pekalongan and in Jakarta. She told us that she had been aspiring to work in Jakarta from a very young age:

> I've always really wanted to work in Jakarta. I wanted to help my parents. That's what I aspired to from a very young age. [My parents] wanted me to go to school, but I didn't want to. Even now they want me to continue my schooling up to high school, but I'm the one who doesn't want to. I want to work.

Her family tried to convince her not to leave for work any more and to carry on with her secondary schooling in a *pesantren*, an Islamic boarding

1. In the Philippines, women who migrate to be employed as domestic workers abroad have been described in the literature as more highly educated, with more skills, working experience, and economic capital than those who perform the same type of work within the Philippines (Parreñas 2000; Lan 2003). Sometimes local domestic workers in the Philippines are employed as carers in the households of Filipinas who are themselves employed in domestic service overseas; this delegation of domestic and care work to women of lower classes back in the Philippines has prompted Rhacel Parreñas to speak of the 'international transfer of caretaking' (2000: 561). In contrast to the Philippines, in Indonesia the same women tend to experience employment as domestic workers in national and transnational contexts.

school, 'so that I get educated as a polite and respectful girl (*biar tahu sopan santun*)'. But Utami had made up her mind; she wanted to leave again.

Interestingly, young Kalembah girls frame their migration to Jakarta more as quests for adventure and exploration (*cari pengalaman*) than as labour migration. As a female maid agent recruiting women for the national labour market told me: 'When women are still young, they want to go out, see the world. When they are old, they are hard-working and stay at home'. This is illustrated in the way in which Sundari, a friend and neighbour of Utami, framed her own departure from the village for Jakarta when she was only 15 years old. She said that she wanted to go because Utami and all of her other friends were in Jakarta: 'I wanted to be like my friends, look for adventure (*cari pengalaman*). And look for my own money'. Utami herself told us that she left her employer in Pekalongan to go to Jakarta because she wanted to move on: 'Jakarta is hip (*asyik*); I wanted to explore new surroundings (*cari suasana baru*), and of course in Jakarta you make more money'.

Hence, the word *pengalaman*, which literally means 'experience', is best translated as 'exploration' or 'adventure' in the context of migration for it is big, modern cities that these young women set out to explore when they refer to *cari pengalaman*. To young women in Kalembah, migration is thus not just about seeking economic opportunities, but also about escape from the confinement of village life. During our encounter with Utami and Sundari, it turned out that soon after *Lebaran*, Sundari would be going to Jakarta again, to work for a new employer. When we asked her how it felt to be leaving the village again so soon, she answered:

> When I'm at home I can't bear it ... because I am used to travelling (*merantau*). I am never at home. I just come home for a few days, and then, after *Lebaran*, I'm off again. Come home for *Lebaran*, after *Lebaran*, work again. I never stay home for long. Like my friend, Tri; we never stay here for long.

The term *merantau* has been commonly used to describe mobilities that engender a rite of passage in the Indonesian context. Historically describing the travels of Minangkabau men who temporarily left the matrilineal society in which they were born, the *rantau* has come to take on a much wider meaning and is currently used to describe any form of border-crossing mobility (Salazar 2017: 24–25), including that of women leaving Kalembah as migrant domestic workers. Migration as

a rite of passage has generally been described as a male phenomenon, that is, migration as marking the entry into male adulthood (ibid. 2000; Monsutti 2005). In Kalembah, however, it is not men but women who migrate. Female migration for employment in the care sector is encouraged and socially valued. It has even become so ordinary for young, unmarried girls to be employed as *pembantu* in Javanese families that one can readily speak of migration for domestic work – a period that usually lasts between one and five years – as a rite of passage that marks a liminal phase between adolescence and female adulthood.

These years spent away from the village in paid domestic service on Java do not, however, entail staying with one and the same employer: young women report frequent employer changes. Many stay with their employers a few months, and if they are dissatisfied, look for another one. Often, *Lebaran* is a good moment to change employers; many young girls come back to the village for the festivities and never actually go back to their employers after that. The eagerness to seek experience and explore new places is one thing that drives them from one employer to the next; another reason for frequent employer changes is that young women prefer to leave an employer rather than voice their discontent.

Utami's experience illustrates this mobility from employer to employer. She explained that she was disappointed when her employer did not pay her a *Tunjangan Hari Raya* bonus for *Lebaran*. Since her mobility was also very restricted with this employer – she was not allowed to go out on her own except to buy *bakso*, soup with meatballs, at the corner of the street – Utami decided to leave this employer and not come back. She did not ask her employer for her bonus, nor did she ask to use the landline in her house when she needed to call back home: 'No way I'd ask her whether I could use the phone! I'd lose face (*malu*) if she wouldn't allow it. Better go to the phone shop'. So Utami travelled back to Kalembah, to celebrate *Lebaran*. And she never went back to her employer after the festivities. She sought to find employment via one of her friends who was back in the village instead. Indeed, very often men and women employed in Jakarta are approached and asked whether they have a younger sister back in the village who could come to work as a domestic in Jakarta. So during their next holidays, usually around *Lebaran*, they go back to the village and recruit girls from their own family or neighbourhood and bring them to Jakarta.

Besides escorting young women to their new employers, the role of informal intermediaries also includes responsibilities vis-à-vis both the employers and the families of the domestic worker whom they have recruited. In the event of a conflict they will be called in to help settle the issue – which usually means bringing the worker back home. It is the fact that they would take on this responsibility (*tanggung jawab*) that many villagers employed in Jakarta, who could recruit friends or family if they wanted to, shy away from. As Ismah, herself employed as a domestic worker in Jakarta, put it:

> Sometimes when I was cleaning outside of the house I would be approached like this: 'Miss, don't you know anyone for me?' Or at the market people would say: 'Come on, arrange for me to meet one of your friends!' or 'When you come back to Jakarta don't forget to bring along one of your friends!'. I did it once [brought a friend] and she liked it in Jakarta. But I refused to bring anyone else to Jakarta after that. I was afraid. If my friend hadn't liked it in Jakarta, I would have felt embarrassed towards her boss (*malu*), and I would certainly have had to accompany her back to the village. No way would she return home on her own. So I'd have had to ask my boss for a few days off, which would also make me feel uneasy (*tidak enak*) towards my own boss.

In labour arrangements mediated through informal brokers, intermediaries are generally responsible for the 'match' between employers and employees. In turn, employers feel responsible for their worker. The following example illustrates the web of responsibilities involved in such an arrangement very well. An elderly upper-middle-class woman employing a domestic worker in Jakarta told me the story. One of her former workers, a young girl from the rural area of Magelang, had already been working for her family for some months. At some point, she asked her employer for a day off to make an excursion with a young man she had met, a door-to-door seller who sold calligraphy in the neighbourhood. It turned out that she had already allowed this young man to come into the house. The male employer became angry and asked her what she was there for. 'Do you want to get married or to work?' The girl answered: 'Well, if possible, both, sir'. The employers were shocked by the audacity of her answer. Directly after they had this exchange with their *pembantu*, the employers decided to contact the man who had served as an intermediary in the recruitment of the worker and asked

him to take her back to her village right away. Even though she protested strongly, she was picked up by the broker and taken back all the way to her family in Magelang, a journey of about ten hours, the same evening. Asked why they had reacted so strongly to the behaviour of their worker, the employers explained that under such conditions they could not take responsibility for the girl any longer. This responsibility involved, first and foremost, moral custody; the employers explained that if the girl got pregnant, her family and recruiter would blame them as employers for not having watched her properly. This justified her immediate dismissal by the employers, and the recruiter's taking her back.

This example shows that on Java the relationship between a domestic worker and her employers involves more than just a work arrangement, and that such an arrangement draws on a patron-client relationship that involves the broader community. As Tellis-Nayak has observed of domestic service in the Indian context:

> The interchange between maid and mistress transcends their dyadic pact and involves the community as a whole. The mistress's custodial responsibility takes shape in relation to the girl's parents and to the mediators, to whom she may be beholden in other ways (Tellis-Nayak 1983: 70).

This responsibility is understood primarily in terms of moral custody – guarding the sexuality and good morals of young unmarried girls.

The transformation of domestic service on Java

Girls from Kalembah clearly see employment in domestic service in Jakarta as a temporary activity, but there is a long tradition of domestic service on Java that entails both men and women dedicating their lives to domestic work in the service of a single family.

A family that I met in Yogyakarta employed both a young migrant girl, Tani, and an older woman called Musri. Musri had been working for the family from a very young age. Tani and Musri both carried out domestic service in the household, but they had completely different labour arrangements. These two arrangements – referred to as *ngenger* and *pembantu* – exemplify the variety of domestic work arrangements on Java, and how practices in this employment sector are changing.

Musri started to work for the family of Slamet as a small child. Initially, Slamet was teaching Musri's older sister to read and write on an informal basis. When Slamet's wife became severely ill, Musri helped

out in the household. After his wife recovered, however, Musri felt that her help was no longer needed. She intended to go back to her parents, but Slamet told her that she did not need to go back home and just could 'stay on' with them. That is how Musri started to work for and live with the family. She has never married.

As Slamet himself explained, the arrangement with Musri was what is called, on Java, a *ngenger* arrangement. Before saying this, he apologised to Musri for referring to it. 'She is now part of the family', he explained. The Javanese concept of *ngenger* can be applied to arrangements in which children – both boys and girls – are placed with wealthier families to work as domestic servants, hoping to get food, clothing, housing, education and pocket money in exchange (Utami 2005: 47).

In contrast, younger women like Tani are employed as *pembantu*. As Slamet explained, this is a completely different arrangement: 'It is different with Tani [the younger domestic worker]. Tani gets a salary'. In her case, labour is compensated by monthly wages and regulated through (informal) contracts. Young women like Tani, or Utami and Sundari from Kalembah, work in domestic service for a *limited* period of time. In the case of Tani, it is very likely that she will leave the family after a few years to marry and look after her own household – as four of her predecessors have done. Thus, one of the most striking differences between older women employed in *ngenger* arrangements and young women employed as *pembantu* is the *duration* of the labour arrangements involved. Hence, this case shows that two women, employed simultaneously by the same family and carrying out exactly the same tasks – cleaning, cooking, washing, and looking after grandchildren – have a different status, enjoy different labour conditions, and have a different relationship to their employer.

Interestingly, over the last few years, *ngenger* arrangements have come to renewed prominence in activist reports. In these, the legacy of 'premodern', 'slave-like' *ngenger* arrangements is said to shape contemporary paid domestic service on Java (Utami 2005: 47). As such arrangements fall into disuse, formal recruitment agencies that tend to formalise, professionalise and depersonalise recruitment and training in the domestic service sector have emerged on Java. Such recruitment agencies, with names like 'Mother's Hope' or 'Pure Rose', are new actors in the sector of domestic service on the island. The majority of them emphasise the care

with which domestic workers are recruited, selected and trained before being sent to their employers. Some of these agencies have training centres, much like the agencies specialised in the recruitment of domestic workers for the overseas labour market.

These 'local' agencies tend to create new categories in terms of domestic service, by hermetically separating 'babysitters' and, to a lesser degree, caretakers for the elderly from the unspecialised domestic workers, who are simply referred to as *pembantu*. According to these agencies, 'babysitters' are domestic workers who have been specifically trained to take care of children – and the recruitment fees and salaries are, accordingly, way above those of 'usual' domestic workers. While until recently Javanese domestic workers have taken on all kinds of work, from washing clothes to bathing babies, without ever being formally trained for these tasks, these new agencies tend to create specialisations and, at the same time, hierarchies in the domestic service sector. They ask for more acknowledgment for the specific skills of 'babysitters' and caretakers of the elderly, and charge accordingly.

However, whether workers who are supplied as specialising in babysitting or the care of the elderly are really specially trained in these areas is often questionable. This is illustrated in the case of Inul, another young girl from Kalembah who works in domestic service in Jakarta. Unlike most of her friends, Inul was recruited by a formal agent who promised to train her as a 'babysitter' and to give her a formal certificate at the end of the training. Inul registered with the agency and agreed to later on pay back the training fees, which amounted to 1,300,000 IDR (US$130). Inul had been at the agency for less than a week when she was chosen by an old woman from Pekalongan who was looking for a 'babysitter' to help her daughter in Jakarta. The agent told Inul to lie about the length of the training that she had received – Inul did so and said she had been trained for 'about three months'. According to Inul, since people want to work as quickly as possible, such 'little' lies are very common.

Once Inul arrived in Jakarta, her female employer was often very angry with her because she did not know how to do things. The woman had given birth to a baby two months before. She would often 'test' Inul to see if she knew how to do things, which Inul found disturbing. Her employer also often made mean comments. Inul recalls that her employers were very educated people, so she felt a little out of place. She actually

wanted to change employers but was told by the agency that she could not do so during the first three months of employment. In actual fact, it is precisely during these first three months that agencies are required to provide employers with a free replacement if they are not satisfied with their employee, or if the latter leaves. Not being aware of this rule, Inul waited for three months and then left. As a result, her employer had to look for a new 'babysitter' and, more importantly, pay for the whole procedure again. Inul's wages were deducted again after she was placed with a new employer.

Inul's experience illustrates the fact that both employers and employees have lost control over work arrangements and that agencies manipulate workers and employers in order to get the maximum profit out of these arrangements. This recalls what Jennifer Bickham Mendez has described in relation to maid agencies in the United States; the bureaucratisation of domestic work through formal agencies, legal contracts, and training certificates does not necessarily lead to better working conditions (Mendez 1998). From the point of view of the workers, however, in the Javanese context, and even in the context of these contractual arrangements, it is still relatively easy (though expensive) to leave employers if they find the working arrangements unsatisfactory.

Time to leave for overseas

When I asked young women in Kalembah about international labour migration, they were clear about the fact that they were too young to go abroad for work, but many of them aspired to travel overseas. Nunung, for instance, whose elder sister had worked in Malaysia for five years, told us that she would 'love' to work abroad (*pingin banget!*). Ismah, another young inhabitant of Kalembah, also wanted to register with a broker in order to work abroad, together with her friend Eti. But Ismah's parents were against it because:

> A lot of women from here travel to Saudi Arabia, but all of them are married and have children (*sudah berkeluarga*). It's very exceptional that an unmarried woman (*belum kawin*) travels abroad ... So my parents were against it ... My mother said: '[Eti] is married now; you aren't'.

Hence, marital status and the birth of a first child are key in determining whether a woman is 'ready' to travel overseas. This goes to show that

beyond the state's regulation of migration and, for instance, the establishment of a legal minimum age for migrant domestic workers, the definition of who is a 'good migrant' is subjected to a wider set of societal norms (see Rodriguez and Schwenken 2013). What usually puts an end to young girls' adventures as domestic workers in Jakarta is precisely marriage – at some point, their parents will call them back to Kalembah to settle (see also Koning 2004: 258). Marriage is almost universal in Indonesia, and it represents an obligatory rite of passage into adulthood (Boellstorff 2005: 116–117). Generally speaking, young people in Kalembah marry at around 18 or 19, and by and large this first marriage is arranged by their parents, a practice which is referred to as *dijodohkan* – despite the fact that younger generations increasingly aspire to 'love marriages', framed as modern and opposed to the tradition of arranged marriages throughout Indonesia (see Boellstorff 2005: 117–118).

Working in Central Java, Juliette Koning has explained that 'Javanese marriage practices involve matrilocal residence, monogamy and relatively easy divorce' (Koning 2000: 216; see also Geertz 1961; Brenner 1995). This was also the case in Kalembah. Following the principle of uxorilocal residence, after marriage most young couples move in with the bride's parents (see also Koning 2004: 269). People from Kalembah refer to this principle of uxorilocal residence with the expression *suami ikut istri*, that is, 'the husband follows the wife'. The couple usually stays with the wife's parents at least until they have the financial means to be able to afford to build a house of their own. Generally, this house will be built next to the bride's parents. However, as Diane Wolf has pointed out, the Javanese kinship system is flexible, and in certain circumstances the couple may choose patrilocal residence (Wolf 1992: 52).

As I have pointed out, it is only after marriage, and often the birth of her first child, that a woman will go to work abroad. Surya, who has worked as a domestic worker in Pekalongan, in Malaysia and in Saudi Arabia, was clear that those who migrate abroad are generally married and mothers:

> All of them are married. When a husband does not take his responsibilities (*tidak tanggung jawab*), when the *nafkah* he provides is not sufficient, then his wife will usually ask him for permission to go and work abroad. Typically this happens after giving birth; when a young mother realizes that the *nafkah* that her husband provides is not sufficient, she will go to Saudi Arabia right away.

Following the Islamic ideal of *nafkah*, the husband is seen as the main breadwinner – he has to cover the basic everyday needs of his wife and children. On Java, however, it is commonplace for women to earn and handle money. Indeed, in her ethnography of batik traders in Solo, Suzanne Brenner argued that despite the Islamic ideal of *nafkah*, Javanese women are important contributors to the household economy. As Brenner put it, in the Javanese context 'it is not uncommon for a woman to be the *main* or even the *sole* breadwinner for her family' (Brenner 1998: 139, emphasis mine).

In Kalembah, most women were traditionally working away from their households, be it in agriculture or as tea pickers on the tea plantation. Despite the fact that women had long been working outside their homes, I found that men generally felt the need to justify the fact that their wives worked abroad. They often described the decision-making process as a unilateral one, in which wives decided to leave despite their husbands' disapproval, and husbands finally had to give in. As alluded to by Surya above, women's importance as breadwinners does not mean that they do not need to ask their husbands for consent for overseas labour migration. As a matter of fact, the husband's letter of consent (or that of her parents, in the case of unmarried women) has been institutionalised by the Indonesian state as one of the formal requirements for registration with a recruitment agency (C. Williams 2007).

Wahyu's wife was working in Malaysia when I met him in 2007. He gave a vivid description of how he had tried to keep his young wife from leaving to work abroad:

> It all started after we had been married for a year. She wanted to go to Malaysia, but I wouldn't let her go: 'Not so fast. If you want to leave, then don't let it be tomorrow'. She waited for two years, but then she told me again: 'I want to leave'. 'You cannot, not yet,' I replied. The third time, she said: 'I have to leave' [having in the meantime given birth to her first child]. I answered: 'Well, the important thing is that I didn't force you; I didn't even ask you to; I didn't do anything; this is your own free will (*itu keinginanmu sendiri*). If anything happens to you, I won't take any responsibility'. She replied: 'All right, I'll go then'. And I said: 'Well then, so be it. Obviously nothing can hold you back (*digondeli wis ra kuat*)'.

The way in which Wahyu recounted his wife's migration – namely as her own, independent decision and going against his will – was common

for men 'left behind' in the village. Indeed, for the men involved it would be unthinkable to openly encourage their wives to go abroad, as having their wives earning large amounts of cash abroad compromises their status as adult men. Tariman, for instance, pointed out that as the husband he had to provide *nafkah* and that therefore he did not at first agree with his wife going abroad. But later on his wife, Nastiti, told him that she wanted to 'help' him. Since she wanted to so badly, he said, he could not keep her from doing so. In husbands' accounts, women's overseas labour migration is thus mainly framed as a decision that helps to improve the economic situation of the family. At the same time, Tariman explained:

> I agreed with her going abroad, but the important thing is that I do not ask her for money. I would not feel okay doing that (*tidak enak*). Imagine a man saying: 'Hey, where's your money?' I'd be ashamed (*malu*). I'd feel very bad about it.

Tellingly, receiving remittances is not compatible with the local politics of masculinity and causes a man to feel ashamed (*malu*).

Beyond the fact that these accounts tell us something about normative gender relations, Wahyu's account in particular confirms that overseas labour migration is tied to marriage and the birth of a first child. In fact, migration is socially interpreted in such ways, too. Mothers migrate to 'help' provide for their children. Yet the fact that women are considered to be 'ready' to migrate abroad once they have given birth to their first child also involves a paradox, as Caroline Ibos has argued in a somewhat different context (Ibos 2008). Some women leave behind babies barely a few months old; one woman whom I interviewed in a training camp told me, crying, that milk was still dripping from her breasts because, before leaving, she was still breastfeeding her child. According to Caroline Ibos (2008), who has done research with African nannies in France, it is precisely the birth of this child that 'frees' women and makes them suitable candidates for migration. In fact, the birth of a child both *liberates* women from the obligation to procreate and *ties* them to the homeland (ibid.: 28–29). As Ibos explains, a child is the family's guarantee that the mother 'will respect the terms of the exchange' (ibid.; my translation), i.e. that she will always financially support her family back home while abroad (ibid.). Ibos' observations can fruitfully be applied to the the Javanese context. In Kalembah, migrant women often left while their children were still young, and it is generally considered better to leave very young

children in the care of relatives, and to return before children enter school – it is assumed that the presence of mothers is crucial to children's educational success. Elia, for instance, a woman who had herself spent years in Malaysia, told me that she had asked her elder daughter to come back from Saudi Arabia when her grandchildren were about to enter elementary school. Consequently, the stages of women's reproductive lifecycle and, though to a lesser extent, the age of their children structure the mobility of migrant women and determine the ways in which such mobility is socially interpreted (Rodenburg 1997: 57; see also C. Williams 2007: 45). The *timing* of migration is thus crucial.

Gendered predicaments: migration as a way out of marriage

Although Yani's suicide, reported at the beginning of this chapter, was an exceptional event in the village, the comment made by Nastiti's neighbour placed overseas migration in an interesting perspective: she framed migration as a way out of an unwanted marriage. This understanding of migration resonates with dozens of accounts of migrant women in Kalembah. Their narratives often referred to some sort of personal disappointment which triggered their decision to migrate. So while transnational migration is tied to marriage and the birth of a first child, marriages experienced as unhappy unions or, even more so, divorce, tend to reinforce women's motivation for migration. This is echoed in Sri Lanka: while migration has sometimes been reported as the cause of family breakdown, Ruth Gamburd has argued that it is very often family itself that makes Sri Lankan women migrate abroad:

> While some scholars blame migration for the breakdown of family life, often the troubles that have made marriages in Naeaegama break down ... form part of the reason the migrants choose to leave the country in the first place. Understanding how migration has changed women's roles and personal identities requires both an accurate understanding of ideals and stereotypes, as well as a realistic vision of family life. (Gamburd 2000: 198)

Gamburd's argument also holds true for my study in northern Central Java and points to an important tension between the standard media discourse, which represents Indonesian women's overseas labour migration as a form of sacrifice for the sake of the family, and migrant women's narratives, which sometimes tell of their decision to leave as a

way of leaving a problematic family. A closer look at life 'back home' in the village reveals that migrant women often cast migration as a way out of a crisis, and it is particularly prevalent among divorced women. In one hamlet, for instance, Yusriah, a young return migrant from Malaysia with one child, told me the following story:

> I had problems at home, it's as simple as that. Personal problems (*masalah rumah tangga*). Like most migrants. My husband was cheating on me; he was having affairs with other women. I was staying at home and so angry (*panas*). So I decided to leave rather than to stay at home like that. I worked abroad for three years and I never contacted him in all that time; I just contacted my mother from time to time [with whom Yusria's child was staying]. But I did not contact my husband, and I did not want to hear a single thing about him ... I did not send any money back home. I saved all my money and now I am building a house. He can't call me his wife anymore; it's over.

Transnational migration tends to be seen as a solution for women who experience unhappy marriages. It allows them to get away from cheating husbands while gaining autonomy by earning large amounts of cash abroad; it also enables them to sustain their families after a divorce. Women are considered to be mainly responsible for reproductive labour, and in Kalembah, as elsewhere in upland Java, children always follow their mothers in the case of a divorce (see also Hefner 1990: 168). In Kalembah, to my knowledge, all single-headed households were headed by women.

However, as we have seen, in the Javanese context, women have long earned and handled cash. So it is not economic independence alone that challenges male authority; it is economic independence achieved through a journey into the big, wide world, to which men have no access – experiences of overseas travel, of cosmopolitanism and modernity, as Rebecca Elmhirst has vividly described in the context of Lampung (Elmhirst 2007). Consider Surya's account. She was left by her husband when she was two months pregnant, and migration helped her get a divorce:

> My husband failed to give me *nafkah* from the moment I was two months pregnant. Even now [for the circumcision of his son], he only contributed 50,000 IDR (US$5). While I was in Malaysia and in Saudi Arabia, he never even gave him pocket money ... I wanted to divorce

> because our marriage was only about nitpicking. I wasn't happy with that, because you want to be happy in your marriage, right (*pengennya kan bahagia*)? I don't want a marriage that makes me feel miserable all day long ... My husband did not agree with the divorce right away, but I went straight to the village head to talk. The village head told him to leave me alone if I didn't want him any more ... When I came back from Malaysia, he still wanted to get back together with me but I refused. I had been hurt too badly (*sudah terlalu sakit hati*). So he said he would wait for me to come back from Saudi Arabia; but people over here told him I wouldn't want to, that I would marry some Saudi guy and never come back. In fact, if I had wanted to, I could have married the son of my Saudi employer. He wanted to marry me.

Surya fetched some pictures from Saudi Arabia as well as migration documents, which she kept carefully in a cupboard. We looked at the picture showing the marriage of one of her employers' sons. All of her employers' children liked her, she said. Surya's neighbour, who joined the conversation at that moment, wanted to know everything about the one that was interested in marrying her. Surya got a bit embarrassed by this, but she obviously also took some pride in having been courted by this man. She recounted that he was 28 years old, but that he was too shy to ask her straight away whether she wanted to marry him, so his mother asked her. But Surya refused: 'I told her that if I married someone in Saudi Arabia, I could not go back to Indonesia. She said I could go back for short holidays. But I said no, I did not want to.'

Surya's account reminded me of the stories of 'alien romance' that Meratus Dayak women told Anna Tsing (Tsing 1993). As in the Javanese context, for the Meratus travel and mobility are associated with brave men and adult masculinity. Women, in contrast, are thought to be fearful and silent (ibid.: 227). Yet Tsing argues that Meratus women travellers, by telling tales of 'alien romance' involving the love that foreign men have felt for them, challenge male privilege:

> In describing [foreign] men's unfailing love, the women turned the focus of the stories from victimization toward alien romance gained through bravery and travel. These stories challenge the characterization of women as fearful and shy, and they usurp men's exclusionary rights to a reputation for bravery and attractiveness. In this sense, they stand as both claims to status and critical commentary. (ibid.: 227)

That Surya's story of travel and 'alien romance' evokes female independence and challenges male privilege is also clear in the subsequent explanation:

> If my husband had still been living in this house [in her parents' home], then he might have spent all my money by now; but since we are divorced he can't. When he saw I brought back money, he tried to get me back. But I am divorced, I have a child, and I decide all by myself whether I want to marry or not (*mau kawin terserah saya*).

By engaging in domestic worker migration, women gain financial autonomy, but also experiences of travel and alien romance, as well as knowledge about modern, urban middle-class lifestyles. As Rebecca Elmhirst (2007) has argued, the gendered circuits of mobility and women's experiences as migrants have important implications for the cultural politics of masculinity in migrants' context of origin, as young rural men feel increasingly 'left behind'. I will describe in the next chapter how some men manage to reclaim male privilege by getting involved in transnational domestic worker migration as brokers.

From local to transnational migration

The global demand for paid domestic workers spans from Pekalongan to Jakarta, and from Kuala Lumpur to Riyadh. Women from Kalembah have increasingly responded to this demand, leaving their work on the tea plantation to travel for work away from the village.

The contemporary scholarly focus on transnational domestic-worker migration has shifted our attention away from the journeys of women working as domestic workers within their own countries (Moors 2003: 394). In fact, as we have seen, 'local' forms of domestic worker migration remain extremely important. For women from Kalembah, they are often the first stage in a series of moves which later lead to employment in other countries. Rather than being two completely distinct phenomena, the domestic and the transnational journeys of women looking for employment in domestic service are related to different stages of these women's reproductive lifecycles. Hence, the same women experience employment as domestic workers in national *and* transnational contexts: while young women work as domestics in Javanese families, they then go abroad as formal contract domestic workers after their marriage

and the birth of their first child. Labour migration is planned in accordance with important events such as marriage and the birth of a first child but also divorce, which is particularly prevalent among migrant women. While 'local' forms of employment in domestic service on Java tend to be increasingly formalised, I will show in subsequent chapters that important distinctions remain between 'local' and transnational domestic worker migration. Most importantly, the rules and regulations of domestics' work contracts abroad are backed up by strict migration policies, and these tend to leave little room for the negotiation of better work arrangements. In contrast, young women in Kalembah represent employment in paid domestic service on Java as a time of carefree travel and adventure.

CHAPTER 3

On the Road

Male Realms of Brokerage

While the requirements of the global labour market channel women into migration, the recruitment of migrants is largely in the hands of men. A small number of men, often husbands, brothers, or sons of women who have migrated overseas, have started to act as brokers in Kalembah.

In this chapter, I discuss how brokerage operates at the village level. The social inappropriateness of a woman travelling unescorted into the unknown, along with the cost of travel to the capital, prevents women from leaving their villages alone (Spaan 1994: 103). In contrast, male brokers roam near and far on their motorcycles, in search of potential migration candidates. Their ability to connect women willing to leave the village with recruitment agencies in large cities, and to 'protect' these women throughout this internal migration, allows brokers to reassert their masculinity in the wake of feminised transnational migration (Elmhirst 2007) and makes them essential actors in the increasingly formalised regime of labour migration from Indonesia (Lindquist 2009b; 2010; 2015; 2017). In them lies the promise of the big, wide world.

Most agencies recruiting women for overseas employment are situated in Jakarta. Of 365 licensed recruitment agencies registered in Indonesia, 253 are located in Jakarta,[1] and Indonesian women who wish to travel abroad as domestic workers first have to register with a licensed recruitment agent. For the vast majority of migrants from Java, the road to Riyadh or Kuala Lumpur must thus pass through Jakarta or some other major Indonesian city. Consequently, transnational migration involves an initial internal migration, from rural areas in Indonesia to the main inter-

1. The list of licensed recruitment agencies can be found on the website of the BNP2TKI: www.bnp2tki.go.id (latest statistics from December 2015, last accessed 11 November 2017).

action nodes of the Indonesian migration industry – the training camps of recruitment agencies, the special migrant-worker health centres, the certification agencies, the government's pre-departure briefings, and the embassies of destination countries (see Killias 2009a).

Wayne Palmer has shown how the geographical distance involved in this internal migration, together with the legal restrictions that prohibit licensed recruitment agencies from promoting their services directly to potential migrant workers (Palmer 2010), reinforce the crucial role that brokers play in the Indonesian migration industry. As Palmer points out, 'agents can advertise in newspapers and hold job fairs, but they must wait to be approached by intending migrant workers' (2010: 1). The agencies have no direct access to the rural areas from which most of the migrant domestic workers come, and they therefore have to collaborate with middlemen – in other words, brokers. Agencies pay brokers considerable commissions for every worker escorted to Jakarta. Since the demand for domestic workers from Indonesia is much greater than the number of women willing to migrate, especially to Malaysia, recruitment agencies are in fierce competition with each other, something brokers can exploit to their advantage. A placement agent from Kuala Lumpur told me that:

> The main cost for us is occasioned by the fees that the Indonesian agency is paying to the recruiters from the village, and this fee is constantly increasing. You know, the competition between agencies in Indonesia is very fierce, and they compete to attract recruiters from rural areas to get their maids. So if my Indonesian partner, let's say, pays a recruiter four million rupiah (US$400), another agency might say: 'I can pay you five'. This is the problem now.

The common idea that migrant workers are simply 'pushed' into migration by sheer poverty ignores the role played by recruiters or brokers, who are crucial actors in international labour migration. In their analysis of the recruitment of Javanese coolies around 1900, Houben and Lindblad came to the conclusion that 'market forces were not sufficient to generate a spontaneous flow of labour from Java' (1999: 41). Active recruitment strategies were required – and still are.

As I have explained earlier on, in Indonesia, it is widely assumed that women should not travel unescorted into the unknown (C. Williams 2007). Hence, from the day of their recruitment in the village up to

their arrival at their employer's home overseas, women are 'escorted' by various intermediaries. The fact that women actually travel thousands of kilometres for jobs in the domestic service sector does not necessarily challenge the idea that it is men who wield power in realms beyond the village. Male brokers are essentially mobile, and they sell the fact that they have access to different networks and places.

During the first days of my fieldwork in Kalembah in 2007, the road to the top of the village had just been paved. Villagers were excited about this new road. The improvement of road infrastructure in and around Kalembah and the increasing availability of motorcycles – bought not least thanks to migrant women's remittances – enabled some men in the village to expand the reach of their activities beyond the village. The ability to travel at higher speed was particularly crucial to men who engage in labour brokerage. As Johan Lindquist has pointed out, a private mode of transportation, but also a mobile phone and cash are key to getting started as a broker in the field of transnational migration (Lindquist 2015: 166).

Broker figures

Johan Lindquist (2009b; 2015) has described the figure of the broker – *petugas lapangan* – as a key figure of Indonesian modernity and argued that the shifting meaning associated with brokerage reveals a broader transformation in migration from Indonesia – from informal practices to regularised ones.

According to Lindquist, the appearance of the figure of the *petugas lapangan* – which can be translated as 'field officer' – needs to be understood in relation to 'the historical prevalence of various forms of brokers (*calo*) in Indonesia' (Lindquist 2009b: 56). On Lombok, Lindquist argues, the *petugas lapangan* stands for a much larger transition in terms of migration trends, namely the increasing formalisation of labour recruitment (ibid.). The word *petugas* clearly refers to someone on an *official* mission. The island of Lombok has long been known as a source of undocumented male migration to Malaysia, but Lindquist explains that there has been a swift transition from smuggling organised mainly by *taikong* (migrant smugglers) to formal migration organised by the *petugas lapangan*, who takes care of 'all the paperwork that is demanded in the manufacture of legality – including a birth certificate, an identity card,

a medical certificate, various government letters, and finally, a passport' (Lindquist 2009b: 57).[2]

In Kalembah, *petugas lapangan* – or its abbreviation, PL – is the term which brokers use to refer to themselves. The *petugas lapangan* is contrasted to the *calo*, a pejorative term that has increasingly been associated with trafficking-like practices. In the living-room of Nastiti's house, I saw the following advertisement:

> Do you feel like going abroad legally and being protected by our government? Then don't leave with a trafficker (*calo*)! Register with a licensed recruitment agency. Just give us a call—we come to your place!

Sponsored by national recruitment agencies, the advert featured the photographs and addresses of the managers of local branch offices. It illustrated clearly how formalised recruitment is contrasted with the activities of a *calo*. The picture of a crucial local figure in Kalembah, Supomo, was also on the poster. People referred to him as a 'sponsor', and several *petugas lapangan* recruited migrants for the branch office that he managed.

For the agency for which they recruit prospective migrant workers, brokers' essential attribute is their potential to recruit in their own environment, an environment to which the agency itself has no real access. To workers, the brokers represent the agency and have contacts with the 'big bosses' far away in Jakarta. Supomo said that:

> What people need is trust (*kepercayaan*). They don't know anything about the recruitment agency in Jakarta. What they know is the face of the local broker, like me.

A broker like Supomo provides prospective migrants with information, but, more importantly, he also has privileged access to local government officials who process the migrants' identity documents, can cover the cost of the 7-hour trip to Jakarta, and can introduce prospective migrants to a recruitment agency. Clearly, Supomo's power rests with his connections to both local state officials and recruitment agents in Jakarta. As James Scott (1972) put it, 'a broker does, in a real sense, have a resource: namely, connections. That is, the broker's power – his

2. For a description of how the *taikong* system operated, see Abdul Haris' discussion of 'illegal' labour migration from Eastern Indonesia to Malaysia (Haris 2002).

capacity to help people – is predicated on his ties with third parties' (Scott 1972: 95).

Supomo had been among the first to leave his village, which was situated not far from Kalembah. Now in his early 50s, he has become one of the main migrant labour brokers in the region and the emblem of *sukses* for people in Kalembah. His house is a modern villa decorated with flagstones, and inside imposing furniture and paintings astound his visitors. He owns a big car and a motorcycle, and his children are both studying at university. He is the person in charge of the local branch office (*cabang*) of a national recruitment agency that sends migrants to the Middle East and has its head office in Jakarta. He also owns a small shop that provides services such as photocopying and currency exchange. Although Supomo does occasionally recruit migrants for Malaysia or Taiwan, he clearly favours migration to the Middle East.

Supomo is the oldest son of one of the wealthiest families in the village, and his parents were traders; they owned a lot of land. He married a woman from the valley below Kalembah, a region closer to downtown Pekalongan – a town where international labour migration was already taking place, although not on a very large scale, at the end of the 1970s. He moved in with his in-laws. Part of his narrative of success, and probably what makes it so appealing to his co-villagers, is that, although born into a rich family, he had, at some point in his life, lost everything he had because of gambling. As Supomo put it:

> I was ruined (*hancur*). When I left the village with my wife, I still had a car, a motorcycle. But then I started to have problems. I had no hope. I had lost everything. That is when I realised that I really needed to look for money (*modal*) ... I had this friend in Pekalongan who had come back from Saudi Arabia. I was quite surprised to see what he had achieved: he bought a truck, and a car, and a motorcycle. That was all very new at that time. You could see that he had made it (*kelihatan suskes lah*). So I wanted to know all about it. I asked him about how to go to Saudi Arabia, what it was like. He was the one to motivate me. If I hadn't migrated abroad, no way I would have been able to earn as much money.

Supomo and his wife spent almost 20 years working in Saudi Arabia, she as a domestic worker and he as a chauffeur. They changed employers a few times, working in different Saudi cities. Interestingly, very early on Supomo encouraged his own siblings, nieces and nephews to migrate

to Saudi Arabia and elsewhere for work. Two of his younger brothers have been working in Saudi Arabia with their wives, his niece worked there as a domestic worker, and his nephew is currently employed in the construction sector in Malaysia.

Supomo recounts that after he came back from Saudi Arabia, other villagers asked him to help them get work overseas. With time, he realised that there was more in it than just helping his family; while in the lowland, urban area of Pekalongan, labour brokers had been active since the 1970s to recruit people to work in the Middle East, from the 1990s onwards, brokers increasingly entered the hills to look for labour supply (Semedi 2006: 206). That is when Supomo started to recruit workers and to take them to Jakarta, hoping to find an agency that wanted to 'buy' them off him. Most of this recruitment took place informally. When the state started increasingly to formalise labour migration, however, he became worried and looked for a way to be involved at a more formal level in labour recruitment. That is when he was chosen by a national recruitment agency from Jakarta to open up a branch office in his village in 2005. After this, he became this agency's representative and recruited workers from the region willing to migrate to the Middle East. During the main part of my fieldwork and until the government issued a ban on domestic worker migration to Saudi Arabia in 2011, Supomo recruited between 10 and 20 migrant workers per month, depending on the season.

Supomo's geographical sphere of activity expanded after his younger brother, Warsito, started to work for him as a *petugas lapangan*. In fact, after returning from work in Saudi Arabia, Warsito moved to live in the hamlet of his wife, Mia. From then on, through his brother and his sister-in-law, Supomo had access to parts of the village where previously he had not been able to recruit workers. This needs to be understood in the context of the fact that labour recruitment is extremely localised within Kalembah, which consists of seven hamlets (*dusun*). Each hamlet has its own primary 'migration area'. The overwhelming majority of migrants in Kalembah Desa go to Saudi Arabia; in Karangwuni, people leave exclusively for Malaysia; and the other hamlets display different variations of these two extremes.[3] Hence, the seven hamlets of the village are connected in completely different ways to the global flows of transnational migration.

3. All of the inhabitants of these hamlets are Muslim. Questions of faith do not play a role in the differences between migration destinations.

Mediating destinations

Labour recruitment in Indonesia is broadly organised along two main lines – gender and area of destination. National recruitment agencies receive licences to recruit workers for either the Middle East or the Asia–Pacific (Lindquist 2010: 125). Brokers have their preferred recruitment connections, and in Kalembah these connections lead principally to Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, which also happen to be the two most important destinations for Indonesian migrant workers overall. Malaysia and Saudi Arabia have in common that they have relatively low requirements in terms of workers' education, age, and physical appearance – in contrast, for instance, to Taiwan. They both have the reputation of being 'easy' destinations, and they are also among the cheapest ones. Singapore and other destinations in the Middle East are close behind, while Taiwan is the most expensive – but also the most lucrative – destination that brokers advertise in Kalembah.

Men like Supomo, his brother Warsito or Punjul (another broker in Kalembah) broker information about overseas destinations to women whom they have identified as likely to migrate. They do so in a context in which information on faraway destinations is already available: through national and international media, and through stories circulated by brokers and return migrants.

Brokers advertise migration destinations according to their connections – I found that Warsito, for instance, mainly advertised destinations in the Middle East. He distributed flyers that compared information on different destinations, and he roamed through the village telling stories about far-away places. Often, brokers' family members and especially their wives – many of whom have migrated overseas at some stage – play a key role in turning other villagers into migrants, too.

While Saudi Arabia's attractiveness was related to its status as the heart of the Islamic world, Malaysia was often framed as desirable because it was the destination that was closest to Indonesia, both in geographical and cultural terms. Malaysia's popularity as a destination had clearly been decreasing in Kalembah when I was carrying out the main part of my fieldwork between 2007 and 2009. This was related to the tightening of Malaysian immigration laws and to well-publicised deportation campaigns, as well as to the emergence of new destinations such as Taiwan or Hong Kong, where Indonesian domestic workers

could earn much higher wages. However, Malaysia remained attractive, especially to first time migrants, mainly because of its geographical and supposedly cultural proximity to Indonesia, the common (Malay) language, and the relatively low requirements in terms of education, age and physical appearance. As Supomo put it, 'we say that the ones to go to Malaysia are the garbage, the ones that were not good enough to go anywhere else'.

Despite the fact that for several years it was most lucrative to travel to Saudi Arabia, migrants from some hamlets in Kalembah refused to do so. This is exemplified well by a discussion that I had with Miatun. A return migrant from Malaysia whose daughters have both migrated to Malaysia as well, Miatun told me about different brokers active in the region, and she referred to Warsito as one of the most important brokers. However, Miatun said that she did not want to migrate with Warsito because he took people to Saudi Arabia. Her husband provided the explanation:

> Saudi Arabia is the heart of Islam. Yet in my opinion this is where the most abuse takes place. A lot of women return pregnant from there; I don't like that ... There are even cases where the women have been raped by their employers.

As this citation illustrates, stories of domestic worker abuse abroad did circulate in rural Java: villagers watched television, and husbands and fathers mentioned cases of abuse featured on TV when explaining why they did not allow their daughters or wives to go abroad.[4] The following discussion that I had with Merdi, his sister and their neighbour Adi, who did not want his wife to work abroad, illuminates this point from the perspective of the men in the village:

> You know, what I worry about is the employer. What if she gets a brutal employer? That's what I think about all the time ... I think it is because of what we get to see on TV ... They are treated so badly. Some of them even get raped! When I see these kinds of things on TV, I get distressed (*trauma*). Well, maybe, and this is quite probable, maybe [those who get in trouble] are the ones who are illegal, maybe; I'm not sure ... So that's what I am afraid of.

4. For a more detailed analysis of how Indonesians' recent travels to the Middle East as workers lead to new identity constructions contrasted to 'Arab' Others, see Chan (2017); Lücking and Eliyanah (2017); Nurchayati (forthcoming).

By circulating 'horror stories' (Gamburd 2000), media representations set the tone of the national debate on transnational labour migration, and they affect how migrants, their relatives and society at large 'judge, assess, interpret, regulate, legislate and make policy about migration' (Gamburd 2000: 210). In the context of such 'horror stories', in Kalembah, 'legality' is something on which migrants and their relatives placed a good deal of emphasis. In the following quote from an interview with Yusriah, she connects 'legality' to responsibility (*tanggung jawab*), a broker's most important attribute:

> Now there is Warsito: he has already escorted a lot of migrants to Saudi Arabia. He is a fine man (*baik*). If he recruits people, he is willing to take responsibility for them (*tanggung jawab*) if anything goes wrong. If those who recruit migrants do it carelessly (*sembarangan*), migrants will be wary. They will worry that a broker is cheating on them (*tak betul*), and that they will end up as illegal migrants. As an illegal, you're overseas without a passport and you are in trouble. You are always on the run; you are chased after by the police (*dikejar-kejar polisi*). If you want to get back home, that's difficult, too.

Yusriah's account demonstrates that criminal brokers, 'illegal' migration, abused migrants, and police raids have entered the collective imagination about what migration can be like. And not everyone migrates, partly because of the risks – real and perceived – involved. So, as Aguilar has argued, migrants tend to be 'risk takers': 'the risk-averse do not emigrate' (Aguilar 1999: 129).

Stories of 'illegal' migration, deportations and being chased by the police were particularly common in areas where people had left for Malaysia. Hence, the categories of 'legal' versus 'illegal' migration have not only become prominent in the Indonesian government's discourse; the figures of the 'illegal' migrant and the 'criminal' broker were often brought up in Kalembah. 'Illegal' migration was generally portrayed in conversations as the reason for abuse abroad, and it was considered very important that women migrate through 'legal' migration channels.

However, 'illegal' migration is regarded as primarily related to male migration, and as situated in the past, not the present. In the early 1990s, a few young men from the village were smuggled 'illegally' into Malaysia, first through Semarang, then by boat to West Kalimantan on the island of Borneo, and then to Malaysia through the land border at Entikong.

They worked on plantations in East Malaysia. According to the accounts of some of these young men, and consistent with what Lindquist (2010) has found on Lombok, this kind of migration pattern belongs to the past, the last group of men having left the village in the mid-1990s.

Producing the state effect

The fact that 'illegal' migration was described as a male phenomenon confirms the fact that Indonesian women and men have migrated following completely different patterns. They are, in their migration, subject to different techniques of state control. These findings are consistent with other research on Indonesian migration to Malaysia (see e.g. Wong and Afrizal 2001).

In Kalembah, female transnational domestic worker migration to destinations as varied as Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan was overwhelmingly 'legal' (see also Lindquist 2009b: 56).[5] Thus, bureaucratic procedures, visas, passports, long confinement in licensed recruitment agencies, pre-departure briefings, and returning through the special migrant-worker terminal in Jakarta have become part of virtually all return migrants' stories. Women who had ended up as undocumented migrants abroad generally had faced illegalisation after running away from their employers, as I will discuss in Chapter 5. Labour recruitment in Indonesia is thus increasingly formalised, and this can be observed in the various ways in which brokers, migrants and non-migrants alike refer to 'legal' and 'illegal' migration at the village level.

State interventions designed to regularise and formalise labour migration have specific effects in the village. While brokers claimed legality and aspired to be part of formalised recruitment channels, they were also critical of state involvement in transnational labour migration. Supomo, for instance, expressed discontent at increased state involvement:

> Our state takes such a long time to process everything... The bureaucracy is full of twists and turns (*berbelit-belit*); our bureaucrats like to make us lose time. Like identity cards, that's a good example; if these were processed correctly, within two hours I'm sure they could be done. So why do we have to wait for two weeks and be given all kinds of unlikely excuses, while most of our state bureaucrats actually just sit there smoking their cigarettes? The work isn't done, even though there are enough people around to do it.

5. Official statistics tend to confirm these observations: steady numbers of over 100,000 contract workers have left Indonesia for Malaysia 'legally' every year in recent years (source: BNP2TKI). Comparing this with the 2,917 workers who were sent to Malaysia through official channels in 1983 (Hugo 1993: 41), one can conclude that 'legal' contract-labour migration has come to represent a much greater part of migratory movements between Indonesia and Malaysia.

By expressing their discontent with the effects of increased state involvement, brokers make it clear that what is considered *legal* by the state is far from being considered *licit* by participants in transnational migratory flows, and this in turn reveals something about the ways in which brokers 'see the state' (see Kyle and Siracusa 2005). This dimension is especially important, because privileging the views of participants in international labour migration 'leads us to accounts and understandings very different from that of states' (van Schendel and Abraham 2005: 6). Ethnography is particularly suited to bringing such distinctions to light, as it looks at migration policies from the perspective of migrants, brokers and bureaucrats, all of whom participate in border-crossing mobility. These are participants 'who act, adapt, and often circumvent' (Brettel 2008: 120).

The formalisation of labour emigration is accompanied by the will to exert greater control over the mobility of the population. As this broker, a competitor of Supomo, put it:

> Now every recruitment agency is required to have a local branch office in the areas where it wants to recruit migrants. It is more difficult now. Before we just made an identity card and that was it; we could send the migrants to Jakarta. Now you need to provide a family certificate, an identity card, a birth certificate ... Before, it wasn't that complicated. But before, a lot of addresses were fake ones. Now it is impossible to falsify, you need to indicate the real address.

However, as Johan Lindquist has pointed out, the increased formalisation of migratory streams in Indonesia has not eliminated various 'illegal' practices, such as the falsification of documents that remain central to 'legal' recruitment processes (Lindquist 2010: 123; see also Palmer 2010). Even though certain documents may have become more difficult to falsify, manipulating the age and the marital status of migrant women is still common. Indonesians refer to such falsified documents as *aspal* – an acronym for *asli tapi palsu*, literally 'original but fake' (see Palmer

2016: 59; Ford and Lyons 2011). A 17-year-old worker, for instance, may have her age specified as 23 on her official identity card; a 17-year-old girl would not be allowed to migrate overseas. The increased regularisation of migration hence creates a 'manufacture of legality' (Lindquist 2010: 123), where brokers and others involved in the recruitment of workers at the local level produce legal documents through illegal means (ibid.). In fact, Wayne Palmer points out that following the intensification of police raids in national recruitment agencies, the falsification of documents – for instance the manipulation of a worker's age or marital status – is now increasingly taking place at the village level (Palmer 2010). Agencies pay local brokers a fee for providing workers with 'adequate' documents. Hence, although the myriad of documents required of prospective migrant workers do not necessarily result in the effective control of the migrant population, they do create what has been described as the 'state effect' (Mitchell 1991) – through documentation practices, the state comes to be known to citizens as an entity much larger 'than the sum of the everyday activities that constitute it' (ibid.: 94).

(Bitter)sweet stories

In the literature, it has been argued that migrant women depend heavily on informal brokerage networks for migration, perhaps even more so than male migrants, and this dependency has often been associated with their inexperience (Spaan 1994: 101; Sim and Wee 2004: 171). Spaan put it this way: 'the migrants' dependent position, their low educational attainment and their lack of information facilitate exploitation' (Spaan 1994: 101). However, female migrants are far from ignorant about migration processes or of the conditions that await them in destination countries; as I have indicated earlier, many village women have migrated abroad more than once. At least in areas where migration has already been going on for some years, women know what documents need to be processed for migration, which destinations pay what wages, which brokers pay how much 'pocket money', and international currency exchange rates (see also Fanany and Fanany 2017).

Migrant women are also well aware that middlemen do not always tell them the whole truth, and they actively compare the information they get from different brokers. 'Brokers tell us sweet stories, of course; they make us want to leave', a young migrant worker told me. Even

though many aspects of the migration process – including migration fees and government regulations at home and in destination countries – change constantly, making it hard for prospective migrants to ensure that they have accurate, up-to-date information, available news tends to be shared among kin and neighbours. Information-sharing also takes place when a broker harms a migrant in any way, as Punjul's story demonstrates.

Punjul, a widower, claims to be one of the first brokers active in the region of Kalembah, although it was only after his own daughter came back from Malaysia in 2000 that he succeeded in recruiting workers in substantial numbers. He explained to me that prospective migrants need to prepare their identity card, their family certificate and the letter of approval from their husband or parents – and if they do not have one or any of these documents, 'I will take care of it'. Punjul said that he could recruit workers for any imaginable destination, but all of the women whom he had recruited were, in fact, sent to Malaysia.

Like Supomo, Punjul noticed that state control over labour recruitment had increased, and he argued that this situation made things more complicated. When Karina and I met him in 2007, Punjul said that he had become fairly uninterested (*malas*) in recruiting new workers. He said that he only agreed to escort workers who came to his place and explicitly asked to leave with him.

The reason for his lack of involvement in recruiting women turned out, however, to be more complex than he had told us. What Punjul did not tell us was that his reputation in the village had suffered from what happened to a young woman, Tia, whom he had recruited and who was sent to Malaysia. Towards the end of 2006, Punjul recruited four women from Kalembah, among them Tia and her sister Pratiwi. He escorted the four women to Semarang and started with the medical check-up that agencies require before accepting the women. Unfortunately, three out of the four women were found to be unfit after their medical check-ups, and Punjul therefore had to take them back to the village. The only woman who was declared 'fit for work' was Tia. She was accepted by the agency, and after a few weeks at the training camp in Semarang, she was sent to Malaysia. She called her family before leaving Jakarta, and that was the last time that anyone in the village heard of her. Her parents, with whom we spoke in February 2008, were desperate:

> *Tia's mother*: Tia has not sent anything; she has not called us, no letter ... Her sister has sent a letter; she called us. But Tia hasn't, and it's been more than a year ...
>
> *Tia's father*: We don't know for sure where she is, what her phone number is in Malaysia. We don't know. When we first asked him [Punjul], he said maybe we haven't received it yet. But until now we have not received anything! It's weird.
>
> *Tia's mother*: It's very weird ...
>
> *Tia's father*: You know, Punjul's reponse ... he promised to track her down, but he just remains inactive. It gives me a headache, it really does (*pusing kepala saya*) ... I think about it all the time ... No letter from Tia ... What are we supposed to do about it?

From the moment Tia left Indonesia, her family lost track of her, and for two years nobody knew whether she was still alive. As a result, Punjul, her broker, was unable to recruit any other woman in the area. Two of the women whom Punjul had recruited together with Tia but were found 'unfit' in Semarang – including Tia's sister Pratiwi – were later on recruited by Punjul's most significant rival, Warsito.

Punjul's story shows that the reputation of middlemen and the recruitment agencies for which they recruit is of huge importance. Of course, brokers who can rely on existing loyalties and ties and recruit essentially in the area of their home village are more easily trusted by villagers, but the trust and loyalty that villagers feel for a particular broker can rapidly turn into suspicion if rumours about a villager's disappearance circulate in the village. Brokers who have caused harm to a recruited migrant in any way, even if indirectly, may encounter great difficulties in their further endeavours to recruit workers, as happened to Punjul. A few months after the interview with him, Punjul decided to leave Kalembah – and his teenage children – behind permanently, in order to try his luck elsewhere. He married a woman from the valley and was not seen in the village again for a very long time. In the meantime, Tia came back to the village, alive and healthy. She had worked in Malaysia for two years, where her extremely strict employers kept her from entertaining contact with anyone for the whole duration of her contract.

Punjul's experience as a broker demonstrates the risks involved in brokerage and clarifies why some people shy away from involvement in labour recruitment. During my fieldwork, I repeatedly encountered

men who had been approached by agencies to act as brokers but who had refused to do so. Wahyu, for instance, told me that the friend who had recruited his wife did not want to be a *calo*:

> From the way he talked, you could say he was half a *calo* (*setengah calo*). But he didn't want to [be a *calo*]; he said that he was afraid. If anything happened, people in the village would not scold the guys in Malaysia; they would blame him. That's why he did not want to be a *calo*.

Another man in the village reported that he shied away from the responsibility involved in recruiting workers for the overseas labour market despite the attractive offer that a recruitment agency made to him:

> They said that if there were any more workers, I should bring them to the office, that I would be paid 1 million IDR (US$100). Now imagine, if you bring 10 people, it's not too bad, right? ... But I thought to myself: it is no good. In the end, you lose money and you bear this responsibility. The thing that held me back most was the responsibility (*tanggung jawab*).

This reponsibility, *tanggung jawab*, is what holds back men – and some women – from engaging in recruitment. A migrant's story of failure or abuse can harm a broker's business and reputation immensely. This clearly distinguishes brokers from traditional patrons, who have a monopoly over goods to be distributed (Scott 1972: 100). A careful analysis of brokerage practices on the village level shows that these do not always correspond to '"traditional" patron-client networks' (Rudnyckyj 2004: 414). It also shows, however, that brokers are differently positioned in the field of brokerage depending on their social and economic status. A broker from an influential family like Supomo will more easily be able to control his reputation, as we will see below.

Narrating failure

Since reputation is a crucial aspect of their business, brokers take care to protect it. As a result, they also seek to know what people say about overseas labour migration, and especially what return migrants relate about their experiences abroad. In June 2008, we were able to observe how brokers dealt with a problematic 'case'. A woman from Kalembah, Bintari, came back from Taiwan after only a few months. Since contracts

> Warsito [Supomo's brother] did come over here, too. I didn't tell Dulah from *Putri Bangsa Sejahtera* that I wanted to leave again, and that I wanted to leave with Warsito. But then my father told Dulah that I wanted to leave abroad, and so Dulah said: 'She didn't tell me anything'. So after that he came to see me and asked me about it, and I said that I wanted to leave. 'With whom?' he asked. I said: 'With Warsito'. That was all, but then he got really ... really outraged. He said I wasn't allowed to leave with Warsito, he said I couldn't. He went on talking like that to me, coming very close, in a very brash way, also towards my sister ... so in the end I gave in. I decided to register and leave with his agency.

This demonstrates how brokers with different networks and political linkages try to make the most out of transnational domestic service – and the competition between them is intense. Women in search of a job overseas do have some negotiation power in their interaction with brokers, and they do sometimes take advantage of the competition between brokers to negotiate better conditions of migration, for instance a bit more 'pocket money'. However, the threats addressed towards Atik also show that selecting a broker is not a woman's individual decision alone. In particular when conflicts of interest arise and when her relatives have a stake in a woman's leaving the village with a particular broker, pressure to do so can become overwhelming.

The departure

Nastiti, whom I knew well and who had already migrated for work, was considering migrating abroad again. People in the village talked about it and speculated about when she would leave, where she would go, and with which broker. 'As long as there is gossip about me leaving, I'm not going,' she told me.

All of a sudden, a few months later, Nastiti left. Her husband later on told me that she had finally decided to leave because brokers kept contacting her. Four different men came to their house repeatedly to offer her a job abroad: a broker they did not know from Tegal, Supomo, Dulah and Hasyim. Although she had some reservations about leaving with Supomo because it was not clear how much pocket money she would get per day, she left with him anyway. She did so, her husband explained, because she was such good friends with Mia, Supomo's sister-in-law.

Nastiti would have felt ill-at-ease (*tidak enak*) towards Mia if she had chosen another broker.

On the day that Nastiti left with Supomo, only her husband and two children kissed her goodbye. She instructed her husband not to tell anyone that she had left for Jakarta: 'Just tell them that I've gone to Yogyakarta, to visit my relatives', she said. She didn't want anyone to know where she really was before she sat on the plane to Saudi Arabia. It was very important to her that no one in the village knew about her plans. The strong sense of secrecy surrounding the departure of Nastiti and other migrant women is especially interesting since it is in stark contrast with the departure of Indonesian pilgrims to Mecca; the latter is strongly ritualised.

Because of the cost of travel to Jakarta, brokers tend to wait until they have recruited several women before actually organising the journey to the capital; by grouping workers on one bus, they can save money on transportation. The date of the collective departure can be decided quite abruptly, however; as soon as workers have made up their minds, they are told to be ready for departure. Nurdjana told us the following about her planned departure with Warsito:

> Once Warsito has told you that you will be leaving within the next two weeks, then you should be ready to go ... even if you don't know when exactly he will come to pick you up. We have to be ready. If we're not, the bus will have to wait for us; that's annoying. So when Warsito came, I was ready: my bag was packed. But then [when I wanted to go], my son wouldn't let me go. He started to protest and begged me to stay, although he didn't cry. So I told Warsito: 'Let it be. If anything happens while I'm abroad ... My son does not want me to go, poor thing'. So Warsito said: 'Alright, if your kid doesn't want you to'. And then he left because he had to pick up two other women, from other hamlets in Kalembah.

When migrants from Kalembah leave for Jakarta, they know what awaits them: an interview with a recruitment agency in Jakarta, a long bureaucratic procedure, and, among other things, a medical check-up that determines whether they are fit enough to be sent abroad. They also know that they will spend time in a 'training camp', as described below. Hence, leaving the village and going to Jakarta does not entail immediate migration overseas. Medical check-ups are particularly likely to prove an obstacle; many women in the village have been declared 'unfit',

although they often do not know why they failed the health test. If this happens, agencies refuse to send them abroad and ask their brokers to take them back to the village. This uncertainty leads to a fair amount of anxiety, and it also provokes the spread of rumours about someone's medical condition in the village.

Consequently, being recruited by a local broker and taken to Jakarta is no guarantee that one will succeed in being sent overseas. Only weeks later is it generally clear whether someone will be leaving or not. Hence, women migrants prefer to keep their endeavours secret; coming back to the village earlier than planned because one failed the medical check-up, for instance, would be an embarrassment – and cause a migrant to be *malu*, in other words, to lose face. Hence, the first internal migration to Jakarta often occurs in secrecy. It is to this first trip, and to migrant domestic workers' experiences in recruitment agencies in Jakarta, that I turn my attention in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

At Camp

Indonesian Maids in the Making

Widhi, a woman in her late 20s, was escorted to the so-called *penampungan*, or camp, of recruitment agency *Sinar Harapan Putri* on a Sunday morning. Located in a suburban area on the outskirts of Surabaya, the agency recruited women for employment in domestic service in Malaysia, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Surrounded by high walls, the only access to the camp was through a gate that was locked and was under the constant surveillance of a male security guard.

The training camp of *Sinar Harapan Putri* consisted of two main parts. Offices, a 'modern' kitchen and bathroom used for training purposes, as well as several classrooms, were located in a modern building situated just behind the entrance gate. Further away from the gate, down a little hill, was the 'lower' part of the compound, where the recruited women lived. This comprised two large dormitories that could accommodate up to 200 women, bathrooms and an outdoor kitchen with, under a tin roof, wooden tables and benches.

Widhi's broker assisted her in registering at the agency's office. She had already passed the obligatory health test and was now asked to sign a so-called placement contract. Agency staff then checked her luggage for forbidden items such as mobile phones, and escorted Widhi to the camp's dormitory, where she was asked to store her belongings.

A few hours later, Widhi was sitting outside the camp's dormitory, in front of a large mirror. Rini, a young migrant woman who had already been at the camp for several weeks, was standing behind her, scissors and comb in hand. Rini, who had previously been in Hong-Kong, had worked as a hairdresser, so she knew how to cut hair. Some other women were sitting around on the ground, watching. Since it was Sunday, no training was going on.

Rini cut Widhi's ponytail with one cut and handed over the long, black hair to her. Widhi took it and kept stroking it as Rini went on to cut the rest of her hair into a short pixie cut. Some other women started jokingly to tease Rini on her skills as a hairdresser and gave her advice on how to arrange the haircut: 'The back is not even yet...', 'You should cut it shorter behind her ears'. Other women waited to have their haircuts improved. Loud music was playing from another room, and as she continued to cut Widhi's hair, Rini softly sang along with Celine Dion: 'Near, far, wherever you are...'. When she was done cutting the hair, Rini asked: 'You're done, Widhi. Do you feel lighter now?'

Having their hair cut short is the first of a series of transformations that women have to undergo when they enter a camp. This formally marks the fact that they have become a candidate for overseas labour migration, powerfully evoking van Gennep's 'rites of passage', as I discuss further below (van Gennep 1909; see also Krome 2009). Beyond agencies' intervention on migrant women's bodies, the detailed description of the actual cutting of the hair, including the fact that Rini cut the hair of a fellow migrant into a pixie cut as stylish as possible, and her singing along to the famous American *Titanic* song, also captures something about the subjective ways in which these Javanese village women imagine themselves as being on the way to becoming 'global women'. Having left their native villages, but not having arrived at their final destinations overseas yet, women in training camps are, in many ways, 'betwixt and between' (Turner 1964, cited in Krome 2009: 14).

In this chapter, I zoom in on the discursive and material practices by which Indonesian women are turned into 'maids', confined for weeks in camps that have all the defining features of 'total institutions' (Goffman 1961). Often housed in former hospitals or schools, surrounded by high fences and barbed wire and guarded by male security staff, training camps of Indonesian recruitment agencies are completely cut off from the outside world (Killias 2009a). The high wall and barbed wire that separate the camp from the outside world do indeed evoke Goffman's 'total institution'; Goffman speaks of 'locked doors, high walls, barbed wire' as symbolic expressions of the totalitarian character of institutions (1961: 4). He defines total institutions as follows:

> A total institution may be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life. (Goffman 1961: xiii)

Goffman argues that the mobility of people kept in such institutions is very restricted, and contact with the outside – for instance through visits – is limited and carefully regulated. Domestic worker training camps, quite clearly, belong to the category of total institutions that 'pursue some work-like task and justify themselves only on these instrumental grounds: army barracks, ships, boarding schools, work camps, colonial compounds', as Goffman writes in *Asylums* (ibid. 1961: 5). Explicitly designed to 'train' women for employment in paid domestic service abroad, camps are experienced as spaces of confinement, but also of liminal transformation: immobilisation in these camps is, by definition, temporary. By zooming in on camps as total institutions, and more specifically on moments of transition within the camp, I show that training camps are also sites of ambiguity and contestation. I reveal both the effort invested in the 'manufacture' of maids and the struggles and moral ambivalences involved in the process.

The immobilisation of mobile women

Recruitment agencies, so-called PPTKIS (*Pelaksana Penempatan Tenaga Kerja Indonesia Swasta*, lit. 'Private Placement Agencies of Indonesian Migrant Workers'), are key actors in transnational care chains. They process the legal documentation necessary for overseas labour migration and prepare women to become domestic workers in special 'training camps'.

The Indonesian government legally requires recruitment agencies to train women migrant workers before sending them abroad, and domestic worker training is generally presented as a key strategy to combat women's abuse abroad (Robinson 2000). However, women are not only trained, they are also detained in these camps until the very day of their departure. Luke Arnold has demonstrated that Law 39/2004 and implementing legislation in Indonesia allow agencies to keep workers confined in such camps: 'Law 39/2004 permits private recruitment agencies to detain prospective migrant workers provided they are treated "reasonably and humanely" and in accordance with implementing legislation (Article 70 of Law 39/2004)' (Arnold 2007: 131). Hence, the practice of confining women in these camps is not illegal under Indonesian law, despite the

fact that it violates the basic human right of freedom of movement (ibid.: 12). The Indonesian state outsources the training of migrant domestic workers to private recruitment agencies, but it remains directly involved in domestic worker training by assuring the licensing of recruitment and certification agencies, and through the pre-departure briefing previously described. Tellingly, while there are male migrants who travel to work for private employers – as chauffeurs in Saudi Arabia, for instance – migrant men are not immobilised in camps in the same way. Men sleep in dormitories, but they are free to roam around. Because of gendered ideologies, migrant men are required individually to get indebted at the village level to fund their migratory projects, as I have explained earlier on (see also Lindquist 2010). Hence, agencies care less about their whereabouts. Gender thus shapes the practice of labour recruitment in crucial ways.

Before being escorted to a training camp, migrant women have to pass through a series of assessments. First of all, the staff of the recruitment agency cursorily interview them. Medical check-ups are part of the standard recruitment procedure, too, and they can only be carried out in one of the specially licensed health centres. Health tests check for a multitude of health conditions, such as tuberculosis, hepatitis, HIV/AIDS, and blood pressure, and they include a pregnancy test. Only once migrants have passed these health tests will agencies formally register them and proceed with the next steps of the recruitment procedure. The importance of health tests is related to the contractual obligations of recruitment agencies – if a worker becomes ill or turns out to be pregnant during the first three months of her employment abroad, the recruitment agency who placed her is responsible for sending a replacement and cover all costs involved. This can easily amount to high sums, and women's bodies are therefore subjected to a process of 'contractualisation' (Debonneville 2016). It is extremely important from an Indonesian agency's point of view that they send healthy workers who will stay with their employer for the whole duration of their work contracts. As Nurdjana from Kalembah put it: 'I had to undergo the medical check-up … and after that I had to wait for the results. Because if you're 'unfit', you cannot leave.'

That the agency which sends a woman has an economic interest in ensuring that women fulfill specified obligations is made explicit in the so-called 'placement contract' (*perjanjian penempatan*). As the description of Widhi's admission to *Sinar Harapan Putri* illustrated, women have to sign such a placement contract before being formally registered with a recruitment agency and sent to its training camp. During my fieldwork, workers signing the standard placement contract with an agency agreed to the following terms and conditions:

- To work for the period stipulated in their work contracts
- To be kept at the camp for three months. If kept in the camp longer than three months, to be given an explanation by the agency
- Not to return home meanwhile
- To study as long as held in the camp
- To follow the instructions at the training camp
- To be clean, polite, well mannered and disciplined

In signing the contract they agreed to the following sanctions:

- To refund to the agency all recruitment and migration fees should they terminate the placement or work contract before its regular termination. Some placement contracts state amounts as high as 18,000,000 IDR (approx. US$1,800)
- If they ask to return home before the end of the training, to repay all of the recruitment agency's expenses
- If they violate the rules, to be sanctioned according to the agency's regulations (these regulations are not explicit)

The terms and conditions of these placement contracts reflect the unequal power relations between prospective migrant workers and their recruiters; they also explicitly mention prospective workers' state of indebtedness. By paying brokers' commissions of up to US$500 and covering administrative fees, food and training at the camp, recruitment agencies have invested in the migration candidates. Therefore, at this point migrant women enter a new stage in their labour migration: from informal negotiations with a multitude of different brokers back in their village, they now enter a realm of contractual obligations and depersonalised relations, and they are completely cut off from their former social networks. Signing the placement contract marks the transfer of responsibility from the broker to the agency – from now on, it is the agency that carries out all the steps necessary for overseas migration, and it is to the agency that workers are indebted (see also Rudnyckyj 2004).

The transfer of responsibility from broker to agency also marks the beginning of a phase of seclusion in one of the highly securitised training camps. It is powerfully evoked in the account of Nurdjana, who left Kalembah to work as a domestic worker in Malaysia:

> I hadn't brought my handphone along with me, but I had kept some phone numbers. If I hadn't hidden them, they [the staff at the camp] would have confiscated them. But I already knew that, for at the camp there were some experienced women who told us about it. So I sewed the phone numbers into my skirt; I wrote them on a handkerchief first, then sewed the handkerchief into my skirt ... If they know you save phone numbers [of acquaintances in Malaysia], they accuse you of wanting to contact people so you can run away from your employer. If they find money, they take it away because they claim that otherwise your employer will assume you've stolen it. If they find make-up or lipstick, they accuse you of wanting to be beautiful: 'Do you want to work or do you want to be fashionable?' And if they find a picture of your children, then they take it away for sure: 'Do you want to work or do you want to look at your family pictures? You are not allowed to go abroad to daydream all day long and look at your family'. It's hard.

As Nurdjana explained, a woman's luggage is checked upon her arrival at the camp, and mobile phones are taken away. While the high fences of the agencies' camps obviously restrict women's physical mobility, the deliberate restriction of contacts with the outside is even more remarkable: no mobile phones, no contacts or addresses of relatives or friends in countries of destination, and visits only at particular times during the week.

Migrant women were critical of the the total confinement that they were subjected to in training camps. Ipsah, for instance, explained that

> [At the camp] we got the same food every day for two months and if we wanted to eat something different, we had to buy it. But we were kept as though we were in a cage. We were forced to buy our food through the fence, with just one hand. For some time they even completely forbade us to buy stuff outside. They said we had to buy from the canteen because outside the food was unhealthy.

Comparing this level of confinement to employment in domestic service in Malaysia, she said: 'Of course I won't be allowed to go out of my employer's house, either. But here's the difference: my employer pays me, this agency doesn't'.

From the moment they register with a licensed recruitment agency, migrant women cannot simply change their mind – their indebtedness ties them to one particular recruitment agency. Nieboer's hypothesis that bondage develops where there are plenty of resources (in this case, job orders from abroad) but the workforce (in this case, domestic workers) is scarce is, to a degree, still plausible (Nieboer 1971 (1910)). Since the demand for domestic workers from Indonesia has tended to exceed the numbers of women actually willing to go, recruitment agencies have been competing to get their 'share' of workers to send overseas. This competition partly explains why agencies deploy extreme measures to control workers. They want to impede women from moving to another recruitment agency (see also Palmer 2010). So, as soon as they have signed the placement contract, women are escorted to the agency's camp, where they will be kept in confinement until a job opportunity allows them to leave for overseas.

To legitimise the confinement of women in camps before they are sent abroad, Indonesian recruitment agencies resort to a register of discursive legitimation that is centred on the sexuality of young, mobile women. Most of the Indonesian recruitment agents interviewed justified the fact that women had to be locked up in training camps by referring to the women's rural origins and the idea that they would be 'lost' if they were left to wander around in the capital. Because in the Indonesian context mobility is viewed as a male attribute, the fact that the mobility of these women was restricted seemed to be perceived by many as an appropriate way to guard both the women and their sexuality. Many agents invoked all of this quite unequivocally, claiming that women needed to be locked up in camps because otherwise they would get pregnant. These kinds of discursive practices position migrant women as promiscuous and emphasise agents' moral responsibility towards the women's families. This also evokes Aihwa Ong's discussion of how both parents and factory managers legitimise keeping control over young Malay female factory workers (Ong 1987).

The owner of a recruitment agency told me that the families of migrant domestic workers often welcomed the fact that he kept them in his camp and did not allow them to go out. He told me that, whenever possible, he addressed the migrant's family directly, saying the following: 'Sir, your daughter now stays at my place, and consequently I take full responsibil-

ity for her. For this reason, I will not allow her to go out'. According to him: 'parents are happy with this; it makes them feel confident'. Some parents have, indeed, told me that they welcomed the fact that their daughters were confined to their employers' homes while working as domestics in Malaysia, because, as women, they were in constant danger of moral depravation. Paternalist 'protection' of mobile women, then, is what justifies the secluded environment of the camp and makes it seem safe and hence legitimate.

Agents often defended practices of immobilisation by contrasting them to 'irresponsible' competitor agencies who supposedly let women workers walk around 'freely'. This is how Harry, the director of a recruitment agency, put it:

> The good, honest agencies are the ones that are strict (*streng*). There are a lot of unofficial, illegal agencies (*kaki lima*) around now, and they let the women walk around freely, they go out, sleep in all kinds of places ... Nowadays, agencies do not care about quality anymore. Once they've got their licence, they lose all sense of responsibility.

Although I have personally never met such an 'irresponsible' agent, what became clear was that the patriarchal discourses that serve to legitimise confinement and revolve around the good morals of young rural women aptly disguise the fact that for the agencies involved there is an economic rationale behind the women's incarceration. Agencies have invested in the recruitment of these women, they have paid brokers significant commissions, and now they want to make sure that their recruits neither 'run away' nor enrol with a competing agency. Indonesian recruitment agencies thus tend to instrumentalise gender ideologies in order to mask the considerable profit they are going to make from women's labour migration.

Maids in the making

Admission to and exit from camps, when migrant women enter and leave this 'total institution', are accompanied by a series of rituals. As Corinna Krome (2009) has argued, these rites of entry and exit evoke what French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep's has called 'rites of passage', a term he coined to describe ritualised transitional stages in an individual's life such as birth, marriage or death (Van Gennep 1909). Van Gennep identified three separate moments in each rite of passage: separation, margin (or

limen) and incorporation. Victor Turner then further developed the second of these stages, the liminal period, where initiates are characteristically isolated from the rest of society (Turner 1964). Turner argued that liminality characterises the transition from one state to another – from single to married, from teenage to adult. It can also, he argued, mark the transition to 'a new legal status, profession, office or calling' (ibid.: 46). Transition from one state to the next is viewed as a 'process', a 'becoming' (ibid.). This is a good description of what happens in training camps, where Javanese village women *become* Indonesian domestic workers.

Nurdjana, from Kalembah, vividly remembered the first time she entered the offices of a recruitment agency that later sent her to work in Malaysia:

> My hair was cut at the agency. I looked like a man. I was also told that I wasn't allowed to bring powder or lipstick; they threw it all away. My praying veil (*mukena*) was taken away too; they said I wasn't allowed to pray (*sholat*).

'To cut the hair is to separate oneself from the previous world', writes van Gennep (1909: 189). Such 'rites of separation' (ibid.) serve to mark

Figure 12: Cutting of Widhi's hair. Photo: Olivia Killias.

a woman's separation from her former life; cutting her hair, confiscating some of her clothes, make-up and perfume are practices that seek to separate a woman from her former self. While recruitment agents claim that long hair, which is traditionally associated with ideal feminine beauty in Indonesia, needs to be cut 'so that hair doesn't fall into the food while they're cooking', women whom I interviewed did not agree with the agency's claim that cutting hair short was a hygiene measure. No, to them, agents cut their hair 'just like a man's' (*macem orang laki-laki*) in order to make them look less attractive – this was, they said, in line with the wishes of female employers abroad who are 'worried about their husbands'. Hence, they claimed, agencies deliberately deprived them of bodily attributes commonly associated with feminine attractiveness. This line of reasoning resonates with Judith Rollins' work. Rollins argued that domestic service is one of the only sectors of activity in which it is an advantage to be considered physically unattractive (1990: 76). Rollins understands this fact as part of a more general politics of deference in which domestic workers constantly need to reaffirm their employer's superiority through acts of deference, downplaying their intelligence, keeping quiet about material possessions, and not looking 'too' attractive. Maids need to be inferior to their madams in every way (ibid.; see also Constable 2007). Agencies 'prepare' future maids in their training camps by forcing them to practise such acts of deference.

Generally taken at the camp within the first few days of the arrival of a new recruit, so-called 'biodata' photographs complete the physical transformations that turn women into maids (see Killias, 2011). These photographs are later published on the websites of placement agencies abroad. To take the photographs, professional photographers come to the agency with their equipment and set up a studio. One after another, the workers to be photographed are required to wear an apron and have their hair arranged by one of the photographers. In the process of having their photographs taken, the women are given various instructions, such as wetting their hair, holding their heads in a slightly different position or keeping their hands crossed in front of them, so as to show off their fingers. According to the photographers, employers want to see that their future employee still has all her fingers (*tanggannya utuh*).

The fact that migrant domestic workers are required to wear an apron for these portraits is interesting, since it is rare for Malaysian employ-

Figure 13: Smile! – composing a 'biodata' photo. Photo: Olivia Killias.

Figure 14: A finalised 'biodata' photo. Photo courtesy of a recruitment agency.

ers to require their maids to do so. Its presence in the photograph says something about the work to be done and is a claim to professionalism. The colour of the apron, red and white, symbolises the colours of the Indonesian national flag, which is no coincidence, as I was told by the manager of the agency. It echoes the essentially nationalist discourse that seeks to valorise Indonesia's migrant working class by referring to migrants as the national heroes of remittances (*pahlawan devisa negara*).

The 'biodata' pictures have to appeal to the imagined requirements of potential employers overseas. The apron stands for the cleaning, washing, and cooking, or the 'dirty' work; the smile stands for the emotional work that workers are expected to carry out, attending to their employers' needs and caring for children and the elderly (see Parreñas 2001: 171). The smile is, indeed, the most important component of the photograph, and much effort is put into getting it 'right'. The photographers repeatedly draw the women's attention to the importance of their smile: 'Smile so that employers become interested in you, so that you quickly get an employer'. The 'right' smile needs to seem natural and sincere; but in many cases it is the result of intensive efforts. The importance of the 'smile' is also emphasised in the event that women fail to be selected by a foreign employer. A woman whom I met in a training camp was desperate to get an employer, but seemingly no one had wanted to employ her for more than nine months; a staff member from her agency declared that this was because she 'could not smile' (*tidak bisa senyum*).

I noticed that the time-consuming composition of the photographs, and especially the physical contact that occurred in the process of composing the pictures, caused excitement, flirting, and jokes between the male photographers and the female migrants. While one woman was being photographed, others were getting ready and waiting around, often commenting and joking about the *mise-en-scène*. As the two photographers prepared one of the women for the photo shoot, her fellow recruits giggled. One of them asked: 'How come you're quivering when you're having your picture taken? Look at that touching!' She was obviously referring to the fact that the photographer was arranging the woman's hair and uniform. All of them laughed, and the woman whose photograph was being taken accused her friend of being naughty.

At the end of the shoot, the women were required to pay for the pictures; this is just one of the hidden expenses that migrant domestic

workers – allegedly migrating 'for free' – have to incur in order to travel abroad (see Killias 2009a; Lindquist 2010). Then the photographs were handed over to the agency, which processed and sent them to their partner placement agencies in Malaysia, Hong Kong, or Taiwan, where future employers would choose their maid from a catalogue.

While the 'biodata' system offers employers abroad the comfortable and quick option of selecting their maid with a few mouse clicks, domestic workers have to undergo a lengthy disciplinary process in secluded training camps before being able to migrate abroad. As Lenore Lyons has rightly observed, 'domestic workers are not simply produced through discourse: a range of material practices ... serve to "make" the maid' (Lyons 2005: 1).

Training as a civilising mission

Every licensed PPTKIS emphasises that it trains workers whom it has recruited before those workers are allowed to go abroad. Generally speaking, domestic worker training is presented as an effective way to curb abuse. Suleiman, who owned an agency sending workers to the Middle East, defended domestic worker training particularly vehemently. He referred to examples of domestic workers who were unable to handle domestic tasks and specifically mentioned the famous case of Nirmala Bonat, a domestic worker who suffered shocking abuse at the hands of her female employer in Malaysia. This is what Suleiman told me about the Nirmala Bonat case:

> She [Nirmala Bonat] is really a stupid person. Would you be happy if you paid a lot of money and recruited someone from far away, only to find out that this person was not capable of anything? They are not trained, because agents want to send them abroad as quickly as possible, and because they want to leave abroad as fast as they can. So they do not even know how to use an iron.

Suleiman attributed the abuse suffered by Nirmala Bonat to her alleged 'stupidity' and to the fact that she had not been adequately trained. Like Suleiman, many agents claimed that training was necessary because rural, working class women were unable to carry out domestic chores in a 'modern', urban household. I noticed an interesting tension in agents' discourses, between the proclaimed necessity to train village women in domestic work to adapt them to the expectations of their prospec-

tive middle-class employers, and the supposedly natural suitability of Javanese women for domestic service that I will describe more at length further on.

Agents have a long list of what the training consists of, such as language training or cooking. The trainers focus on skills that are perceived to correspond to the expectations of middle-class employers abroad, and to the requirements of destination countries. Jeni, the director of an Indonesian recruitment agency that sent women to Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan explained it in this way:

> We have time. We make sure that they are well trained. We do not want workers to [...] be sent back to Indonesia. We would have to replace each of these workers for free – so we do not want to take a chance on this ... If agencies care about the quality (*kwaliti*) of the training, that is better. The level of achievement (*kesuksesannya*) is much higher. So we need to talk quality (*bicara kwalitilah*).

In training camps sending workers to the Asia–Pacific, migrants have schedules that divide their time between language training and training in domestic tasks. During language classes, women have to repeat words or phrases after their teacher, or recite texts that they have to learn by heart. Often, women are interrogated one by one. When called by the instructor, they have to stand up to give their answer. If their answer is wrong, they are punished. One teacher, for instance, made it a habit to make women who provided the wrong answer stand in front of the blackboard for the whole duration of the lesson, in full sight of their colleagues. In Kalembah, many women told me that staying in the training camps was like going back to school. All of them disliked this aspect of their time in the training camps.

Cooking is another important dimension of domestic worker training, and is perhaps the most important part. In groups, women are instructed how to cook foreign food. The elaborate meals that they cook during these classes are later served to the staff. After each cooking class, a group of workers has the responsibility to serve dinner to the staff. The group has to set the table and arrange all of the dishes on the nearby buffet. Then two women from the group have to stand straight and immobile next to the table, in a posture that signifies their being on duty. They have to make sure that no flies or other insects get at the food. On certain days, the two women on duty have to wait in this standing

Figure 15: Language class in the training camp. Photo: Olivia Killias.

position, occasionally driving the flies away with a fly swatter, for as long as 30 minutes – a very long time if one has to stand still.

Some of the training is carried out in ways that are humiliating for the women. For instance, at one camp I saw women required to scrub perfectly clean office floors on their knees while members of the agency's office staff walked past them on high heels. The fact that most of the cleaning took place in spaces that were already spick and span provoked a sense of frustration among trainees. Women had to proceed with the cleaning of the camp according to a very tight set of rules. They had to clean the furniture with a particular sponge, using a particular product and putting things back in a particular way. When scrubbing the floor, they had to proceed with the scrubbing in a particular order, first in this room, then in that room, always under the constant supervision of staff. According to Goffman, this kind of painstaking supervision of and interference with even the smallest details of an activity leads inmates of total institutions to completely lose their sense of autonomy. The meticulous regulations regarding inmates' activities are characteristic of total institutions in general. Through such minute rules and regulations,

Goffman argues, 'the autonomy of the act itself is violated' (1961: 38; see also Ehrenreich 2003).

Tellingly, women are only minimally trained in care work. If they are trained at all, they are instructed in the care of elderly people through role-playing games in which experienced migrant women take on the roles of the foreign elderly. Generally, the emphasis of training in care work lies on patience and submissiveness. As a trainer told me:

> I often tell the women a lot of stories about employers ... If you get an employer like this, act like this, or if your employer is like that, behave like that ... I also tell them to answer violence with patience. If your employer is being mean to you, just let it go in one ear, out the other. Be patient.

Hence, more emphasis is placed on the submissiveness of Indonesian women than on practical skills. This emphasis is, I would argue, related to the fact that domestic workers are not paid to carry out a particular task – say cooking or childcare – which has a beginning and an end; they are paid to be there, at the full disposal of their employers, for the entire duration of their contracts. In the case of Indonesian domestic workers in Malaysia, this non-stop availability lasts for a contractual minimum of two years. Thus, agents place a greater emphasis on the need for workers to stay with their employers than on the actual practical skills needed in the conduct of domestic work on an everyday basis.

Consequently, less obviously necessary aspects of training include the inculcation of good manners (*sopan-santun*) and honesty. Consider the following explanation by Harry:

> The most important thing is that we really train the women who register with our agency. For our usual workers, we need approximately three or four months; for older ones it can take longer ... The most important thing for them to learn is the language. The second most important thing is cooking, cooking like people [abroad]. Third, we need to teach them good manners (*sopan-santun*). Then they need to be honest. A lot of migrant workers come from poor areas, and they do not understand what it means to be honest. So for instance if they are hungry and would like to eat chocolate, they will just help themselves and take a chocolate bar in a shop or at their employer's home, not understanding that this falls under 'stealing'. So that is the kind of thing that we do here; this is the kind of teaching that we give them.

While they arguably regard all rural women as 'backward', agents have set ideas about the relative backwardness of women from different regions of Indonesia.[1] Women from certain regions have the reputation of being more 'backward' than those from other regions. Those from some regions are thought to be more docile; those from more isolated and 'underdeveloped' regions are said to be tougher, wilder, and 'harder to tame'. Stacy Leigh Pigg has argued that for elite, educated Nepalese living in the cities, 'to go to a village is tantamount to visiting alien land' (1992: 493). This is equally true for the Indonesian urban middle classes. Jeni, the director of a Jakarta-based agency I quoted earlier on, told me that she sometimes needed to travel to very remote places in order to understand the workers that came from those areas: 'I need to understand them in order to avoid problems when we place them with their employers, later on,' she said. She clearly regarded women from more remote parts of Indonesia as very different not only from their future employers but also from herself. This is how she described her trip to Lampung in South Sumatra:

> Once I went to a village in Lampung, to a place where electricity had not even arrived yet. On my trip to that village, I kept praying, I was so afraid ... We had to drive through the jungle, and anywhere you looked, there was jungle all around. I wanted to go to that area because I needed to know how bad it really was down there. No way was I going to believe some broker's stories. I needed to see for myself why it was that certain workers were so much tougher than others ... Why is there such variation between workers from different areas? Because their mentality is different. So when I was in Lampung, I saw it, and I couldn't blame them anymore; it's because their region of origin is as it is. In contrast, take the workers from Central Java. All of them are okay because their culture, their whole mentality, is gentle; they are more obedient, more submissive, and willing to work harder – that's what the Javanese are like. So no wonder our clients are more interested in 'biodatas' from Central Java.

From what Jeni says, it is very clear that 'a kind of place comes to stand for a kind of people' (Pigg 1992: 492; Kahn 1999; Li 1999). From the perspective of Indonesian recruitment agents, the making of the generic 'Indonesian maid' is consistent with a broader national ideology

1. For an interesting comparison with the Philippines, see Debonneville (2014).

of development and modernisation. Stacy Pigg has argued that Nepal sees itself as 'an underdeveloped country in relation to the rest of the world' (1992: 497); the same may be said of Indonesia. The 'rest of the world' includes the destination countries of migrant Indonesians, such as Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. In the Indonesian context, underdevelopment is generally referred to as *belum maju*, 'not yet developed' (see Lindquist 2009: 147-148). As Johan Lindquist has explained, *belum* evokes a particular sense of temporality. It points to an idea of evolutionary temporality, a 'not yet there' on a straight line of progress. This view is illustrated well by a board I saw in one of the training camps I visited (see below). It urged migrant workers to 'keep up the good name of the Indonesian nation abroad, so that Indonesia will one day reach the rank of developed country (*sudah maju*)'. Similarly, when I asked Harry about the importance of 'discipline', a word that is in all agents' mouth, he said:

> Discipline is very important, because even now our people (*bangsa kita*) cannot be disciplined yet (*belum bisa disiplin*). This is why we keep shouting all the time – to discipline the women. Let me give you an example: if we call a TKI, she must run, not carelessly drag her feet ...We teach them, so that when they finally arrive in Hong Kong, they *run* when they are called. Discipline is really important ... but unfortunately our people just don't get that yet (*belum ngerti*) (emphasis mine).

The way Harry explained the need for more discipline among Indonesian migrant workers, and across the Indonesian nation more generally, and the example of the 'foot dragging' in particular, echoes the colonial myth of the lazy native that was so skilfully described by Syed Hussein Alatas (1977). Alatas described how European colonial writers interpreted 'native' behaviour in the colonies of Southeast Asia and how, often based on extremely superficial accounts and prejudice, they produced the negative image of the 'lazy native'. According to Alatas, following decolonisation and changing relations between Southeast Asia and the West '[t]he image of the indolent, dull, backward and treacherous native has changed into that of a dependent one requiring assistance to climb the ladder of progress' (1977: 8). Indonesian recruitment agents promise to train rural women so that they can climb this 'ladder of progress' (ibid.).

This can be seen in the fact that there are two lines of demarcation in Harry's reasoning. One line separates the rural working classes of

Indonesia – the population to be educated – from the educated, urban middle-classes who will help them 'develop'. The second line separates Indonesia, still an 'underdeveloped' country in the eyes of its own elite, from the 'developed world' – represented by, among others, the destination countries of Indonesian domestic workers. In the words of agents and state bureaucrats, the training of migrant domestic workers taking them out of poverty and ignorance and transforming them into foreign-language-speaking professionals is envisioned as an important step towards national development. The training of domestic workers is thus cast as the education of rural women as Indonesian domestic workers. This framing of women as key agents of national development was made explicit in a myriad of ways during training, including the so-called 'Five Commitments of the Indonesian Migrant Worker' that hung on the wall of a domestic worker training camp on Java.

The five commitments of the Indonesian migrant worker

We, Indonesian migrant workers, promise the following:

1. We promise to always be faithful to God.
2. We promise to always respect the rules that were made by the recruitment agency PPTKIS, whether these rules are written or unwritten.
3. We promise to always uphold the dignity and status of women, and to honour, respect and protect our fellow migrant workers.
4. We promise to always keep up the good name of the Indonesian nation abroad, so that Indonesia will one day reach the rank of developed country (*sudah maju*).
5. We promise to always work hard, and to be polite and honest, for this is what it takes to be successful. We promise to complete our contracts (*finish kontrak*), for the sake and success of all migrants, in the name of Allah SWT.

Amen, Amen, Amen.

Manager of the recruitment agency
Director of the local police

Clearly, women are represented as key actors in the nation's march towards progress, and at the same time it is clear from this list of 'commitments' that the dignity, politeness and honesty of women migrants

is not self-evident; women need to commit to these values, and experts train them to become polite and honest workers. Above the door of the dormitory, a damaged red plastic sign read in big yellow letters: 'Polite, Honest, Hardworking' (*Sopan, Santun, Jujur, Rajin*).

Teaching deference

Everyday life in the camp is characterised by military discipline. Daily schedules are strictly timed, and twice a day all women are required to gather, to stand in rows and to wait for the staff to check on their presence. Names are then read out loud and workers are required to answer in English, Cantonese or Mandarin, depending on their destination country (see also Krome 2009: 31). Women are split into groups (*piket*) that have to take turns in carrying out defined tasks at particular times of the day, such as cooking, doing the washing up, cleaning the staff quarters, washing clothes belonging to the staff, cleaning the office and cleaning the bathrooms. At least one female overseer, a so-called 'camp mother' (*ibu asrama*), supervises the living quarters of the workers in the camp. She is responsible for order and discipline. More staff are employed as trainers or language teachers, and it is not uncommon to see former migrant domestic workers who have successfully returned from abroad take on these roles. More staff are employed in the agency's office, but this upper managerial level of the agency rarely has any contact with the 'lower' realms of the women's camps.

The social organisation of the camps is based on an extreme hierarchy between staff and migrants. This hierarchy can be seen in many aspects of everyday life in the camps. An example is the spatial segregation of staff and inmates. Members of staff have their own living quarters and their own bathrooms (which are marked as 'staff bathrooms' and which recruits are not allowed to use or enter, except to clean them). Staff and migrants do not eat together, and they do not eat the same food. While the recruits' meals are extremely simple – generally a bowl of rice with some vegetables – and cooked in the camp's rudimentary outdoor kitchen, staff meals consist of various elaborate dishes that are cooked in a special, 'modern' kitchen designed after models in cities such as Singapore or Kuala Lumpur and which is located in the 'upper' realms of the camp.

Hierarchy between staff and migrants also exists in the forms of address. As Daromir Rudnyckyj has shown, migrants are 'always addressed in the second person – "*kamu*" – rather than the formal "*mbak*" or "*anda*"' (Rudnyckyj 2004: 429). In contrast, when migrants address staff, they always have to punctuate their address with a respectful *bapak* ('sir') or *ibu* ('madam'), or their equivalents in the languages of destination countries, such as *jiejie* ('older sister' in Mandarin). These forms of address convey the message that women migrants do not deserve to be treated like equals.

Acts of public humiliation are also very common in camps. On one occasion, I was talking with a staff member when suddenly the angry voice of the *ibu asrama* became so loud that we could not ignore it. She was shouting at some of the women for a reason unknown to me, and insulted them: 'Monkeys! Dogs! You cannot be called humans!' (*Monyet! Anjing! Yang tidak bisa dikatakan manusia!*). The staff member with whom I was talking immediately justified the *ibu asrama*'s excessive anger to me. He argued that the women needed to be treated like that: 'What if they arrive abroad and don't know what discipline is? Poor things! We have to teach them so that they will be able to cope with their employers!' I soon found that women were used to being treated in this kind of way. Although some were worried at the idea of encountering members of staff, because they didn't want to get scolded, some of the women themselves viewed such behaviour on the part of the agency staff as legitimate, arguing that it was necessary:

> They test our mental strength (*menguji mental kita*). When, in language classes, Mrs. Erma gets angry because we don't know something, it's understandable. If we are mentally strong enough to pass the tests they put us through here, we will succeed abroad.

This kind of justification is a good example of how every institutional action is reinterpreted in order to fit the avowed, official goals of the institution – in this case, training and education (Goffman 1961: 83–84). Every act, every decision – even the most meaningless one – is justified, at least to the outside (in this case, to the anthropologist), as essential to the training imperative. Yet this training imperative is tenuous, at best. There are quite a few discrepancies between the rules and regulations of the agencies and the actual requirements of foreign employers. Having

their hair cut short, wearing an apron, saying 'Good morning, sir' every time they meet their employer – these are *not* things that Malaysian employers commonly require of their Indonesian migrant carers. To the contrary, I was told by an employer that she was annoyed at first when her domestic worker arrived, because she would say 'Good morning, madam' at least five times a morning. Another employer had never discussed with his domestic worker whether she could pray or not – for him, it was obvious that she could. Most employers were unaware of the fact that workers had been trained in precisely these ways. The transregional articulations of domestic worker migration tend to remain opaque.

The moral ambivalence of brokerage

Given the scandalising media reports in Indonesia about women's overseas labour migration, recruitment agents are not viewed very positively in the country; theirs is a business that is considered economically lucrative yet morally questionable. Staff at recruitment agencies have all been at least affected somewhat by the negative image associated with what is often seen as a 'trade in women'. Consequently, agencies' staff generally cared about the ways in which their work was seen by outsiders, and often referred to 'the need to train'. The ones directly interacting with the women felt the greatest need to morally justify their work, as I discuss below.

Erma, a young Javanese woman, worked both in the office and at the camp of a recruitment agency. However, in her view these were very different activities. Within all recruitment agencies, there is an internal division of labour. Some staff members are considered 'white collar' – they are employed on an 8 am–6 pm basis, they carry out administrative work or teach, and they go home at the end of the day. Other staff members stay at the camp 24 hours a day. These staff members may well be involved in secretarial work or teaching during the day, but they are also involved in the 24/7 management of workers in the camp – including the surveillance of workers during the night. The relationship between 'pure' administrative or teaching staff on the one hand and staff working at the camp on the other is pervaded with friction. According to Erma, her colleagues from the office did not understand the small daily struggles that the staff working at the camp experienced, or the

difficulties inherent in living together with the trainees. Erma said that she found it very hard to work at the camp. According to her, people working there all become ruthless, with time: 'even people who were patient and soft-hearted become tough, strict, and easily angry (*bisa marah*)'. Erma also remarked that most people from the outside saw the employees of recruitment agencies as immoral men and women who were just after the money. Moreover, the fact that it is women whom they send abroad, women who leave behind families, puts the morality of the agencies' activities into question. Ideally, Erma told me, she would like to stop working in the recruitment agency and find another job as soon as possible.

Tellingly, Indonesian recruitment agents often frame their activities as recruiters in terms of *helping* poor, rural women become independent, by turning them into transnational breadwinners. As such, they cast the migration of Indonesian women as domestic workers as an important step towards financial independence, the bettering of the economic situation of many families in rural Indonesia, and hence as a contribution to national development. By framing their activities in the familiar jargon of national development, Indonesian recruitment agents seek to morally legitimise their businesses. This strategy is also reflected in the names that these agencies choose for themselves: 'Hope for Success', 'Daughters Forever Independent', 'Work for Independence', and 'Travel Around the Globe' are just a few examples of Indonesian recruitment agencies' (translated) names.

Liminal socialities

Training camps are characterised by continuous flows of migrant women entering and leaving the premises. Although many have to stay for months, no migrant is there to stay forever; the time spent at a training camp can thus appropriately be framed as a liminal moment (see Krome 2009).

After initial admission procedures, women are pretty much left to themselves to find their place among dozens or even hundreds of others. As Mia from Kalembah recalled, this is not an easy process:

> Of course it is difficult at the camp. I was relieved when I finally arrived at my employer's home ... At the camp, it's always too hot and too crowded... And when you have just arrived, when you're new to

> the camp, that's the worst ... The women who have been there longer than you have already taken everything. If you want to lie down on a mattress to sleep, you can be sure that someone will tell you: 'No, leave it, that's mine'. When you want to take a pillow, someone will shout: 'That's mine!'... So it's really difficult. I imagine that if someone were really shy, they wouldn't sleep at all because they wouldn't be able to find a bed.

Upon entering a training camp, women must, literally and figuratively, find their place. This is particularly important because they are explicitly separated from their former social lives.

The practice of confiscating mobile phones is clearly intended to keep migrant domestic workers from entertaining (transnational) social ties while they stay in the camp, but it also keeps them from organising collectively, since mobile phones have been identified as important instruments of labour organisation among domestic workers (Sim and Wee 2004: 191). Some camps make public payphones (*wartel*) available to the women. However, these *wartel* can only be used at specific times of the day. In one of the camps, for instance, workers were allowed to make calls only between 5:30 pm and 7 pm. With just two phones for over one hundred women, there were long queues in front of the *wartel* every evening. When they made a call, women were both in sight and within hearing distance of others – privacy was compromised, and so was the duration of phone calls. With others waiting in the queue and the restricted operating hours of the *wartel*, women who stayed on the phone too long would get scolded by fellow recruits.

Visiting hours in training camps are restricted, too – visitors are only allowed to come on weekends, and only for a few hours. All visitors have to remain within the yard in front of the camp, in full sight of staff and other recruits. Entering the living quarters is taboo, and so is taking a woman out of the camp for an excursion or a walk. Hence, the character of visits is inherently public – another characteristic of total institutions (Goffman 1961: 31).

I witnessed a visitor day at *Sinar Harapan Putri*. It was a Sunday afternoon, and some women had gathered in the courtyard of the camp. They were sitting in little groups, chatting and waiting. For most women, visitors were a rare occurrence, as most families lacked the financial resources to travel to the city and visit their mothers, daughters

Figure 16: A woman walks through the dormitory of a training camp. Photo: Olivia Killias.

or wives in the camp. That day, the mother and children of Sita paid her a visit. Sita had been at the camp for nine months already – she was the one who 'could not smile'. Sita and her family spent the afternoon sitting in the shade of the main building, talking. The children played in the courtyard, and Sita occasionally bought them some sweets from a street trader who had exceptionally been allowed onto the premises of the camp because it was visitor day.

When the time came for Sita's family to go back home, Sita gave her mother some money before hugging her. The old woman walked to the gate with tears in her eyes, carrying Sita's youngest child, a girl barely 18 months old. The two older children walked behind her. Sita watched the camp's security guard open the gate, and her mother and children walked through. Her children did not seem to mind or realise that it might be a very long time before they would see their mother again. They dutifully followed their grandmother and waited next to the big, busy road. The camp's security guard closed the gate, but we could still see them stepping into a green bus and rushing off into the busy traffic of this early Sunday evening.

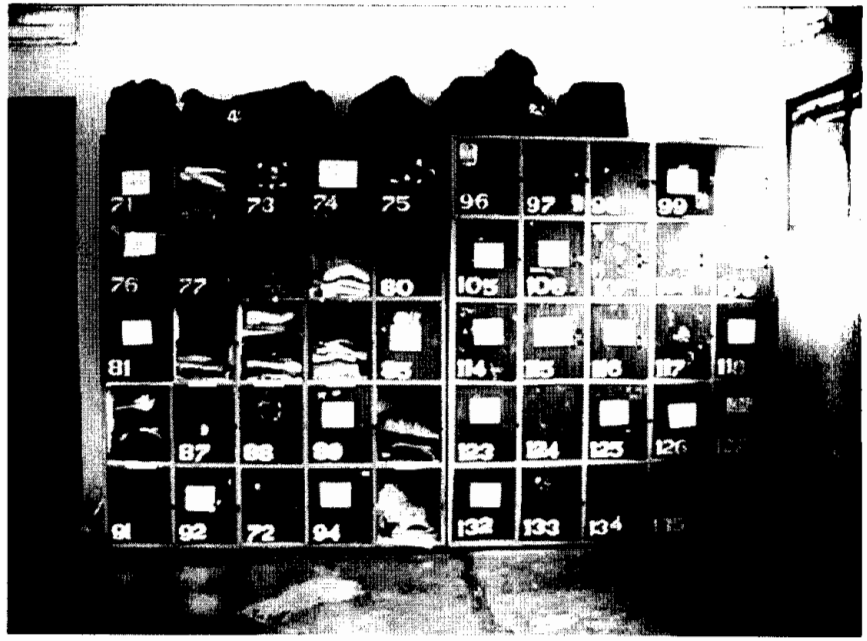

Figure 17: Lockers in the camp dormitory. Photo: Olivia Killias.

Clearly, entry into a training camp is a moment of rupture for migrant women; it separates them very effectively from their former social networks, and more generally from their former lives. Yet despite the separation that migrant women face when entering a camp, the camp is also a space of sociality (Silvey, forthcoming). In fact, while the relationship between recruits and the staff of the recruitment agency is marked by extreme forms of hierarchy (Rudnyckyj 2004), relations between women at camp are marked by equality; age, marital status and class do not play a major role in interactions between them. However, there is differentiation regarding the time spent in the camp, as Mia explained, and experienced migrants who have left abroad before tend to be treated with more respect by the others (Krome 2009: 49).

In his work on liminality, Victor Turner has argued that, during a liminal phase, transitional beings have nothing: 'they have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows' (1964: 50). In many ways, this applies to the situation of women in training camps, as they have been stripped of most of their belongings and cut off from their former social networks.

Figure 18: Doing 'homework' together in the camp. Photo: Olivia Killias.

Privileges that exist outside the realms of the camp lose their relevance once women enter a *penampungan*. This reflects what Turner writes about the liminal group, which he argues 'is a community or comity of comrades and not a structure of hierarchically arrayed positions. This comradeship transcends distinctions of rank, age, kinship position' (1964: 50). Ina, a woman in her early forties, told me about taking showers at the camp: 'When we shower here at the camp, it's around ten women at the same time, all of us naked [bursts out laughing]. It's crowded (*ramai*)!' There was obviously an aspect of sociality, comradeship and laughter involved. Other moments of sociality took place during instances of 'leisure'. In the camp of *Sinar Harapan Putri*, some of the women gathered on Saturday evening in an empty room next to the dormitory to sing karaoke together. A particularly popular song during these nights was Indonesian singer Rhoma Irama's *dangdut* song *Kerinduan* (literally 'Longing') about two lovers missing each other. When one of the women in the camp would start singing this song, all the others would listen in rapt attention, some of them joining in to sing: 'Calm your heart, do not be anxious, I know you're waiting. Be patient, be patient. I will be back soon.'

While women like Mia remember feeling insecure when they first entered the camp, many did in fact develop friendships during their stays and appreciated the sociality of other migrant women:

> So many women stay at the camp. The first night it is difficult ... so many women and you don't know them ... But I got to know so many women from other parts of Indonesia. Some of them have been abroad, so they have a lot of experience. My closest friend (*teman curhat*) was Siti. Every day, when getting ready in the morning, having breakfast, going to class ... I did everything together with Siti. We confided in each other, we told each other everything, from our childhoods to the moment we came here. Now Siti's gone abroad, and I feel both happy for her and very sad to have been left behind.

As this statement by Watik illustrates, the common experience of having left families behind and of staying in secluded camps in order to become a TKW opens up possibilities for sociality and friendship. However, since the duration of transit is uncertain – women never know for how long they will stay at a camp – the *communitas* (Turner 1964) that is created is always of a transitory nature, with some of its members leaving as new ones arrive.

Migrant struggles and the underlife of the camp

While women were drilled to be docile and deferential in training camps, they resorted to various techniques of insubordination, or 'secondary adjustments', as Goffman calls them. Despite the totalitarian character of Indonesian domestic worker training camps, the management of such camps – like the management of any 'total institution' – in no way maintains 'perfect' control over its inmates. As McEwen argued, the 'image of the total power of authorities is especially misleading given the influence of the inmate underlife that Goffman and others have taken great pains to elaborate' (1980: 149). In most camps, for instance, staff referred to one particular quarter of the camp as being less disciplined and particularly 'hard to handle'. Acts of insubordination included finding creative ways to circumvent agencies' rules, as is illustrated by Nurdjana's account of how she sewed addresses into her clothes. Other women managed to bring mobile phones into the camps.

But there were also instances of more public defiance. On the occasion of the national day celebration on August 17th in a camp, a group

of women decided to stage a play about a migrant domestic worker leaving for Hong Kong. The story went as follows. Tun, a Javanese wife and mother, was desperate because of her husband's debts and hence decided to migrate abroad to save her family from a catastrophic financial situation. When she arrived at the recruitment agency, she was met by two of its female employees and given a myriad of instructions about life in the camp. One of the two employees, a stylish young lady whom everyone in the audience could easily identify as Salina, one of the chief employees and the director's mistress, was particularly mean to poor Tun. She ordered her around in a high-pitched voice and showed no empathy whatsoever for Tun's situation. Everyone in the audience laughed as this despicable character ordered Tun to 'finish her contract'; it was well known that Salina herself was a former migrant domestic worker who had not finished her contract and had started a relationship with the agency's director instead. That the piece was directed at Salina became particularly clear when the latter left the audience in the midst of the play, amidst loud laughter.

The most extreme form of insubordination is, of course, breaking out of the camp. In Kalembah, I met one woman who had run away from the recruitment agency to which Supomo had escorted her. Although she recalled having been very worried about Supomo's reaction to her escape, not much happened at all – they just never talked to each other again after that. Therefore, despite the placement contract that women are asked to sign upon their admission to a training camp, in practice not much seems to happen if women succeed in running away. In fact, brokers prefer to ignore the running away of a migrant and refuse to assist central agencies in Jakarta in locating workers who have done so. How brokers react to an escape is certainly related to the fact that if they treat prospective migrants – their fellow villagers – too harshly, they would jeopardise their ability to recruit new workers in the village. This is how a broker from Kalembah reacted to the eventuality of a woman running away from an agency:

> If a worker runs away from a training camp in Jakarta, that's it. Let it be. We villagers, we know that if someone's in trouble, that person needs protection.

It is interesting that agencies make workers sign placement contracts, when in practice it is difficult for agents to implement the stipulated

(financial) sanctions. It is only under certain circumstances that workers who have not complied with the contract can be forced to pay any money. Bintari, a returned migrant domestic worker from Taiwan, whose story of 'failure' I mentioned in chapter 3, told me that she was not at all aware of the consequences that the placement contract could have for her. It was only once she had come back from Taiwan after just three months that she learned what the placement contract was all about. Recruitment agency staff picked her up at the airport in Jakarta and brought her to the agency, where she was confronted with the placement contract she had signed a few months earlier. She was told that she would not be allowed to go back home before she had paid back at least part of the money that the agency had invested in her. She paid three million IDR (US$300) and was then allowed to go back to Kalembah.

A last piece of advice

Just as the entrance into a training camp is marked by a series of standard procedures, so is the moment of departure. In the *Sinar Harapan Putri* camp, the night before their flight migrant women had to go to all members of staff to say goodbye. It was also part of this custom that they went to the director's office, where he personally gave them a last piece of advice. I accompanied two Javanese women, an older and a younger one, as they went to the director's office. Both of them were about to leave for Hong Kong the next day. Ina, the older of the two, had been in the camp for six months. She had had a hard time, both because she had had to stay in the camp for so long, and because she had found it difficult to re-learn Cantonese (she had been to Hong Kong before). The younger woman, Sari, had found the process relatively easy, and she quickly found an employer abroad. We had been waiting in front of the director's office for some time before he finally came out to greet them. This is the exchange that ensued between the director, Harry, and the women:

> First thing, do not compare your new employer with the old one. A new employer is always finicky. But if you work well, your employer will be nice to you, too. Second, do not take a mobile phone with you – that would be big trouble. Then, do not steal. There is a former recruit of ours, she stole chocolate ... and she was filmed while doing it. You know that cameras are everywhere, do you?

> Yes, sir.
>
> Well, you know about praying, once in the morning, once in the evening. You know, right?
>
> Yes, sir.
>
> In the beginning, do not ask for a day off, alright? Even though you have been abroad before, do not insist on it. You will only spend your money if you do [have a day off]. Ina, you know that it was really difficult to find an employer for you, so please hold out. What more? We had the prayers, the stealing, the mobile phone ... Eating pork! You are smart enough, you know how to handle that, do you? If you want to eat it, eat it, if not, you don't have to. But do not say to your employer: 'Yes, I'd like to eat pork,' and then throw it away. If you do, you will be scolded for sure. Please save your money. Do not spend it on trivial things. You don't need to buy clothes, cosmetics or high heels. Finally, a very important point: do not fool around with men. If you do, you will be rewarded with a big belly. Be smart – you don't want to come back pregnant. There is a recruit who just came back from abroad, you know what she brought with her? AIDS. So, do you have a husband yet? [One of the women nodded, the other one said 'no'.] You who are not yet married – work first. Then, when you come back home; you will look for a nice husband. You will bring back so much money that you will be able to use it as a fan! And then men will come to you easily. Tonight, rest well. You will leave tomorrow morning very early, and if possible, when you arrive in Hong Kong, start to work right away. So don't chat tonight! We will meet again in two years. I would not like to see you before you have finished your contracts.
>
> Yes, pray for us, sir.
>
> Yes. One last thing: do not ask to change employers. You have been abroad before, so you know. Have a safe trip. And you, Ina, forgive us that it took us so long to find you an employer. But in the end, we were successful!
>
> Yes [with tears in her eyes]. Thank you, sir.

As a mark of respect, Ina bent forward, took the director's hand and kissed it, before he turned around and stepped into his car, where a driver was already waiting to drive him home.

Harry's instructions underline the way in which the instructions given at the training camps contradict the contents of work contracts

and create a discrepancy between migrant domestic workers' rights in theory and their rights in practice. While they are staying in the camps, workers are given instructions such as 'pray only twice a day', or they are even told not to pray at all, as Nurdjana had experienced it; however, standard work contracts specifically allow domestic workers to practice their religion. Their contracts also allow them to change employers once in the event of abuse or unpaid wages, but workers are not informed about the opportunity to change employers – quite the contrary. Employers, on the other hand, are offered the possibility to reject and replace their maid up to three times within the first three months of employment. More generally, workers are given no clue as how to resist abusive employers or where to turn to if they are in need of support (Krome 2009: 32). This lack of information is particularly problematic because domestic workers are employed alone, in the intimacy of private homes, and have little or no access to social support networks. Nurdjana told me the following: '[At the agency] they told me that four months of wages would be deducted, but in the end, once I started working, it was six months. My employer told me so. So what could I do? I just shut up. I didn't dare to protest'.

The managers of recruitment agencies seek to maximise their control over the women and to weaken their autonomy and capacity to resist. For the agents, it is of capital importance that women stay with their employers; if they ask to return home before the end of their employment contract, agencies have to replace them and thus lose money.

Leaving the camp: the selamatan

The final ritual that marks a woman's departure from the training camp is the so-called *selamatan* (religious celebration) that women generally organise when a batch of workers is about to be sent abroad. I witnessed a *selamatan* in August 2009. All of the women who were at the camp participated in the ceremony, and they organised it on their own initiative – staff did not participate, nor did they assist or intervene in the celebration in any way. Before the ceremony, the women dressed up – not in camp uniforms, but in the best clothes that they were able to keep with them. All of them put on a veil, and some of them even wore their long, white *mukena*. Because I had only seen them with short hair and maid uniforms, women dressed up for the *selamatan* looked so different

that they became almost unrecognisable. I got an idea of what some of them might actually look like in their 'real' lives, outside the camp.

Then the women gathered in one of the big common rooms around *isyah*, the time of the last prayer before nightfall. They sat on the ground, and all of them looked west, to Mecca. Two women then took over the role of leaders of the religious ceremony. They were given a microphone, and they invited the other women to recite various prayers from the Koran, the most important one being the *Surat Yasin*. This is one of the Prophet's letters, and it is often recited during death rituals in Indonesia (Retsikas 2007; Sudarmoko 2010). There is some discussion among Islamic scholars as to whether the recitation of the *Surat Yasin*, the so-called *yasinan*, is 'really' an Islamic practice, but it is popular throughout Indonesia. Before starting the recitation, one of the two leaders of the ceremony said: 'Hopefully Allah will hear our prayers (*cita-cita*)'. Then all the women proceeded to recite the *yasinan*, and all of them knew it by heart. They repeated it again and again, collectively. This collective repetition had a compelling rhythm to it. The two women who led the recitation interrupted its flow from time to time in order to formulate specific prayers:

> For our parents who have educated and raised us – may Allah give them good health, welfare and happiness, as well as long lives.
>
> For our friends who are going to depart (*terbang*) – may you get a good employer, be successful and work for two years, leave Indonesia and come back home in good health.
>
> For our friends who have not yet found an employer – may you get one very soon. To the ones who have an employer – may your procedure be processed as quickly as possible.

Right after the recitation of the *yasinan*, the second woman leading the recitation, who had not yet said anything, took the microphone and started to speak slowly, in an emotional tone:

> We also ask God to protect our families and us. Oh God, we stand here, humble and full of sin. We ask for forgiveness for all our sins, whether they were intentional or not, because we believe that you are forgiving and merciful. We have gathered tonight for this religious service. We want to relieve the workload of our families. We want to lighten the burden of our husbands. Oh God, we had to leave our families ... we left our mothers ... we left our fathers ... we left our husbands ... and

> what causes us most pain: we had to leave behind our children! Our children, whom we should be rocking in our arms, whom we should be hugging right now [at this point in the prayer, the speaker began to sob]. So God, with this prayer, we ask for your blessings: bless our departure, bless our departure and our going far away (*merantau jauh*). Make us strong, strengthen our will, and strengthen our will to go abroad. We travel to work abroad with honest hearts ... Amen.

During this prayer, most of the women in the room started crying. It was clearly one of the few moments during which women held in the camp were encouraged to display their emotions collectively. Interestingly, the standard rendering of women's migration as a sacrifice of dutiful mothers and daughters was reproduced during this ceremony; the prayers focused on duty and sacrifice and urged migrant women to be 'good' workers, to finish their contracts.

After the final prayer, the two leaders of the ceremony invited the women who were about to migrate abroad to come to the front and stand in a row. The women were divided into two groups, according to their destination. All the other women then walked past them in a procession, saying goodbye (*salaman terakhir*), sometimes hugging them for minutes. Again, many women were in tears. This very specific moment of life in the camp revealed the intense bonds of friendship that had developed between women during their common time in transit, and again supports the idea that in many ways, these women constituted a *communitas* in Victor Turner's sense (1964). The emotional *selamatan* ritual marked the end of liminal transit and the beginning of a new life outside the camp, a life still marked by uncertainty. The emphasis of the *selamatan* ritual was not on life in the camp, but rather on the world 'outside'. Explicit references were made both to the place that they had left behind and the place to which they would go: a private home in Hong Kong, Taiwan, or Malaysia. In this book, we will follow those who went to Malaysia.

CHAPTER 5

Doors Closed

Indonesian Domestic Workers in Malaysia

'You know, it's a market,' Joyce told me. 'Malaysia is willing to pay, and Indonesia is willing to sell'. A Chinese Malaysian woman in her late 30s, Joyce was the manager of maid agency 'Elite'. Elite is situated in a residential neighbourhood in the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. On entering the agency's office, on the first floor of a two-storey building, a big orange sign on the wall reads E-L-I-T-E. When I visited, four young women were sitting behind computers in an open-plan office, answering emails and talking on the phone. Piles of official forms and photocopies of identity documents lay on their desks. In a corridor, pink uniforms hung on a rack, ready to be worn by the newly-arrived domestic workers from overseas. Large posters, featuring smiling young women wearing white aprons, adorned the agency's windows, indicating to passersby what this agency was about. As Joyce walked me through the agency, her phone kept ringing, and she often stopped to give instructions to her employees. One could hear Mandarin, Malay and English all around the place.

Agencies such as Elite have become key actors in care chains across Asia (Chin 1998; Tyner 1999; Loveband 2004; Lan 2006; Constable 2007; Liang 2011). In Malaysia, 273 so-called 'maid agencies' that were specifically allowed to process the hiring of domestic workers from Indonesia were registered with the Malaysian government in 2016.[1] While Malaysian maid agencies rely on their Indonesian counterparts to recruit migrant workers, they themselves look for and interact with prospective employers, and ultimately they 'make the match' between Indonesian domestic workers and their Malaysian employers.[2]

1. Statistics 2016 from the Ministry of Human Resources: http://www.mohr.gov.my/bm/index.php/en/ (last accessed 28 May 2017).
2. 'Maid agency' is the most common term for placement agencies in Malaysia. In English, the term 'maid' is often thought to sound 'servile, anachronistic and

In this chapter, I seek to follow the paths of migrant women from Kalembah through the offices of commercial maid agencies into the terraced houses and high-rise apartment buildings of their Malaysian employers. In the process, I discuss the transformation of paid domestic service in Malaysia in recent years by focusing on two key aspects: the regularisation of domestic worker migration and the bureaucratisation of paid domestic service. Previously based on informal arrangements, the employment of domestic workers in Malaysia is now mediated by commercial maid agencies, governed by standard work contracts and backed up by strict immigration provisions. Only by taking into account these historical transformations can one start to understand the transnational articulations and practical implications of contemporary care chains.

Making the match

While we were sitting in her office, Joyce showed me files of domestic workers who were waiting in Indonesia, ready to be employed by Malaysian employers. These files, the 'biodata', contained information on the age, height, weight, ethnicity and years of work experience of the domestic workers. A picture showing the worker in question, smiling and in a complete maid uniform, was attached to the top of each file.

The term 'biodata', widely used by maid agencies in Malaysia, is in itself interesting, since it evokes the fact that both biological and biographical data are used to describe candidates in the recruitment process. In certain cases, the word 'biodata' is even used in place of the term 'domestic worker' or 'maid', such as in the case of Malaysian agencies advertising 'Christian biodatas' (Hamid 2009: 174). According to Hamid, such 'biodata' profiles de-humanise women and give employers the impression that they can choose between standardised, homogeneous products. However, when talking to Joyce, it appeared that she was somewhat dissatisfied with the 'biodata' system. She argued that relying

almost premodern' (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, xix). In Malaysia, however, 'maid' is the most widely used term to qualify domestic workers. Here, it carries with it the connotation of modern paid domestic service, in contrast to terms of fictive kinship used in more informal labour arrangements (see Killias 2014). Following Adams and Dickey (Adams and Dickey 2000: 9), I have chosen to stick to local terminology and to use the emic term as it allows me to 'convey the local nuances of power that such terms reveal' (ibid.).

on the 'biodata' alone did not provide clients with sufficient information:

> I found that most of the agencies just gave you a picture. So you just choose a maid by a picture! And some details. That's all. And I found that that was not enough. Because if we employ a maid, this maid will stay with us for two years, that's the contract ... So if we don't know these maids from the inside, I mean ... At least the agency should provide me with some extra information about their personality or their family background; that will be better for me.

Employers need to know workers 'from the inside'; workers, however, are given only very limited information on their future employers and have no say in the selection of the latter (see also Constable 2007: 68). In her ethnographic study of labour migration by Indonesian and Filipina domestic workers to Hong Kong, Nicole Constable (2007: 68) has argued that the publication of domestic workers' profiles on websites, available for anyone to see, stands in stark contrast to the ways in which employers' data are handled. In fact, Malaysian employers do need to produce an array of documents to employ a foreign domestic worker – a marriage certificate, the birth certificates of their children, and bank slips proving that they earn the minimum amount required for the employment of a foreign maid – but none of these documents or any other information on the employers are forwarded to the domestic worker, let alone made available to the general public. Furthermore, maid agencies tend to spend very little time scrutinising the profiles of employer families (Bakan & Stasiulis 1995: 312). The recruitment and placement process is thus heavily employer-oriented (Constable 2007: 68). The inequality between employers and employees is also exemplified in the amount of time that workers and employers respectively have to invest in the 'match-making' process; while the 'biodata' system offers Malaysian employers the comfortable and quick option of selecting their maid with a few mouse clicks, Indonesian women need to undergo weeks or even months of compulsory training before finally being able to migrate abroad.

In her statement, Joyce pointed out that employers needed to know their maids 'from the inside' because, she explained, they are to stay – and live – with their Malaysian employers for a contract period of at least two years. In fact, Indonesian domestic workers in Malaysia are

obliged by law to *live* with their employers – the live-in quality of these labour arrangements is indeed one of its most defining features (Chin 1998: 142). So while the increased transnationalisation of production is characterised by, among other things, the fact that 'capital and its workforce become more and more *remote* from each other' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 304, emphasis mine), the transnational division of reproductive labour brings together workers and employers, or labour and capital, in particularly *intimate* ways.

Letting the domestic worker enter into the intimate space of the home justifies the need for knowing her 'from the inside'. Agents play a key role in acquiring and communicating knowledge about a particular woman to her future employers (see Lan 2006: 32), and in doing this they often resort to racialised discourses about the 'nature' of women from particular regions, as we will see.

Agencies tend to advertise the services of domestic workers as mass commodities, as is noticeable in their jargon – stock, quality control, benefits and deficits. At the same time, Malaysian maid agencies also emphasise the relational labour involved in their daily work as agents, in their work towards the making of the right 'match'. Interestingly, the placement of domestic workers and more specifically the interaction with prospective employers is generally taken care of by female maid agents. Joyce stated that:

> This business is better dealt with by women than men, because as women we can approach the maids more closely. I think that in Malaysia, most agencies are owned by men, but run by women!

Hence, there is a double gender logic at work here. The gendered and international division of (reproductive) labour has led to an increase in the demand for Indonesian women to take up domestic work in Malaysia. But this same gendered division of reproductive labour also propels professional Malaysian women – rather than men – to the forefront of the 'maid industry'. In contrast to the recruitment of labour back in Indonesia, where male brokers tightly control the mobility of migrant women, the placement of Indonesian women with Malaysian employers and in particular the interaction with employers is dealt with by female maid agents. On the side of employers, the 'maid issue' is a 'women's issue'. The fact that in most cases female employers were the ones to answer my interview questions confirms that the responsibility

for reproductive labour continues to be borne unequally by men and women (see also Chin 1998). Lan Pei-Chia has argued that because of this gendered assignment of reproductive labour, scholars should consider paid and unpaid reproductive labour as continuities (2006); despite the fact that paid domestic work involves inequalities of race and class *between* women, it has its origin in broader gendered inequalities between men and women.

On their websites, Malaysian 'maid agencies' assure prospective employers that they will be given 'plenty of biodata for selection', and promise 'quality maids for quality life', 'maids with a great working attitude', or 'the most reliable, honest and competent domestic maids'. However, the process of becoming a 'maid' does not take place overnight, and maid agencies emphasise the training that prospective domestic workers have to undergo in their home country. From phrases like 'we believe in developing quality maids', 'most important is mental training' to 'maids are trained not only with good hospitality skills but also good relationship skills', Malaysian placement agencies construct Indonesian domestic workers as inherently unskilled and promote the effort invested in the training of migrant women from rural Indonesia to 'adapt' them to what are perceived to be the expectations of urban, middle-class Malaysian families.

Exoticising Indonesia

On one of the walls of Joyce's agency, I saw a frame with pictures of a very destitute wooden house – the house had wooden walls, mud floors, no running water. The caption said: 'This is what my home back in Indonesia looks like'.

Anyone who has been to an area characterised by out-migration back in Indonesia will find that such pictures do not do justice to social reality. In the next chapter, I will describe the effort with which people in Kalembah – as elsewhere on Java – renovate their houses. A minority of people was living in wooden houses with mud floors by 2016, when I visited the village for the last time. Yet these pictures stand for Malaysian agents' broader discourses about Indonesia. Indonesia is represented as poor, backward and uncivilised. While in the discourse of Indonesian recruitment agents it is certain areas of the country that are regarded as particularly 'primitive' – usually the rural, upland regions on the periph-

Figure 19: A domestic worker from Indonesia holds a board with the caption, 'This is what my house in Indonesia looks like'. Photo: Olivia Killias

ery of the nation-state – in Malaysia the whole country of Indonesia is discursively constructed as 'underdeveloped'.

The photographs of the Indonesian house are supposed to give future employers an idea about the place from which their maids come. According to Joyce, it is necessary to provide employers with such 'information' so that they will be patient with their employees in the first months of employment. To cite Pigg, 'a certain kind of place comes to stand for a certain kind of people' (Pigg 1992). Not only do Indonesian women live in destitute houses, the very quality of their surroundings also determines their 'character'; they themselves are cast as uncivilised and backward. This representation of Indonesia as an exotic, remote, 'underdeveloped' place also comes through in the following statement by Joyce:

> Since childhood, they [Indonesian maids] have been accustomed to their culture, to their food, to their daily habits. So I think we need to give them time. We have to upgrade them, we have to modernise them,

> both in terms of lifestyles and mindsets. That is very important, because we are dealing with human beings.

By portraying Indonesian domestic workers as backward and poor, Malaysian agencies define them as different from their employers, sometimes in primordial terms. Malaysian agents' discourses produce a series of dichotomies to characterise the domestic workers on the one hand, and – even if implicitly – the employers on the other: backward versus modern, rural versus urban, poor versus wealthy. Employing a domestic worker who is constructed as a poor woman of rural origins allows employers to imagine themselves as modern, urban and middle-class. The act of employing a domestic worker hence participates in the performance of modern middle-class status, as Christine Chin (1998) has eloquently argued (see also Yeoh, Huang and Rahman 2005). In presenting Indonesian domestic workers as in need of 'modernisation', Malaysian maid agencies construct a social and cultural 'gap' that appears to divide 'maids' and 'madams' (Stivens 2007). This divide both creates and legitimises the intervention of agencies as necessary intermediaries between workers and employers (Bakan and Stasiulis 1995).

As intermediaries, agents must possess the skills to interact both with prospective employers and with workers, but it is the ability to approach workers – framed as 'Other' – that is generally emphasised by agents. Joyce referred to her ability to 'approach the maids more closely' as a woman, while another agent whom I met, Shirley, was reportedly able to better communicate with Indonesian domestic workers because she herself was married to an Indonesian. As one of her clients put it: '[Her marriage] is why, I think ... Shirley can understand these people, she can speak their language'.

Maid agencies position Indonesian women vis-à-vis women of other nationalities on the market for paid domestic service, in particular Filipinas. Indonesians are presented as less educated and more submissive, and this directly legitimises the fact that they are getting lower wages. In 2008, standard wages for Indonesian domestic workers in Malaysia were set at around RM 500 (US$155), which was just over a third of the minimum wage of RM 1,400 (US$435) paid to Filipina domestic workers. Consequently, hiring a Filipina domestic worker was interpreted by many of my Malaysian interlocutors as an act of social distinction, in the sense in which Bourdieu used this term (1979).

As Lan Pei-Chia has argued in her work on Indonesian and Filipina domestic workers in Taiwan, the racialised sector of paid domestic service reveals inequalities *among* women in the global South. In Taiwan, there are inequalities both between 'coloured maids' and 'coloured madams' *and* between domestic workers of various nationalities who are differently positioned on the market of paid domestic service (Lan 2006: 4). This is equally true of the Malaysian context, even if the racialisation of the Malaysian citizenry further complicates the position of Indonesian women as domestic workers in the country.

Key actors in transnational care chains, maid agencies 'reproduce a set of highly racialised practices' in their day-to-day business (Bakan & Stasiulis 1995; see also Loveband 2004). When I asked Joyce what general advice she gave employers before she placed the domestic worker at their place, she said:

> I do not encourage employers to give their maids days off or to let them go out, especially with Indonesians. Because Indonesians are very easily seduced by men. Especially the Javanese, they're soft hearted (*lembut hati*), so I don't encourage them. But I encourage the employers to bring their maids along when they go out for dinner or shopping.

Processes of racialisation are tied to historically specific conditions, and they do not operate in the same way in all contexts. While Filipina domestic workers are perceived as difficult to manage in Taiwan, in Canada they are compared to their West Indian competitors and described as soft-hearted and passive (Bakan & Stasiulis 1995). In a similar vein, women of some nationalities are considered entirely unsuited for paid domestic work – and this also changes according to the context. For example, the governments of Hong Kong, Taiwan and Malaysia have discussed the possibility of employing Chinese maids from the People's Republic of China for a long time. On the one hand, Chinese women are considered well suited for work in (ethnic) Chinese families, since they speak the same language and are otherwise considered culturally 'closer' (Lan 2006: 38). On the other hand, it is precisely this proximity that is seen as problematic and which finally led all three governments to reject the option of recruiting domestic workers from mainland China. In other words, the Chinese are not adapted as domestics precisely because they are too 'similar' to their potential employers (ibid.). In Malaysia, where a sizeable proportion of employers are identified as ethnic Chinese, the plans of the Home Affairs Ministry to bring in domestic workers from mainland China were met with virulent public protests. These protests, coming mainly from Chinese Malaysians, constructed Chinese women as 'dragon ladies' who would seduce male employers. The president of the Malaysian Chinese Association, Ng Yen Ye, was quoted as saying: 'Following intensive discussions, [we are] appealing to the Home Affairs Ministry to halt this plan for the moment. We do not want the problem of these little dragon ladies to escalate' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 May 2007).

Indonesian – and especially Javanese – women are considered 'ideal' domestic workers in the Malaysian context, and there is a steady demand for their labour. Although Indonesians have long been considered to be the 'ethnic cousins' of Malays (Chin 1998: 136), more recently a stronger emphasis on the foreign nationality of Indonesians has constructed Indonesian women as 'Other' in Malaysian public discourse (see Killias 2014). Furthermore, from the beginning, Indonesian women have been considered less 'civilised' than their Filipina counterparts, as I have pointed out earlier on (see also Chin 1998: 136–137).

Drawing on racialised practices, agents advise prospective employers on the maid's work schedule, on whether it is a good thing to give her a mobile phone, and they tell employers anything 'particular' they need to know in order to be able to 'handle' a woman. In their interactions with prospective employers, agents thus 'socialise' employers with respect to the expectations they can have of their domestic workers (Tyner 1999). However, despite the intervention of maid agencies, the work arrangements of Indonesian domestic workers in Malaysia are very much shaped by the requirements of individual employers – particularly so because Indonesian women are forced to live-in with their Malaysian employers. For this reason, and despite the fact that the employment of a maid is governed by social norms and formally regulated by a standard work contract, the situation of individual workers still very much depends on their employers – a key characteristic of employment in live-in paid domestic service (Hess 2005).

Once a match between a Malaysian employer and an Indonesian domestic worker has been made, Malaysian employers pay the Malaysian agency a recruitment fee – in 2008, this fee amounted to 4,200 RM (US$1,300). The employer also advances the migration fee

to be paid by the domestic worker. In 2008 this amounted to 3,000 RM (US$930). This migration fee is later repaid by the Indonesian domestic worker, whose wages are fully deducted by her employer for the first six months of employment. Over the years, agency fees have substantially increased as the demand for Indonesian domestic workers has exceeded the supply of young Indonesian women willing to work in paid domestic service in Malaysia. As a Malaysian maid agent explained:

> The main difference between the domestic labour sector and other sectors is that we can be more selective in other labour sectors. For maids, basically we have no choice. The highest demand is for Indonesian maids.

While one would expect that market logic works to the advantage of women willing to migrate as domestics, this was not in fact the case. When I met Joyce in 2008, the agency fee that employers paid had increased by 82% over a period of four years (from approximately 2,300 RM to 4,200 RM), while the migration fee that domestic workers paid via wage deduction increased by 125% over the same time period (from to 1,330 RM to 3,000 RM). Tellingly, domestic workers' salaries only increased by 31% during the same period (from 380 RM to 500 RM). Clearly, those who benefit financially from the high demand for domestic workers in Malaysia are *not* domestic workers themselves, but rather their recruiters.

Despite the fact that the fees that had increased most dramatically were the ones that Indonesian women had to pay for their migration to Malaysia, many employers in Malaysia felt that the agency fees that they had to pay were too high: 'Nowadays the agency fee is very expensive, so some employers say: "I pay so much money, I need to lock her up!"' Joyce explained. The money invested by Malaysian employers was often seen as a legitimate reason to control the mobility of domestic workers, a logic that is reminiscent of colonial indentured labour. Bush (2000: 32) has pointed out that the employer of an indentured servant 'had to pay for the service in advance, leaving him with the problem of obtaining a good return from the labour he could extract. This need placed top priority on preventing servants from foot-dragging or taking-flight'. This same concern can be seen in a pronounced form in the attitudes of Malaysian employers towards their Indonesian domestic workers, as we will see.

Working behind closed doors

Anis, a young girl from Kalembah, had given me the contact of her mother, Ika, who was working in Malaysia at the time. According to Anis, her mother not only worked as a domestic worker, but also helped out in her employers' restaurant. The only contact Anis had was a mobile phone number that belonged to a Malaysian employee who worked in the same restaurant as her mother.

Once in Malaysia, I called Ika on her colleague's mobile phone and arranged to meet her at the restaurant where she worked, in the region of Penang. She told me that I could come to the restaurant around 2 pm and informed me that she would be there preparing everything before the official opening of the restaurant in the early evening. Since I was travelling by car, I arrived a bit earlier. It was a roadside restaurant several miles from the next city, and the only other building in the neighbourhood was a petrol station with a small café. I approached the restaurant to see whether Ika was already around. Instead, I met her employer, a Chinese Malaysian woman in her 40s. I explained to her that I was looking for 'Ika'. She was surprised and became very angry. She asked me how this was all possible 'without the employer's knowledge'. She said that Ika would not come. I decided to have a cup of tea in the café of the petrol station, hoping that Ika would come after all. A bit later, Ika's Chinese Malaysian colleague called me and warned me that I should not wait there, that the employer had called her and that she was worried on Ika's behalf. I then tried to call the restaurant, where a male voice answered and said: 'You must be wrong here,' before putting the phone down.

I was really worried and unsure of what to do. Clearly, my presence had angered Ika's employer, but since I had not been given a chance to explain why I was here or how I got Ika's contact, I feared that Ika's employers were suspecting her of having made plans to run away or start working for a new employer (me). I assumed that if I could explain to the employers why I was really here and provide all the necessary documentation to attest to what I was saying (namely, that I was a PhD student with no interest in 'stealing' their domestic worker), this would help to dissipate possible misunderstandings and ensure that Ika would not get in trouble because of me. I therefore decided to give it a chance and wait longer, in the hope that I would be able to explain why I had come. After having waited for almost three hours in the café, the owner

of the restaurant finally called me. She said: 'I have to talk to you,' and asked me to come over to the restaurant. It was pretty dark inside, since the restaurant was still closed to the public. The young female employer sat at a table with two people who turned out to be her husband and her mother-in-law. The husband was visibly angry. His wife asked me what I wanted, so I explained it as clearly as possible and provided all the necessary formal documents. The husband then asked if I was from the government. I explained that I was an independent student and had no hidden agenda. This did not seem to convince him. I tried to explain what my research was about and why I was interested in meeting Ika. His wife told me that Ika had to look after her father-in-law and that, since he was ill, she would not come to the restaurant that day. Since the interaction was extremely tense, I said that I would of course respect it if they did not allow me to meet her. The husband of the young woman then said, almost shouting:

> Yes, you have to respect that! We don't want you to talk to her! Our workers are here to work, we don't want them to go here and there, no, we want discipline! They don't talk to people!

I gave in and left without meeting with Ika. I gave the employer the pictures that I had taken of Anis and told her that it would be nice if she could give them to Ika. She seemed touched as she looked at the photographs of Ika's daughter, and promised to give them to her. Later on, I got a call from Ika's colleague. She seemed relieved, told me that everything was fine and that Ika was very happy with the pictures. I never got to talk to Ika directly again.

It was predictable that Malaysian employers would be reluctant to grant me access to their private apartments – after all, they had never met me before, and researchers working on paid domestic service in other contexts have also written about the difficulty of doing research inside private homes (see e.g. Hess 2005: 155–157). In the case of Ika, the fact that her employers made her work not only in their private house but also in their restaurant – something that is fairly common in Malaysia but which is clearly forbidden by law – certainly played a role in their reaction towards me. The male employer's question relating to my connections with the government supports the idea that he was worried of being accused of illegally employing domestic workers in his restaurant.

Yet the reaction of Ika's employers was not exceptional, and it revealed something more about contemporary paid domestic service in Malaysia. As I have already said, not all of the employers whom I contacted agreed to meet me or to let me meet their employees. Some agreed to do a telephone interview; in other instances the workers themselves were so worried about their employers' reaction to me that they did not dare to give me their employers' contact so that I could arrange to meet them. Other researchers working on paid domestic service in Malaysia have described similar difficulties when trying to approach foreign domestic workers employed in Malaysian households. Ibrahim Suffian, an experienced researcher working for the Merdeka Centre, one of the main survey institutes in Malaysia, told me that a state-sponsored study on Indonesian domestic workers was the most difficult one his institute ever had to carry out. The difficulties experienced were, he argued, mainly related to the reluctance of Malaysian employers to participate in the study, and their even greater reluctance to grant researchers access to their domestic workers (personal communication, July 2011). For her research, Christine Chin (1998: 22–26), started out with her own personal network of acquaintances in Malaysia – that is, middle-class employers – in order to approach and interview foreign domestic workers. Hence, she followed the networks of employers, rather than those of domestic workers. Even though Chin knew some of her informants personally, she nevertheless found it extremely difficult to talk to their domestic workers. To cope with these methodological difficulties, Chin interviewed domestic workers in downtown Kuala Lumpur on their day off, which obviously means that she talked to workers who were 'free' enough to walk around the city. This meant that Chin had far easier access to Filipina rather than Indonesian domestic workers (1998: 23) because Indonesian domestic workers are subject to much more stringent immigration and labour regulations than workers from the Philippines and were contractually denied a day off until the revised Memorandum of Understanding between Indonesia and Malaysia came into force in 2011.

In my own research, I have followed one of the most basic principles of multi-sited ethnography: I stayed with an initial group of subjects, namely women who had departed from Kalembah, and followed them to Malaysia. This focus on the journeys of the women employed as domestic workers may have facilitated my contacts with the workers,

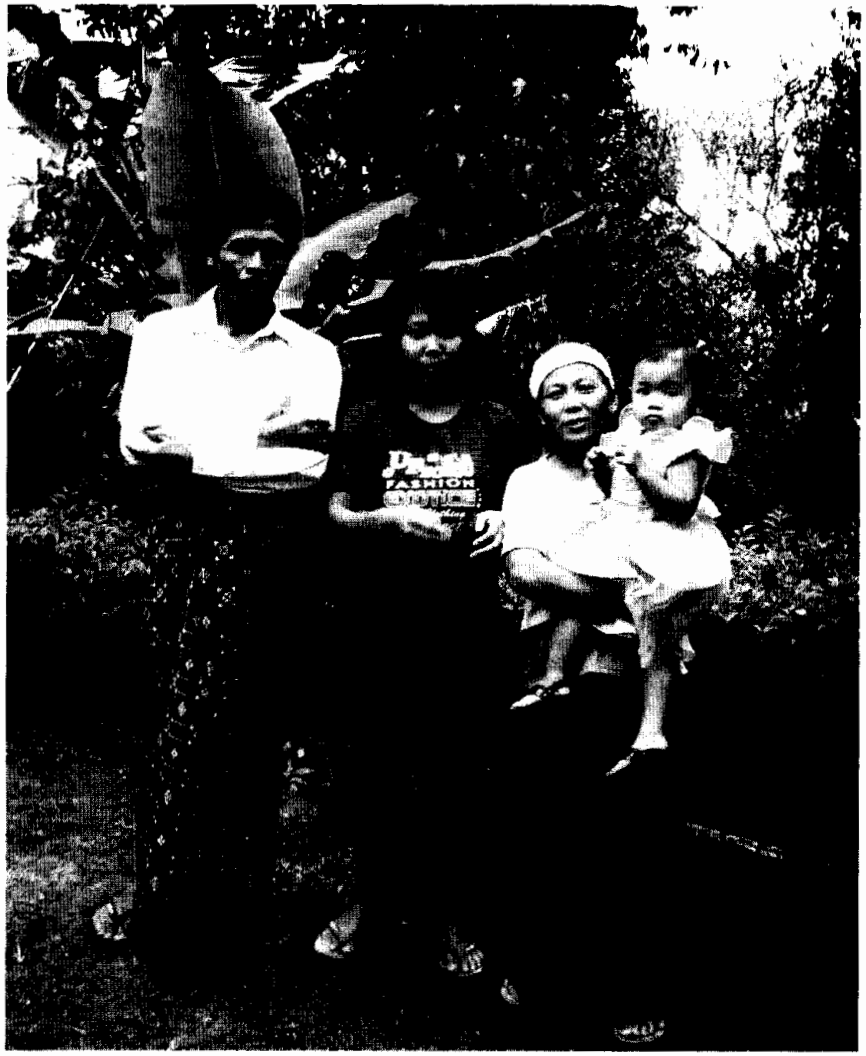

Figure 20: Elia, her husband, their eldest daughter Sari and Sari's daughter posing for the anthropologist back in Kalembah. Photo: Olivia Killias

but it somewhat complicated my relationship with their employers. I spent much less time with Malaysian employers than with Indonesian domestic workers and their families, and ultimately I only got a glimpse of their living situation in Malaysia. Many employers became suspicious rather than trusting when they heard that I had met the families of their domestic workers back in Indonesia.

By showing up at employers' doors with pictures of their maid's family in hand, I connected two sites, those of 'home' and 'work'. The fact that these were places which had been quite deliberately disconnected meant that the presence of a mobile ethnographer who had been both 'here' and 'there' was perceived as disruptive. Ipsah's employer, for instance, was very surprised when she heard that I had been doing research in Indonesia. 'So she got our address from Indonesia? Are you kidding me?' she asked Hoo Chew Ping, my Malaysian research assistant. And after Ping explained my research to her in Hokkien, she asked again: 'So she went to Indonesia all by herself? Wow! So courageous!' Another male employer told me that he found my story 'fishy' – he said that if I had been a man, he would never have allowed me to come into his house to interview him and his Indonesian carer.

The use of the term 'so courageous' by Ipsah's employer illustrates the extent to which Malaysian employers consider Indonesia a dangerous, uncivilised place, a place very different from the middle-class suburbs in which they live. This is rooted in a longer history of confrontation between the two countries, and is related to the fact that, as we have seen, Malaysian maid agencies circulate precisely such images about Indonesia in their marketing. Hence, for many employers it was unbelievable that I had been given their addresses while I was in Indonesia. The very idea that a connection could be made between 'home' and 'abroad' was startling to them. The contractual two-year, live-in employment of a domestic worker is based on a clear-cut separation from her context of origin, as I have explained above. Maid agencies in Malaysia claim that a worker's contact with other Indonesians in Malaysia is a source of bad influence and increases the likelihood that she will run away. Hence, Indonesian domestic workers in Malaysia are kept behind closed doors – and these doors are thought both to keep the worker from running away and to protect her from nasty outside influences.

Moral panics about 'runaway maids'

Middle-class Malaysian families employing a domestic worker typically live in suburban terraced houses or condominiums, generally surrounded by gates and fences and often under the constant surveillance of security personnel (Fischer 2008: 111). Johan Fischer has skilfully

Figure 21: Ipsah in front of her employer's house in Kuala Lumpur. Photo: Olivia Killias.

described how, paradoxically, middle-class life in Malaysian 'fortified enclaves' produces anxiety; 'being trapped with the outside evil on the inside' (2008: 119) is a common motif in neighbourhood gossip and tabloid reports in urban Malaysia.

Those living in these gated communities live in a state of anxiety about their own safety. Security guards cooperating with criminal outsiders are often believed to be a source of crime and danger; the liminal position of foreign domestic workers – coming from the outside, living on the inside – means that they too are likely to be suspected of criminal activities. The trope of the foreign maid who brings her criminal boyfriend into her employers' house whenever the latter are gone is common in the Malaysian middle-class, and often justifies further measures to immobilise domestic workers. The securitisation of modern high-rise condominiums and gated communities does not just involve the control of outsiders wishing to get in; it also involves the control of the movement of those inside wishing to get out. Security personnel – despite the fact that they too are regarded as potentially suspect, as I have just mentioned – are often given the explicit task of controlling the whereabouts of domestic workers,

instructed to warn their employers immediately should workers seek to leave the condominium. Stories of 'runaway maids' and criminal lovers haunt middle-class Malaysian neighbourhoods.

The anxieties surrounding domestic workers' mobility and a possible contact to realms beyond the domestic sphere of her employers' home have to be seen in light of the particular tension between distance and intimacy that characterises paid domestic service (Dickey 2000). Indonesian domestic workers gain 'intimate knowledge' (Zelizer 2005) about the families for which they work. From embarrassing details of daily life to family secrets, through her constant presence the domestic worker acquires information that is 'not widely available to third parties' (ibid.: 14). At the same time, she is perceived as a working class, foreign national. Hence, the control which is exerted by Malaysian families over Indonesian domestic workers' mobility points to a general anxiety about domestic workers 'bringing the outside in and taking back to the outside what properly belongs inside' (Dickey 2000: 473) – whether by theft, gossip or 'talking to people', as Ika's employer put it.

Some domestic workers were, I found, perceived as particularly likely to run away. It was considered risky to employ a woman who had already been in Malaysia and knew people. Sue, the employer of Nita, refused to meet me or to let me meet her employee, but she agreed to do a telephone interview. This is how she explained to me why she did not want her maid to go out on her own or to have contact with other people:

> She [Nita, domestic worker from Kalembah] stays at home with me ... According to what she told me she doesn't know anyone in Malaysia ... I previously would have had another option to get a maid, but she used to work in Malaysia for the past 4 or 5 years ... But Nita is very new, she has never worked in Malaysia, so I don't think she knows anyone ... We are very worried about employing someone who has worked here for many years and has a lot of friends here. Sometimes it's easy to get influenced by the wrong people, so that's why we try not to have someone who has worked here for too many years. If she has friends they may contact her and it's a bit tricky, you know, when we leave her at home ... she might meet someone new ... you know, we just try to be careful.

Thus among Malaysian employers there is a widespread belief that it is better to employ a 'first timer', in other words a migrant with no previous working experience in the same country. As Nicole Constable

(2007) has argued, this negative perception of working experience is paradoxical, since experienced migrants are generally better skilled than 'first timers' – they speak the language, know how to cook local food, and are accustomed to being away from home (ibid.). Yet this distrust of experienced migrants is common and it makes it more difficult for migrants to come back for a second term of employment (see Lan 2006: 32). According to Lan Pei-Chia, a regular turnover of incoming migrants is a defining feature of Asian migratory systems: 'in Asia, the contract workforce is constantly replenished with new blood' (ibid.). Labour-receiving states such as Taiwan or Malaysia are thus only willing to take in *temporary* labour that will not settle in the host society and leave again after the job is done (Rodriguez 2010). As we will see in the next section, paid domestic service in Malaysia is dominated by foreign contract workers who are allowed onto Malaysian territory on strictly temporary contracts. However, these contracts *can* get renewed, and many Indonesian domestic workers end up staying in Malaysia longer than the two years stipulated in their initial contracts. In fact, to avoid the fees charged by maid agencies if they take on someone new, many employers try to keep the women already working for them in domestic service as long as possible.

The transformation of paid domestic service: Nur and Suyekti

Suyekti had left Kalembah to work in Kuala Lumpur four years before I contacted her for the first time in March 2008. She was working for a Malay family living in a leafy middle-class suburb. Since she owned her own mobile phone, it was relatively easy to contact her. Suyekti talked to her employer and arranged for me to come to her employer's place.

As we were having tea on the terrace, the children playing around us, her employer Nur, a Malay woman, then in her early 40s and mother of three children, talked about her long experience of employing domestic workers: 'I've always had a helper, even since I was a child. So I'm kind of used to have someone around the house to help with domestic work'. When she was growing up close to the Thai border, the domestic workers Nur's family employed mostly came from nearby Thailand. 'When I was younger, the maids stayed with us; there was less exposure, you see'. Going on, she explained what, according to her, had changed in paid domestic service in Malaysia:

> The ones from Indonesia, they are different. They have a different mentality. They come, are trained, they have a mission. They are on a mission, so as soon as that's done, they want to go home and build houses and all that. So that's why they don't stay that long ... but it depends on how we treat them.

Nur looked around the neighbourhood and commented on the domestic work arrangements of kin and neighbours. Her mother, who lived across the street, had employed the same Indonesian domestic worker for the past seven years. 'And my neighbour's maid', Nur exclaimed, 'she has been here for seventeen years! She grew up with the family, and she knows how to cook Malaysian food better than the rest of us! So it depends'.

Employing a domestic worker has become a common feature of Malaysian middle-class lifestyles (Chin 1998). While paid domestic service as such is nothing new in Malaysia, there has been a marked shift, as I have already said, from mostly informal, personal arrangements between domestic workers and their employers towards temporary, contractual arrangements mediated by commercial intermediaries, and governed by strict immigration laws (see Killias 2014). The women working in domestic service also tend to come from different geographic areas than in the past.

In the British colonial period in the late 19th century, 'boys' and *amahs* were features of European households (Chin 1998: 69). Interestingly, colonial forms of domestic service involved male as well as female servants, thus putting into question the widespread – but ahistorical – assumption that paid domestic work is by definition women's work (see Hansen 1991). Regardless of their age, however, male Chinese and Indian domestic servants were referred to as 'boys', a term which stripped them of male adulthood and thus made it 'safer' for them to work near European women (Chin 1998: 71).

The term *amah* initially referred to women from the Kwangtung region in Southern China who migrated to Singapore and Malaya in the 1930s (Chin 1998: 73). In contrast to male coolies recruited at the time from the same region, and to contemporary domestic workers from Indonesia, *amahs* paid for passage to Singapore or Malaya *themselves* (Ooi 2013: 413). Upon arrival, they found employment via informal *kongsi pang* networks, networks that protected the women and ensured

that (informal) work agreements were respected by their British colonial and Chinese employers (ibid.).

Following decolonisation, more and more Malaysian women of all ethnicities joined the ranks of *amahs* (Chin 1998: 79), and in the 1970s 25% of all Malaysian women were employed in service occupations, with domestic workers accounting for 60% of that figure (Armstrong 1990: 147). However, with the industrial boom of the 1970s factory work became an attractive alternative to domestic work. Armstrong (ibid.: 149) quotes an employer who complained about this state of affairs:

> The young girls of today are not interested in domestic service. They prefer to work in factories because they have more freedom, and a chance to meet boys and to go out more.

The general 'scarcity' of available domestic workers received a lot of media attention as early as the 1980s. Newspapers headlines of the time – such as 'Help, the maid is walking out on us again!' (ibid.: 152) – use a rhetoric that is strikingly similar to the tone of the debate surrounding the current 'maid shortage' in Malaysia (Elias & Louth 2016).

It is in this context that in the mid-1980s Malaysian state authorities started to officially encourage and regulate the recruitment of foreign domestic workers (Chin 1998: 1). The number of work permits issued to foreign domestic workers – mostly Indonesians – rose from roughly 4,000 work permits in the mid-1980s to over 300,000 in the mid-2000s (Chin 2005: 265). As Christine Chin (2005: 265) has argued, live-in domestic work has not only 'survived' in Malaysia, it has been revitalised through the employment of foreign domestic workers.

'Send her back to the agent!'

The current policies of the Malaysian state encourage the private hiring of foreign domestic workers (Chin 1998). Such policies contribute to normalising the employment of foreign women for domestic work. In the process, employers are encouraged to see the act of employing a maid as an act of modern, middle-class consumption – in other words, state policies 'legitimise the discourse of consumerism', as Williams argues (F. Williams 2010: 390; see also Williams and Gavanas 2008). In recounting how she went about the employment of Suyekti, Nur spoke explicitly about the advantages of using a commercial maid agency as intermediary:

> Before Suyekti, I changed four maids! For this agent allows you to change maids, until you are really comfortable. She is a good agent; she has a lot of candidates. I kept them three weeks, two weeks, one month ... before three months. If there is any problem I send them back to the agent, because the agent will take care.

Clearly, through the intervention of commercial maid agencies employers are relieved of responsibilities towards individual domestic workers. When a domestic does not match an employer's expectations, she can simply be sent back to the agent. Maid agents have therefore become key actors in transnational care chains. They assume the main responsibility for migrant women during the first three months of employment in Malaysia. If employers are not satisfied, agents have to provide them with a free replacement up to three times.

There are alternatives to using a commercial maid agency in order to recruit a foreign domestic worker in Malaysia, but these alternatives have been increasingly illegalised by the Malaysian state. Until 2013, it was possible (and legal) for Malaysian employers with personal networks in Indonesia to recruit a domestic worker directly in Indonesia – something that was already considered illegal under Indonesian law (see Killias 2010). In 2013, the Malaysian government declared such informal recruitment illegal. Furthermore, while some Malaysian employers did not mind employing undocumented workers, Nur pointed to the risks involved and named the advantages of using a 'legal', commercial intermediary:

> With illegal [maids], you always have to worry that they will run away, because there are so many cases. Legal is better. I don't even keep her passport with me, I keep it at the agent's house. It's safer. It's not in my house. That's my arrangement with the agent.

As these examples make clear, the intervention of agencies in the placement of domestic workers is perceived as having clear advantages for Malaysian employers: in particular, the fact that employers can turn down employees before making a final choice during the first three months of employment allows them to defer responsibility to the agents.

Workers were much more critical of the practice that allowed employers to 'reject' a domestic worker. Women reported that some agents considered the domestic workers to be solely responsible for the failed

'match' and employed violence to discipline these women. When I met Ipsah in Malaysia, she told me that:

> My Malaysian agent was mean. If we did something just a little bit wrong, she would freak out (*marah kuat*). But she never hit me. I kept hoping that I wouldn't be returned to the agent. I didn't want to meet my agent again before the end of the contract (*tak mau jumpa agen lagi sebelum finish kontrak*). I was scared! If you are returned to the agent you'll be beaten up ... There were women who had red scars, like they had been beaten up by their employers (*tauke*). She (the agent) said they hadn't worked well (*kerja tak baiklah*).

Consequently, the practice of 'sending back' a domestic worker has very different implications for domestic workers than it has for their employers. Furthermore, in contrast to their employers who are offered the possibility of 'rejecting' and replacing their maid up to three times within the first three months of employment, workers are not informed about their opportunity to change employers. Domestic workers are entitled to change employers once during their two-year contracts, but under very specific conditions. The standard employment contract of an Indonesian domestic worker in Malaysia states that the worker may change employers if she has 'reasonable grounds to fear for [her] life, [is] subject to abuse or ill-treatment by the employer or if the employer has failed to pay [her] wages'. In practice, however, it turns out that placement agents sometimes refuse to assist Indonesian domestic workers who want to change employers. As I have shown in the previous chapter, throughout their 'training' migrant domestic workers are taught to be patient and stay with their employers at all times. Hence, there is a discrepancy between migrant domestic workers' rights in theory and their rights in practice. Their employment contracts may entitle them to leave their employers in the case of abuse, but many agents drill them on the need to stay with their 'madams'. So while Malaysian maid agencies often discourage migrant domestic workers from claiming their contractual rights, these contractual rights are few and far in between, and the contract in itself can appropriately be seen as an instrument of subordination, as I will explain below.

Legalising servitude

When we met, Suyekti had been working for Nur for the past four years. She had migrated to Malaysia through the Indonesian and Malaysian

states' labour migration regimes, and in accordance with the legal regulations of the time, she was paid 450 RM (US$140) a month, had no day off, and no fixed working hours.

The first Memorandum of Understanding between Indonesia and Malaysia, signed in May 2006, required Malaysian employers to enter into a legal contract with their Indonesian domestic workers (Killias 2010). These standard contracts provide Indonesian domestic workers with basic rights under Malaysian law (*The Star*, 23 July 2006). However, they have also forced 'legal' domestic workers to accept relatively unfavourable working conditions. Along with long working hours and non-negotiable wages, standard contracts require workers to live with, and work for, employers whom they have not chosen. As Bridget Anderson has argued, live-in domestic work gives employers 'almost total control over [the worker's] time' by placing the worker in a state of permanent availability (2000: 44). It also gives employers control over aspects of the worker's life that are not related to her work in any way – when she takes baths, where and when she sleeps, when she can send letters back home, whether she can have a mobile phone, and what clothes she has to wear (ibid.: 44). Furthermore, as Lan Pei-Chia has argued in relation to migrant domestic workers in Taiwan, standard employment contracts deprive workers of the basic right of labour-market mobility – that is, the right to choose their employer, leave their job, and seek better working conditions and better wages (2007: 271). As such, legal contracts should be seen as instruments of subordination (Steinberg 2003).

The women who left the village of Kalembah for Malaysia have, like Suyekti, become subject to work contracts that tie them to their employers for at least two years, to practices of confinement during the whole migration process, and to the constant threat of illegalisation in the event of flight, as I will explain further on. The relative isolation from the outside world and the withholding of wages are other common practices. Suyekti, for instance, does not keep her wages herself:

> I don't want to keep my wages. My employer said she would keep my wages for me. If I need money, I tell her: I need so and so much to buy this and this. If I don't need money, I don't ask.

When I asked Suyekti why she does not want to keep her wages herself, she said that she was afraid she would spend all her money on

'trivial things'. It is common for both domestic workers and employers to refer to the fact that workers are 'incapable' of dealing with money, and that if their employers did not keep their money for them they would spend it all. Even though such explanations might sound strange, given the minimal mobility that domestic workers enjoy while in employment, they do serve to legitimise an employer's withholding of wages for long periods of time, sometimes two entire years. Discussing similar practices in the context of Cambodian fishermen in Thailand, Annuska Derks argues that this 'forced saving mechanism for those who are 'unable' to sensibly deal with money ... contributes to labour arrangements that involve minimal risk and investment for employers, while binding workers for longer periods' (Derks 2010b: 930).

Several clauses of the 2006 Memorandum of Understanding on the recruitment and placement of Indonesian domestic workers were heavily criticised by activists trying to improve conditions for domestic workers. Firstly, the MoU explicitly allowed Malaysian employers to keep their domestic workers' passports (this measure was supposed to keep workers from 'running away'); secondly, it denied Indonesian domestic workers a day off. In a reportage shot by Australian television shortly after the MoU was signed, the Malaysian Minister of Home Affairs, Radzi Sheikh Ahmad, when asked whether Indonesian domestic workers should be given a day off, replied as follows:[3]

> I do not think that maids should be given a day off. Because there are so many of them ... Can you imagine them going out? ... It would create a lot of problems.

The fact that Indonesian women are let into the country specifically for domestic work tends to lead to a 'widespread public scepticism as to their right to a public presence in the affluent cities' (Ong 2006: 202). At the same time, the employment of Indonesian domestic workers in Malaysia had become a very public issue by the end of the 2000s, especially in Indonesia. After a media furore following a shocking case of abuse of an Indonesian domestic worker by her Malaysian employers in June 2009, the Indonesian government banned its female citizens from taking up work as domestics in Malaysia (*New Straits Times*, 6 July 2009). The ban was formulated only weeks before national elections

3. See the documentary film 'Maid in Malaysia', directed by Helen Vatsikopoulos, produced by ABC – Foreign Correspondent, 29 August 2006.

in Indonesia, making it clear that the migration of Indonesian women overseas had become a very politicised issue.

The extent to which Malaysian families relied on the care work of Indonesian women became particularly visible after Indonesia issued this so-called 'maid freeze', officially stopping the sending of domestic workers to Malaysia for almost two years and thus provoking a sharp drop in the numbers of domestic workers available for employment. The ensuing 'crisis' in the Malaysian care sector became a hotly debated topic in the country (Elias 2013; Elias & Louth 2016). Simultaneously, the abuse case led to street demonstrations in Indonesia, and some demonstrators were seen brandishing signs featuring the famous call to war of former president Sukarno: '*Ganyang Malaysia*!' ('Crush Malaysia!'). By formulating a ban on domestic worker migration to Malaysia, the Indonesian government sought to enforce better working conditions for its migrant citizens.

Subsequently, both the clause regarding the keeping of workers' passports and the clause regarding a weekly day off were revised in an amended version of the MoU signed by the Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and the Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak in Bandung on May 30th 2011 – after two years of negotiations and a two-year ban on the sending of Indonesian domestic workers to Malaysia (see ILO 2015). Yet, despite these formal changes, the keeping of domestic workers' passports by employers or agents was still widely practised after 2011, and there seems to be no way of ensuring that Indonesian women living-in with their Malaysian employers are effectively given a day off per week.

As Aihwa Ong has pointed out, it is very common for Malaysian employers, even 'nice' ones, to incarcerate their domestic workers (2006: 202), and the Malaysian state both supports and legitimises this practice by forcing workers to live with their employers and by obliging employers of foreign maids to sign a document called a 'personal bond'.[4] This document compels employers to pay a fine of up to RM 500 if their worker runs away; hence, employers are encouraged to control their domestic worker's mobility tightly. The Malaysian state thus hands most of the control over foreign domestic workers to their employers. As Anderson put it, 'although living and working in the home places [domestic work-

4. See Immigration Department of Malaysia: http://www.imi.gov.my/images/pdf/PersonalBond.pdf (last accessed 12 January 2018).

ers] directly and constantly under the authority of their employer, it also protects them against the state – so while the state is not available to protect them from abuse, neither will it remove them from the country' (Anderson 2000: 180) – unless they run away, as we will see below.

The illegalisation of runaway maids: Elia

Back in Kalembah, I had the opportunity to get acquainted with Elia. Elia was a woman in her late 40s when I met her, and she had spent five years in Malaysia after running away from her employer. She described how, from a perfectly 'legal' domestic worker, she was transformed into an 'illegal alien':

> I came to Malaysia legally, through a recruitment agency ... I was told that working in Malaysia was pleasant, as long as I did not run away from my employers or dare to contradict them ... But then I got a mean employer ... You know, I wasn't used to eating fast food. So once we had hamburger for dinner, and I had to throw up ... She immediately suspected me of being pregnant. From that day on, she was angry with me all the time. I tried to be patient ... but one day I ran away. Outside, a guy from Lombok helped me find a new employer; he had seen that I had been abused since my face was all red from the blows ... After that I often got arrested. Once, on Idul Fitri, I had gone to town. I was arrested and put in jail ... Yes, in Malaysia, if you don't have a permit, then they get you. But I was wrong: I should not have run away. I should have contacted the agency ... Olivia, if you meet my daughter Ipsah in Malaysia, you have to tell her: don't run away, finish your contract, even if you're in a very bad situation.

Elia's account is interesting on several grounds. First of all, it draws our attention to the isolation that is characteristic of and specific to live-in domestic service. When her employer started abusing her, Elia had no idea where to turn, since the only thing she had been instructed to do was to stay with her employer. With no connections to fellow Indonesians in Malaysia and no material resources since her wages were withheld by her employer, Elia was extremely vulnerable. Trying to get away from the violence she faced from her employer exposed her to other forms of violence, imposed by the coercive apparatus of the state on the one hand and by fellow Indonesian migrants on the other. In fact, though the 'guy from Lombok' helped her to find employment, he subsequently

sought to gain sexual favours from her; networks of co-nationals do not, thus, only involve relations of solidarity and support; they can also entail domination and (sexual) exploitation (see Menjivar 2000).

Like Elia, many migrant domestic workers choose to run away if facing problems with their employers. The 'runaway phenomenon' is now a widely discussed topic in Malaysia, as some 12,000 Indonesian domestic workers reportedly run away each year (*The Star*, 26 August 2008). In the event that a domestic worker runs away, however, her employer is bound by the aforementioned 'personal bond' to make a police report and cancel her work permit, as well as pay a fine of up to 500RM (US$155). With no valid work permit, the domestic worker loses the right to reside in Malaysia – an employment matter is converted into a matter of unlawful residence.[5] Hence, the legal provisions that regulate the employment and residence of foreign domestic workers in Malaysia provide the very grounds on which they can get illegalised, arrested and ultimately deported.

The illegalisation of domestic workers like Elia has to be understood in a broader context of increasingly strict immigration controls, implemented after the Asian economic crisis of 1997 – a 'turning point in the state policy towards foreign labour recruitment', according to Amarjit Kaur (2006: 48). From a situation of relatively unregulated transnational mobility between contemporary Indonesia and Malaysia, border controls have intensified, mass deportations have increased, and the immigration of Indonesian workers to Malaysia has become an issue of major public concern.

The years after 1997 have been characterised by heightened police action to control migration flows, a rigid categorisation of workers into certain labour sectors, and the limitation of residence permits to certain locations and employers (Kaur 2006: 48). It was also during this period that detention camps for undocumented workers were established all over Malaysia. Additionally, an amendment was made to the 2002 Immigration Act that resulted in harsh punishment for immigration violations. As Kaur has put it: 'It is now a criminal offence for foreign workers to work without a work permit or visa, and punitive measures, including caning of workers, have been implemented' (ibid.). In 2005, the government made an

5. For an interesting discussion of the relation between 'legal' residence status and 'illegal' employment, see Anderson and Ruhs (2010).

amendment to its security legislation allowing RELA (the acronym for *Ikatan Relawan Rakyat Malaysia*, 'Volunteer Malaysian People'), a paramilitary civil volunteer corps created in the 1960s to fight communists, to check the immigration permits of foreigners in Malaysia in order to fight 'illegal' immigration. According to the 2005 amendment, RELA is allowed to interrogate and detain any suspect person believed to be a terrorist, an undesirable person, or an 'illegal' worker, and to make any necessary inquiries about such a person (see Human Rights Watch 2007; ILO 2016). In November 2007, and despite loud protests from Malaysian civil society, RELA – by then constituted of 'nearly half a million mostly untrained volunteers, more than the total number of Malaysia's military and police' (*New York Times*, 10 December 2007) – was also mandated to manage all 14 special 'illegal migrants' detention centres in Malaysia (Daily Express 2007).

As Xiang Biao has pointed out, the deportation of illegalised migrants, first envisioned as an emergency measure, turned more and more into a 'routine' for the Malaysian state (Xiang 2013: 2; Chin 2008). Malaysia has deported hundreds of thousands of migrants since the end of the 1990s, and the so-called campaign *Ops Tegas* (lit. 'Operation Tough') which expelled 600,000 to 800,000 illegalised migrants in March 2005, was referred to as 'one of the biggest transmigration programs in the world' (Xiang 2013: 2; see also Holst 2009).

In principle, as long as they stay with their employers, Indonesian domestic workers have relatively little to do with immigration officials, the police, or RELA, quite unlike foreign workers employed in other labour sectors. The fact that the domestic workers' legal residence status depends upon their staying – and thus being compliant – with their employers keeps them from exercising their rights, however. When I asked Elia why she had allowed her daughter Ipsah to work in Malaysia after her own traumatic experience, and why she had not encouraged her to just seek work in Jakarta, she answered:

> I cannot be worried. Malaysia is not a mess like Jakarta. In Jakarta people are not okay. In Malaysia at least I'm sure she isn't allowed to go out [of her employer's home]: she won't be free (*tak bebaslah*). As women, you know we are in constant danger. So in Malaysia, if her employer's good to her, what more do you want? The important thing is that she doesn't run away.

Elia's call for her daughter to stay with her employer shows how the constant threat of illegalisation – and the accompanying threats of arrest, detention, and deportation – ultimately lead to domestic workers' submissiveness and self-discipline. These findings corroborate Nicholas De Genova's claim that 'immigration laws serve as instruments to supply and refine the parameters of both discipline and coercion' (2002: 425).

Mother and daughter: two generations of migrants from Kalembah

Ipsah, Elia's daughter, was on my list of contacts when I arrived in Malaysia. Before I left Kalembah, Elia told me that her daughter was working for a Malaysian employer who owned an electronics shop. Apparently, Ipsah was experiencing some problems: her employer was *cerewet* (nitpicky) and *pelit* (stingy), Elia told me. Although Ipsah used to call home regularly, about three times a month, she had not called for a long time when I talked to Elia. What was of even more concern to Elia was the fact that Ipsah had not been paid any wages. Of course, her wages were deducted for five months, as per the contract, but at the time when I spoke with her mother, Ipsah had already been working for her employer for 14 months and yet she had not been paid one single ringgit as yet. Elia was visibly worried about her daughter. She told me that Ipsah's employer became angry every time Ipsah asked about money and added that Ipsah really needed to be careful (*hati-hati*). While telling me this, Elia was looking for pictures and letters from her daughter in a cardboard box she kept in the only cupboard in her living-room. She finally found a picture that Ipsah had sent her. It was a picture of her on a sunny day outside of the BNP2TKI building, presumably after the pre-departure briefing. She was wearing the agency's uniform, and her hair was short.

Ipsah was recruited by Warsito in spring 2006. When I met her in Malaysia in April 2008, Ipsah had been working for her employer's family for more than a year and a half. Officially, Chuan, a middle-aged Chinese Malaysian man, was Ipsah's employer, but he was often away. Instead, Ipsah spent her days with his elderly mother, his sister (then in her late forties) and his daughter. Ipsah shared a room with the daughter, who was approximately 10 years old at the time.

The family lived in a two-storey house in a middle-class suburb of Kuala Lumpur. A fence surrounded the courtyard in front of the house. My research assistant Hoo Chew Ping and I had made an ap-

pointment, and we were received in the family's living-room. Chuan's mother, Annie, and his sister, Leslie, were both present. Since they did not speak Malay or English very well, Ping translated from English to Hokkien.

Annie actually knew very little about the formalities regarding Ipsah's employment. She did not know how much the agency fee cost her son, and she was not entirely sure about Ipsah's salary. There seemed to be disagreements in the family about the employment of Ipsah. Annie said: 'It is my son who chose her'. The agency told Annie that Ipsah's working hours were from 6 am to 10 pm, but she did not think that Ipsah worked that long:

> When she first came, she was very hard-working because she was afraid that we wouldn't like her and would send her back to the agency. Then after a while, they start getting lazy. When things get really messy or dirty, they don't even bother to clean up. We are not very strict about this, so we just let them. We are unlike other employers; we are very easy-going. We don't really watch over her. Sometimes after my son has sent his daughter to school, she goes upstairs. We don't know if she goes upstairs to sleep again or to do some work. Sometimes she will stay downstairs to do some work and then go upstairs again. When she goes up, it may well be that she is sleeping. We don't care. Sometimes she does her work upstairs. We don't know; we don't care.

Her daughter then added:

> All my friends who come and visit us say our house is so untidy. We ask her to clean it up properly, but she is still like that. We give them too much freedom.

There were obvious conflicts between family members as to what Ipsah needed to do and when, or how much freedom she could be given. Annie indirectly criticised her son for spoiling Ipsah. According to her, he allowed Ipsah to watch TV with him, took her with him when he went out shopping with his daughter, and even gave her the keys of the house so that she could open the gate when one of the three men working in his electronics shop needed to get something at the house. Such intra-familial conflicts are characteristic of paid domestic work arrangements, where an employee works simultaneously for several employers who sometimes disagree with each other. Power dynamics within a household tend to materialise in the relationship with the domestic worker.

When Ipsah joined the conversation, we started to talk in Indonesian while the rest of the family continued to talk with Ping, in Hokkien. While Ipsah and I were talking, I discovered that, like so many other women from Kalembah, she had already had several years of experience in paid domestic service on Java. When I asked her to tell me more about this experience, and what the main differences were between working as a *pembantu* on Java and her employment in Malaysia, she had some very interesting points to make:

> [Back in Indonesia] I used to work for Javanese employers, and also for a Chinese one. I had a lot of employers! I think there were four of them. You know that in Indonesia we don't have contracts, so we do as we like (*sesuka hati*). Sometimes we change (*tukar*) employers after five months, after seven months; it depends on us. Because sometimes we just feel like going back home, or we think that it isn't that profitable any more to work.

By explicitly referring to the written contract, Ipsah pointed out that the main difference between her working experience in Indonesia and in Malaysia was less to do with working in another country than with working in *contractually regulated labour arrangements*. This point is especially important because written contracts are often seen as legal instruments that benefit workers. Interestingly, Ipsah did not point out the *rights* that she gained through her contract; she pointed out the *obligations* it dictated. By contrasting her work experience in Malaysia to her previous experiences as a domestic worker in Indonesia, she identified the contract as an instrument of bondage that tied her to a (Malaysian) employer for a non-negotiable period of two years.

When comparing her situation in Malaysia with her earlier experiences in paid domestic service in Indonesia, Ipsah also pointed out that the incarceration that she currently experienced was particular to the Malaysian context. When working for Indonesian employers, she recalls, she was allowed to go out: 'In our country, most of us are allowed to go out (*keluar*)'.

The isolation that workers experience while in Malaysia makes them even more dependent on their employers. Ipsah complained about her lack of contacts while in Malaysia. She told me that she had tried to send a letter to Pratiwi, who is originally from the same hamlet in Kalembah and was also working in Malaysia. But the letter came back

unopened. 'The address is wrong,' Ipsah was told. In reality, it is very probable that the address was right but that Pratiwi's employers had sent back the letter; I had been to the same address and had actually been able to exchange a few words with Pratiwi, who was looking out of a small window. She was locked inside the house, I was standing on the outside of the fence, and her employers were away. When I contacted them later on, they refused to meet me or to let me meet Pratiwi. I asked Ipsah whether she had contacts with anyone else from Kalembah and she answered:

> Not at all. There is only this [Filipina] girl from next door; we often see each other [through the fence], and we would like so much to communicate (*jadi pingin*). But she speaks English, so we don't really understand each other.

While contacts with fellow migrants in Malaysia are practically non-existent, Ipsah did communicate with her family back home from time to time. Since her mother, Elia, was herself a return migrant from Malaysia, I asked her whether her mother ever gave her advice for her stay in Malaysia when they talked:

> Sure she did: 'The most important is that you finish your contract. Don't run away. If you run away, you will be in trouble'. Yes, my mother, she knows about that: 'You have to finish your contract, your two years. You wanted to work abroad, now you have to carry on'. And it is really like that: it is very hard to be far away from your family. And sometimes you definitely would like to run away. But running away is tough. Yes, my mother ... She is the fussiest person around (*paling cerewet*)! I know about that.

The emphasis on the need to *finish* the contract again stands out as an issue that is of particular concern to migrants. The injunction to '*finish kontrak*' relates to state discourses on 'legal' migration back in Indonesia, but it also relates to the massive illegalisation of Indonesian workers in Malaysia, an illegalisation that Elia had experienced first hand. Workers are pressured by a range of actors to finish their contracts, that is, to stay with their employers for the entire duration of their agreements (and not to run away). State bureaucrats, recruitment agents and family members all have a stake in their abiding by their contracts.

The fact that Indonesian domestic workers are bound to particular employers for a non-negotiable period of time, without a real possibility to leave their jobs or change employers, invites comparisons with colonial indentured labour. Indonesian contract domestic workers in Malaysia can appropriately be seen as 'coolies' of the twenty-first century.

'Illegal' migration as resistance: Arum's counter-narrative

While temporary, 'legal' migration to Malaysia has been the norm for the Kalembah women whom I have met in Malaysia, my ethnography has also revealed that some experienced workers both contest state narratives and resist state practices by deliberately choosing to migrate to Malaysia outside the state's labour-export programme. I will illustrate this point through the account of a young Javanese woman called Arum. I met Arum through common acquaintances. She originally came from Central Java, from the region of Solo, and had been working in Malaysia for several years when I met her. The first time Arum migrated to Malaysia as a domestic worker, in 2001, she did everything 'legally'. Just like Elia, Suyekti or Ipsah, she experienced 'legal' migration to Malaysia as a contract domestic worker. She was recruited by a local broker and taken to a recruitment agency in Medan in Indonesia, where she had to wait for employment in appalling conditions. Luckily, she was chosen by a Malaysian employer after just one month. She worked for this employer, whom she remembers as having been very kind, for the two years of her contract. Her working day started at 4.30 am and lasted until 9 pm – a workload of more than 16 hours. This is not unusual for domestic workers in Malaysia.

After her two-year contract expired, Arum's Malaysian placement agent asked her whether she could help out a little at the agency in Kuala Lumpur before going back to Java for good. She accepted this proposal, and worked at the agency for six months. She was asked to train newly arrived domestic workers from Indonesia and others who had been 'rejected' by their employers. She remembers her days at the agency as having been very tough, as the agent she worked for frequently employed violence as a means to discipline the women, especially those who had been 'rejected' by their employers. At the same time, the time spent at the agency allowed her to meet many Malaysian employers and to learn the 'tricks of the trade'. Back in Indonesia, she decided to try her luck again in Malaysia, but on her own and without

going through the 'legal', state-sanctioned migration scheme. She organised a passport in Medan, asked a Malaysian acquaintance of hers to lend her his name for the visa, and came back to Malaysia. When I met her, she had been working 'illegally' as a domestic worker for several years, and she told me at length about the advantages of this new situation for her:

> Before [when working as a contract domestic worker], I only stayed at home, my days were no more than eating, sleeping and working. I never kept any money myself, not even a few cents. My employer kept my money and my passport. I only got my money once I went back to Indonesia, after two years ... I never got a bonus and I never got a salary increase. Now I am able to earn my money by selling my own labour power. I work for Malays, for Chinese, for Indians, for expatriates. I can clean houses, look after gardens, bake cakes. I can help to organise wedding parties. I can do anything. But I only work on a daily basis ... I hold my passport myself, I live by myself, and I sell my labour power all by myself. I know actually this is wrong ... But I had to do this ... If we work for 400 RM, we can't save anything for our old age; it isn't even enough to send our children to school! ... By doing domestic work on a daily basis I can earn between 1400 and 1700 RM a month ... I have also started to recruit people myself, because I know how things work and I know a lot of employers. So we migrants (*perantau*), we fight with immigration, with the police. We might very well get caught and detained in a detention camp, and maybe we would go nuts in there, who knows. Everything depends on our fate. If our fate is good (*nasib baik*), we will be fine, and we will get back home ... I could get caught, you know. But I am clever; if I get caught I will talk my way out of it. A lot of Indonesians are living like this now. It's wrong, but what else can you do?

Arum's narrative shows that under certain circumstances, 'illegal' migration is a way for experienced migrant workers to circumvent the exploitative dimensions of the 'legal' migration regime in search of more autonomy and better wages. Or, to quote Lan Pei-Chia, 'illegality' is a way to get out of 'legal servitude' (Lan 2007).

It was clear that Arum is perfectly well aware of the fact that 'legal', state-sanctioned migration leads Indonesian domestic workers into bonded labour. She has experienced 'legal' migration. Now, years later and after having acquired experience and knowledge, Arum has consciously

decided to migrate outside the state-sanctioned migration scheme by using migration paths generally labelled as 'illegal' to go back to Malaysia. Interestingly, and unlike the majority of her compatriots, she decided not to travel to a new destination after her first experience in Malaysia. Doing so would most probably have allowed her to earn higher wages, but she would have had to go through the state-sanctioned programme again and would have been tied to her employer much as she had been when working as a contract domestic worker in Malaysia. Hence, her decision to migrate to Malaysia 'illegally' goes beyond pure economic considerations and represents a clear quest for more autonomy. Arum's counter-narrative implies that we should not look at resistance merely as a collective, organised and institutionalised form of action, but also, as has been suggested by James C. Scott (see, for example, 1985: 297), as an individual, largely covert strategy. If we do this, we may find much more resistance in 'illegal' domestic workers' accounts than has thus far been assumed to be present.[6]

Arum herself knew that there was, until 2013, an inconsistency between the Indonesian and the Malaysian laws, and she has taken advantage of that inconsistency. While Indonesian Law 39/2004 states that any attempt to migrate without registering with a licensed recruitment agency is 'illegal', until 2013 Malaysian immigration law allowed Malaysian employers to process work permits for their Indonesian domestic workers in Malaysia without going through agencies. As van Schendel and Abraham have pointed out, neighbouring states often have different definitions of legality, which leads to 'much strategic mobility of goods and people' (2005: 24). In the case of Arum, this inconsistency has allowed her to cross the divide between 'migrant' and 'broker': before 2013, she was able to 'illegally' recruit girls in her home village

6. This is not to say that there are not, in certain contexts, organised forms of collective domestic-worker resistance, such as the ones that Nicole Constable has described in the case of Hong Kong (Constable 2007: 151). It needs to be said here that the conditions for organising domestic workers collectively are not the same in Hong Kong and in Malaysia, however. As in many other countries, in Malaysia domestic workers are excluded from protection provided by labour laws (Elias 2013), and the conditions in which trade unions and political organisations in general operate are more restricted. In contrast, in Hong Kong migrant workers organise in associations and unions, and they have ties to Hong Kong-based trade unions (Rother 2017).

in Central Java, and to provide them with legal employment once they had arrived in Malaysia. However, recruiting young villagers was not an easy task. Because of moral assumptions about mobile women, Arum, as a woman, was not deemed acceptable as an intermediary, especially as she was not using the usual 'legal' channels. People in her village gossiped about her and accused her of being too daring (*berani*). By crossing the divide between 'migrant' and 'broker', Arum complicates the often simplistic dichotomous representation of migrant women as 'victims' and male brokers as 'criminals'. Furthermore, the example of Arum shows that the disciplinary migration regime in place in Malaysia forces migrant domestic workers to either expect 'legal' but exploitative employment conditions or to fend for themselves in legal grey zones, always at risk of state persecution and deportation.

Arum herself lives in violation of both Indonesian and Malaysian law, as she has organised her passport 'illegally' in Indonesia and is now living on her own and working for multiple employers whom she chooses herself. However, she has been doing well so far. She has avoided the long and costly recruitment process in Indonesia and has been earning four times as much as 'legal' domestic workers in Malaysia. With the huge demand for Indonesian domestic workers, she can choose her employers and negotiate good wages. She can use that which is denied to 'legal' migrant domestic workers, 'the proletariat's trump card – market mobility' (Lan 2007: 259). She also has her own accommodation, which enables her, among other things, to entertain social relations without her employers' approval. She can decide on her own working hours and her days off, and she regularly goes back to Java to meet her family. Of course, circumventing the 'legal', state-sanctioned migration scheme is far from easy and requires networks, money, and courage. Arum has to look for employment herself, and she has to pay for her own food, lodging and travelling fees. The importance of social networks, both with fellow Indonesians with whom she is sharing her accommodations and with Malaysians who employ and protect her, are key to her independence. As she herself says, she may very well get arrested and be taken to one of Malaysia's infamous detention camps. Furthermore, under increasingly vehement campaigns against *perdagangan manusia* ('human trafficking'), Arum could be prosecuted as a 'trafficker' for 'illegally' recruiting women from her village in Central

Java. But taking this risk enables her to negotiate better labour conditions for herself.

Contrasting trajectories

Elia, Suyekti, Ipsah and Arum have all experienced 'legal' labour as domestic workers in Malaysia. Both Elia and Arum subsequently experienced 'illegal' migration, but in very different ways. In the case of Elia, it was immediate flight as a reaction to a situation of despair that led to her illegalisation. Arum, on the other hand, based on the fact that she had developed a good understanding of the 'tricks of the trade', carefully prepared her re-migration from Indonesia after having worked in Malaysia, and successfully arranged a very different experience for herself.

Arum's narrative, which is in sharp contrast to those of Elia, Ipsah and Suyekti, makes it clear that working arrangements mediated by agencies and regulated by legal contracts do not automatically benefit workers. As Mendez has pointed out in describing the way in which cleaning agencies in the United States operate, 'in more bureaucratically organized agencies, employees lose control of the work process, which is often standardized and routinized' (1998: 130). In personal, private domestic-worker arrangements, on the other hand, workers may succeed in negotiating better wages and gaining more control over the work process. They can use 'their acquired knowledge and housecleaning expertise' (ibid.: 130). This has clearly been the case with Arum, who is obviously proud of the fact that she possesses many different skills, from baking cakes to organising parties, and that she is able to deploy these in creative ways as an independent (though illegalised) worker in Malaysia.

Obviously, Arum's and Elia's accounts are just two facets of a reality that is much more complex, but contrasting these two stories allows us to see how important it is to look at the *trajectories* that lead workers into '(il)legality' (De Regt 2010). '(Il)legality' can take various forms, and we need to be cautious about equating 'legality' and state control with improved working and living arrangements. Arum, in organising her migration by herself, is completely at odds with dominant discourses on 'illegal' migrants, which ignore the agency of (female) migrants. Arum's narrative offers a critical commentary on the state's official labour export programme.

Indonesian women spend years working as domestic workers in Malaysian households. Standard contracts are for two years, but many work there for much longer. Ultimately, however, all of these women are expected to return to Indonesia. In the next chapter, I will therefore focus on return to Kalembah.

CHAPTER 6

Return – and New Departures

> Nila, I am waiting for you to come back home for *Lebaran*. If you don't come, does that mean I will have to wait another two years for you to come back? I have been waiting for so long already. If you love me, then please come back.
>
> Extract from a letter from Darsito to his girlfriend Nila, a migrant domestic worker in Malaysia.

Indonesian women employed as domestic workers abroad are both socially expected and legally required to return 'home' to their villages after their work contracts abroad expire. From the mass deportations of illegalised Indonesian migrants orchestrated by the Malaysian state (Xiang 2013) to the special migrant worker terminal at the airport in Jakarta (Silvey 2007; Kloppenburg & Peters 2012) or the repatriation programmes for 'victims of trafficking' (Lindquist 2013), return is enforced through various measures and involves a variety of state and non-state actors. The critical point is that in all these measures, 'return home' is assumed to be in migrants' best interest and, as such, is never questioned (Lindquist 2013; Xiang 2013; Constable 2014).

The norm of return also determines the way in which emigration is seen by those 'left behind' in Kalembah – namely, as a temporary activity, undertaken for the sake of a better future. This future is firmly envisioned as being in the village, and the investment of migrant remittances in the construction of concrete houses symbolises the plans of migrant relatives to return to Kalembah.

In this chapter, I ethnographically explore discourses about and practices of 'return' to the village of Kalembah. I discuss the compulsory return inherent in domestic worker migration, but also delayed returns and contested returns, as well as my own return to the village several years after having carried out my first phase of fieldwork in the village. Exploring temporary contract migration through the lens of 'returns' allows me to

shed light on the ways in which domestic worker migration is negotiated in the village, including among younger generations of migrants who tend to redefine the meaning of migration from (and return to) Kalembah.

Waiting for return

Darsito, the young man who wrote the love letter cited at the beginning of this chapter, expressed well what can be described as the predicament of waiting, an affective state known by all the 'left behind' lovers, husbands, children, parents, siblings and friends who are waiting on news, money, and ultimately on the return of their loved-one. Women, men and children 'left behind' in the village spend the temporary – but often year-long – absence of daughters, mothers and wives employed in domestic service abroad waiting for their return.

Waiting on the return of women gone to work abroad is paradoxical: return is at the same time strictly scheduled and entirely uncertain. While it is tied to the duration of the standard two-year work contract, it might also get delayed indefinitely. A work contract might be extended, for instance, but return can also sometimes be delayed for reasons that remain unclear. Some migrants have never returned from overseas. Other migrant workers faced imprisonment – like Elia, who ran away from her employer and was only able to return during an amnesty period, after having spent five years as an illegalised migrant in Malaysia; or Subianto, a fellow villager who ended up in prison in Saudi Arabia 17 years ago and has not returned to the village since. But there are also rumours about women who are said to have got married again and to have started a new life abroad.

The uncertainties pertaining to a migrant's return have to be read in a context of fragmented transnational social ties. The relations between Javanese women employed as domestic workers abroad and their relatives in Kalembah were often characterised by long periods of non-communication, silence, and suspicion. As I have described earlier, some women do not contact their families any more after having left Indonesia. While this can be interpreted as a voluntary response to marital or other conflicts, it can also indicate that a woman has a particularly strict employer abroad, or that something has happened to her.

While it is widely assumed that migrants all over the world have been increasingly able to sustain transnational social ties, access to technolo-

gies which allow this is highly unequal. Many families did not have a valid contact for their relative abroad, and hence did not know how to contact her. In cases where they did have an address or a phone number, villagers were actively discouraged from trying to contact their migrant relatives abroad by brokers, who told them that Malaysian employers would not like it. In most cases, Javanese families thus waited for their migrant wives, mothers or daughters to initiate contact. As with migrants from the Philippines, there is an inequality in the communication between migrants and their relatives back home (Parreñas 2005a: 330). This inequality is part of the broader geopolitical context. However, migrant workers are not 'free' to initiate contact whenever they please, either. Live-in domestic workers are especially dependent on their employers for things like using a phone or sending a letter (Parreñas 2005a: 330). While some migrants, like Suyekti, were lucky enough to own a mobile phone of their own, many, like Ipsah, were dependent upon the phones of their employers and only allowed to call at particular times of the month or of the year. Furthermore, since not everyone owned a mobile phone in Kalembah, handwritten letters were the most common means of communication between migrant women and their families back in the village in the late 2000s. Consider the following letter sent by Tarsiah to her husband and two children in 2008:

> Assalamulaikum. How is everyone at home? I hope that everybody is fine. I am fine here in Malaysia. I am so sorry I will not be able to be there for upcoming *Lebaran*. Please pray for me so that I will be able to carry on working for the two years that my contract lasts. I am happy to work. I work for a Chinese, in a household of five, two women and three men. One of the women is still young, and I take care of the other, elderly one. Even though I am working for a Chinese, I am free to eat what I want. My employer is never angry, she even cares for me, she even understands me even though I am a simple person. She always talks in Chinese or English, she can't speak any Malay, but somehow I can cope and speak a little bit. I am sorry if I didn't get in touch with you before. Actually my employer told me to write a letter already long ago but I didn't do it. Tarsiah.

Villagers look at these letters with a certain level of suspicion. When I returned from my trip to Malaysia and went back to the village with stories about my cursory encounters with migrant women from Kalembah overseas, as well as pictures to distribute to their families, people were

very excited. They emphasised that these were 'proofs' that could be believed – unlike the letters, where 'you never know'. When she joined the conversation that I had with Maryanti, the mother of Nita, on my return from Malaysia, her neighbour put it this way:

> Well, you never know with these letters. Like Nita, were there anything wrong with her employer, I am sure she would only write to us about all the good things ... You can only know for sure when you meet them, like you [Olivia] could meet them. That's great: you could talk to them straight away, there is proof (*ada buktinya*).

Interestingly, when I met Suyekti in Kuala Lumpur, she still wanted me to tell her family back on Java what I had seen, that she was doing well, even though she was regularly in touch with her family back in Indonesia:

> Olivia, I have prepared some of my pictures, which I want you to take back to the village, as proof that you have met me in Malaysia ... My employer is good. *Alhamdulillah*. You can tell them back in the village, Olivia, tell them my situation here.

Suspicion and fear characterise both sides of the transnational relationship. Even where communication exists, doubt and uncertainties prevail. The following account of Wahyu's experiences illustrates the fragility of transnational ties, the uncertainty of return, and the predicament of waiting particularly well.

Wahyu had been married for three years when his wife decided to migrate to Malaysia. At that time, their son was 15 months old. Wahyu explained that it had been very difficult to communicate with his wife since she left, mostly because she had to use her employer's landline. At the time of our encounter, his wife had been employed as a domestic worker in Malaysia for almost two years, and he hadn't heard from her for a whole year:

> For a year, I've been left to wait. Just wait. Why didn't she contact me? The only thing I remember is that she works in Perak, Malaysia, that's all. A week ago she contacted me. It was on Friday, at 11.45, she called my neighbour and told him that I should wait at his place, that she'd call back at 12.15. So my neighbour came to fetch me and I went to his place. I waited there until 2 o'clock in the afternoon. Then, I had to repair my motorcycle – it had a flat tyre. I'd just arrived at the garage when my neighbour called me again. Can you imagine: I waited for two hours, no phone call. Then I left for a minute, immediately the phone call arrived. So that's when she apparently told my neighbour that she wanted to come back on August 15th. I asked him: 'Really?' He answered: 'Yes'. I asked again: 'No other news?' 'No'. So what can I do? I am so confused (*bingung*) and the only thing that I can do is wait for another phone call from Malaysia.

In contrast to the 'hype about a global community linked by the information super highway' (Jackson and Jones 1998: 10), the account of Wahyu makes it very clear that under certain political and economic conditions, a simple phone call between Indonesia and Malaysia is a difficult enterprise that does not always succeed. While his wife is dependent upon her employer, whose phone she has to use in order to contact her family back in Indonesia, Wahyu himself is dependent upon a neighbour to receive a phone call. In times of global connectivity, the question of access to communication technology thus remains vital. Wahyu's story also illustrates powerfully how the lack of communication during a migrant's absence, the sense of being 'stuck' waiting, produces a sense of frustration. Time passes slowly when one has to wait an entire year for one phone call.

In her work on the Philippines, Rhacel Parreñas has demonstrated that much of the intimacy between migrant mothers and their children is achieved by the establishment of set routines, i.e. 'making contact at particular times that both mothers and children anticipate and wait for' (2005a: 328). These routines, in the context of transnational communication, can take place through various means: text messages sent at particular times of the day, letters or presents sent at particular times during the month or year, and the regular sending back of remittances (ibid.). In Kalembah, however, relations between migrants and their families were characterised by unpredictability and uncertainty. Families back in the village often were not able to control whether there was communication with their kin in Malaysia, Saudi Arabia or Taiwan – they had to wait. In this context, as I will discuss below, houses emerged as particularly important. In fact, a migrant sending back remittances to build a house stood as material proofs of a migrant's plans to return – the presence of the house compensated for the physical absence of the migrant herself, and as such, it was invested with affective engagements (see Sandoval-Cervantes

2017: 220). As the brother of Suyekti put it, the construction of her house demonstrates her years of hard labour to fellow villagers: 'There is proof of her hard work abroad in the village (*kerjanya dia di sana bisa dibuktikan di desa*)'.

A house to return to

Practically from the day they leave their village, migrant women are told to think about coming back. In pre-departure briefings, they are instructed to finish their two-year contracts, to save their earnings and to return to Indonesia. They are urged to use their remittances in a 'really productive way' (*betul-betul ekonomi yang produktif*) – as one instructor put it during the government's pre-departure briefing in Jakarta – so as to allow their families, their villages and ultimately, the Indonesian nation to 'progress'.

To migrant women, return to Kalembah is always tied to the house; a modern, concrete house marks a villager's success abroad. Moreover, by sending back money to be invested in her house, a migrant shows her will to return to Java, to reunite with her family and to spend her future 'at home'. In other words, sending back remittances to be invested in the house is interpreted as a migrant preparing her return. Tarsiah, for instance, remained involved in the renovation of her house even while she was working as a domestic worker in Malaysia and communicated with her family exclusively via handwritten letters. In a letter that she sent back to the village, she informed her husband about her plans for their house: 'I will send you my first two months of salary in April. Please ask Uncle Trio whether he has time to put in our windows. If he has time, tell him to do it at once'.

Houses reflect socio-economic status and in rural areas, they can often directly be related to land ownership (Hart and Peluso 2005: 185). As elsewhere on Java (see e.g. Hart and Peluso 2005: 185), in Kalembah, wealthier families had 'permanent houses' of brick and tile, the houses of smaller landowners were wooden structures with concrete floors, and the houses of the landless had bamboo walls and mud floors, with an outside kitchen and toilet. By the time I came to the village for the first time in 2007, many newer so-called *rumah permanen*, i.e. so-called 'permanent houses' stood along the recently paved road that led all the way to the top of the village. These newer houses were made of bricks, with wooden

door and window frames painted in bright colours; some houses also had colourful, shiny tiles on the outside walls. As Juliette Koning has pointed out, what is interesting about these new, modern, urban-style houses is that many of them are 'virtually empty inside ... and a great deal of attention is paid to the outside of the house' (2004: 272).

The *rumah permanen* is a marker of modernity, of changing times, as one of my informants put it (*perubahan zaman*). It stands in opposition to traditional wooden houses, which are considered backward, dirty, and altogether 'unhealthy'. Having experienced urban, middle-class lifestyles through working as domestic workers in Asian megacities, many women who return to the village aspire to bring back a touch of the modern, urban, 'air-conditioned lifestyle' (van Leeuwen 1997) to rural Java. Inul, a young girl of sixteen who had gained experience as a domestic worker in Jakarta and whose parents were renovating their house, put it this way:

> We build houses because we want to live healthier lives (*hidup lebih sehat*) ... You know, everybody does [build a brick house] these days, so we don't want to be left behind (*tidak mau ketinggalan*)!

Supomo, one of the most successful brokers of the area, had recognised this trend of migrants building new houses, too. By 2013, he had opened a shop selling construction materials to supplement his earnings from involvement in transnational labour migration.

Anthropologists have long dealt with the social meaning of houses (see e.g. Lévi-Strauss 1983; Bourdieu 1990; Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995), especially so in Southeast Asia (Carsten 1995; Waterson 1995; 2000). As Sandoval-Cervantes has argued, in contexts of migration, the building of houses in migrants' regions of origin can fruitfully be seen as 'a process that links those who migrate and those who stay' (Sandoval-Cervantes 2017: 212). Clearly, in Kalembah, brick houses are symbols of a migrant's success abroad, but the construction of houses is also intimately related to kinship relations and in particular the principle of uxorilocal residence in the village. Maryanti, for instance, the mother of Nita, who worked as a domestic worker in Malaysia, told me about her daughter's wish to renovate her house:

> The idea is to invest the money that Nita earns overseas in the renovation of the house. If I am sent something [by Nita], I will be told what to do with the money, but certainly it will not be for food. If possible,

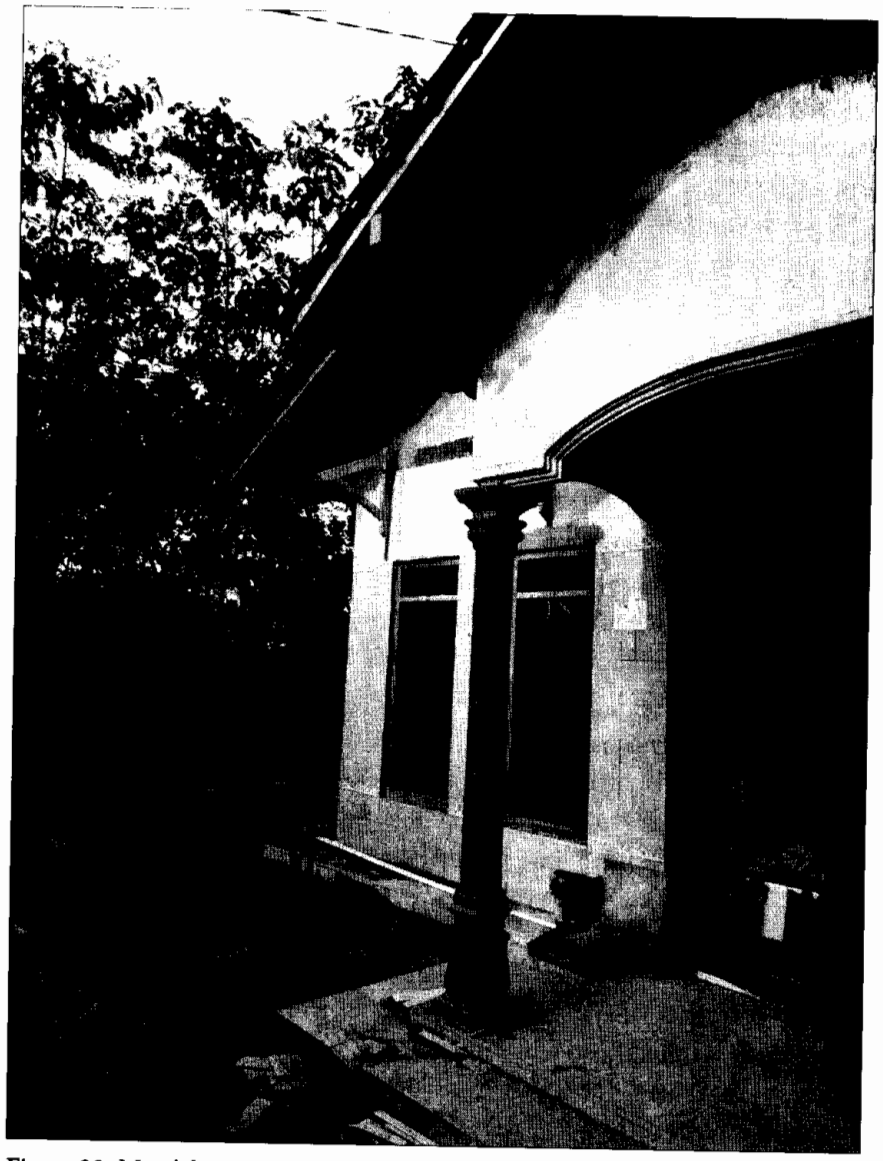

Figure 22: Mega's house under construction in Kalembah. Photo: Olivia Killias.

this is the way we want it. Let's hope that everything will go well with (pointing to the two children sitting next to us) their father's work too, so that husband and wife can combine forces. One works for the needs of everyday life (*kebutuhan sehari-hari*); one works to renovate the house.

> Nita wants to have it this way ... You know, the neighbours' houses are already nicely renovated (*sudah bagus*). If Nita had just waited for her husband to achieve this, then when would it ever have happened?

Like Nita, most women in the village sent back their remittances to female relatives – their mothers, sisters or daughters – rather than their husbands. This needs to be seen in the light of gendered ideas about the handling of money that have been described at length in the literature on island Southeast Asia (see especially Peletz 1994; Brenner 1995; Znoj 1998). But Maryanti's account is not just interesting because it illustrates the fact that remittances are mostly sent to female relatives. It is also interesting because it points to the particular ways in which remittances are earmarked (see Zelizer 1994): a man's remittances are considered to be of a different nature than a woman's remittances. Gendered assumptions about the responsibilities of husband and wife shape the ways in which remittances are used. Following the Islamic ideal of *nafkah*, the husband is seen as the main breadwinner and he has to cover the basic everyday needs of his wife and children, including food and clothes. In contrast, a woman wants to follow the principle of uxorilocal residence and have her own house built on her mother's land. Accordingly, a woman's income should not be spent on daily needs, but on her house. Building a house does not require the frequent sending back of small amounts of money, but rather a few bigger cash remittances. This is fortunate as in many cases, migrant domestic workers were not paid their wages on a monthly basis, as I have explained, but rather in the form of a lump-sum payment after a few months or even at the end of their two-year contract. The earmarking of remittances of male and female migrants into different – in fact, gendered – categories thus needs to be viewed in the context of modalities of payment abroad, Islamic ideals regarding the responsibility of husband and wife, and the principle of uxorilocal residence in the village.

Like Tarsiah, Suyekti and Nita, many women from Kalembah who have migrated abroad want to invest their money in the renovation or the construction of a house; if they have already done so, they often invest their money in a house for their daughters, which will be built on the land next to the mother's house. Although the principle of uxorilocal residence is contested in the village, many examples show how much women in Kalembah are committed to it and seek to keep it alive.

One of the most interesting stories I was told in this respect was that of Mia, the wife of successful labour broker Warsito. When Warsito and Mia first married, Warsito refused to follow the uxorilocal principle and to settle in Mia's parents' house. Instead, they settled in an empty house next to *his* parents' house in another hamlet of Kalembah. Following his older brother Supomo, Warsito then went off to work as a chauffeur in Saudi Arabia for two years; he regularly sent money back home to his young wife Mia, who was then still living in the house next to his parents. However, when Warsito came home after two years, he found out that his wife had spent all the money he had sent back to build a new house next to *her* parents, hence following the principle of uxorilocal residence. The couple is now living in her hamlet, in the house she has built for them, with the money he earned in Saudi Arabia. Every time she tells this story, Mia teases her husband with a smile, while he grumbles in an irritated way. The fact that he has accepted the move, however, shows that he considers Mia to have the right to do what she has done.

The practice of uxorilocal residence also has consequences on the lives of a migrant's family while she is away. If a migrant villager has no daughters around old enough to take care of a household, her children will generally move in with the household of a female relative. In most cases, this female relative takes over the burden of cooking, washing clothes, looking after young children, cleaning the house and serving tea to guests, thus compensating for the migrant woman's 'temporary' absence. The only person not to join in this temporary move is the husband. 'Left-behind' husbands may leave their conjugal home and return to live with their own parents until their wives come back from abroad – at least if there is no daughter around old enough to cook and clean. Alternatively, a man might decide to leave the village himself and seek work elsewhere until his wife's return. In others words, men desert the houses of their wives once the latter have gone. Consequently, when a woman leaves the village, her household as such does not exist any more.[1]

While new houses are generally built in proximity to women's relatives (rather than men's), men from the village are directly involved in the construction of houses. Some men have migrated to Jakarta in the past, where they worked in the construction sector and therefore they

1. For an interesting parallel in Cape Verde, see Akesson, Carling and Drotbohm 2012.

have the required know-how to build houses in an urban, Jakarta-style fashion (see Breman and Wiradi 2002: 184–196; Koning 2004: 270). Consequently, the construction of houses with migrant remittances in Kalembah both respects the uxorilocal tradition of the area and provides jobs for the jobless men who remain back in the village. As Sandoval-Cervantes has argued in reference to Han (2012), the construction of and tending to the unfinished houses of migrants, as well as protecting them from processes of 'ruination', may be interpreted as a process of 'active awaiting' (Han 2012). This is the process whereby the family of a migrant back in the village has an active role in preparing the house for a migrant's return (Sandoval-Cervantes 2017: 210). Clearly, in the village, spending money on houses is by far the most common and the most legitimate way of using remittances, and this is crucially related to the fact that the house materially signifies a migrant's will to return.

Delayed returns, uncertain futures

While the social norm of building a house and returning 'home' remains unquestioned, the uncertainty regarding a migrant's actual return to the village arises from the fact that returns often are delayed – most often because a work contract is extended. In 2013, when I myself returned to Kalembah for a visit, I was sitting with several neighbours at the house of Mia and Warsito. Among them was also Nastiti's husband, Tariman. Nastiti herself was still in Saudi Arabia, where she had been for the past five years. During the conversation, Mia teased Tariman aloud:

> You are such a poor guy! Your wife refuses to come back! Does she plan on getting old in Saudi Arabia? Just get yourself a new wife!

Everyone started laughing. It was clear, however, that people in the village had started to talk about Nastiti staying away for too long. Her daughter, who was 24 years old by then, wanted to get married – and she was growing increasingly impatient for her mother to come back. However, Nastiti herself knew that this was the last time that she could work abroad since she was already way over 40 years old. With recruitment agencies and destination countries setting age limits for candidates wishing to migrate overseas, Nastiti knew, in other words, that she had to take full advantage of this last job in Saudi Arabia, and she didn't want to come back to Java just yet.

During the same visit to the village in 2013, I went to look for Suyekti, whom I had met in Kuala Lumpur in 2008. With the money she had earned in Malaysia, Suyekti had bought some clove trees and she had built a large, 'modern' house made of bricks, with an impressive wooden entrance door – but the house appeared to be empty, and Suyekti was nowhere to be found. It turned out that she was still working for Nur's family in Malaysia. She had thus been working for Nur for the past nine years. Her mother, who lived in the house next door, invited me to come inside the house that Suyekti had built. The living-room was decorated with colourful tiles, a brand-new sofa with matching armchairs, still packaged in plastic, stood in one corner, and a picture of the sacred *Kaaba* in Mecca hung on the wall.

Suyekti's sister, who joined the conversation, explained that Suyekti wanted to wait for the youngest of her employer's children to be out of school – so she would stay for four or five more years, they assumed. As the case of Suyekti makes clear, some domestic workers worked for their Malaysian employers for much longer than the initial two years. In fact, it is legally permitted for Malaysian employers to prolong the initial two-year work contracts with their domestic workers indefinitely. Knowing the rising costs that they would have to cover if employing a new domestic, many Malaysian employers are keen on keeping their domestic workers for longer than two years, as we have seen. At the same time, it is clear to Malaysian families that their domestic worker will ultimately return to Indonesia, and the employers whom I encountered in Malaysia took great care to remind their domestic worker of her own children, and thus, the place she ultimately 'belongs' to: her own kin, her own country (see Killias 2014). The domestic worker's own biological children are indeed crucial, because the supposedly permanent tie to her own children defines her stay in Malaysia as being by definition temporary, and the affective engagement with those she looks after – what Lan Pei-Chia (2006) has called 'substitute motherhood' – of a transitory nature.

Employers' emphasis on domestic worker's ties to their own children is rather ironic, as after year-long absences, the relationship of Indonesian women to their own children is often rather distant. During their employment as domestic workers abroad, visits back home do not generally occur during the first two years of employment – and even

after that, visits are rare and of short duration. When I met her in Kuala Lumpur in 2008, Suyekti vividly recalled how difficult it had been for her to get close to her son again during a short holiday back home after a two-year-long absence:

> When I came home for my holiday, my son kept his distance. Only after a week did he start to even speak to me. He didn't want to. People asked him: 'Why do you treat your mother like this?' He said he was embarrassed (*malu*). Even if I wanted to hold him, he didn't want to ... My own son ... Why was my son like that? I was so sad. After all, I had come back to meet my son!

Despite the romantic representation of migrant women's return home that circulates within as well as beyond Indonesia, 'return' to the village is often ambivalent (Bach 2013: 325). In a powerful account, Nicole Constable (2014) has shown that migrant women's return home can be met with mixed feelings, and that in certain cases, family conflicts make it unbearable for returned women to stay. Also, and especially if they have not been successful in their migratory projects abroad, returned migrants feel a deep sense of shame (Constable 2014: 216–223). Some women feel alienated from their families, especially divorced women. Like Suyekti, such women, particularly if their children have grown up, have little to come back to (Lan 2006; Bach 2013; Constable 2014). When I asked Suyekti's family in 2013 whether her son – who was now studying at an Indonesian university – hadn't missed his mother during all those years that she had been away, Suyekti's sister simply replied: 'no'.

In contrast to the painful distance that she experienced in her relationship with her son, Suyekti was very close to her Malaysian employer's children. In fact, Suyekti's family back in Kalembah pointed out how much her employer's children were attached to Suyekti. Suyekti's mother, especially, explained that the Malaysian children she looked after always missed Suyekti a lot when she came back to Java for a holiday. In fact, every two or three years, when Suyekti travels back 'home' to Indonesia for a two-week holiday, she calls her employer Nur *on a daily basis* to speak to the children because she misses hearing their voices.

By contacting her employer's children on a daily basis whenever she is supposedly off work and 'back home' in Indonesia, Suyekti destabilises the boundaries of 'work' and 'family' and makes more permanent claims of belonging to the family of her Malay employers. Nonetheless,

she remains acutely aware of the fact that hers is only a temporary presence in Malaysia. Only as long as she is strong enough to work and appreciated by her employers will her work permit allow her to stay on in Malaysia. When I met Suyekti again in Kuala Lumpur five years after our initial encounter, she reflected on the last nine years she had spent working in Malaysia, and said: 'As long as my body is strong enough to work, I want to stay. To me, Malaysia feels like home by now (*seperti kampong sendiri*). It's a small world (*dunia sempit*)'.

While some of the migrant women whom I met in Malaysia in 2008 were still working there years later, like Suyekti and Mega, others had come back to the village. Tarsiah was back when I visited Kalembah in 2016, but she was very ill. She had stopped working in Malaysia after almost four years. After the death of her female employer, she had asked to be allowed to go back home, because she couldn't stand the aggressive behaviour of her employer's adult son. He was an alcoholic and always stole his father's money: 'I was afraid of him, so I asked to go back home'. At a safe distance from Malaysia and in the intimate spaces of living-rooms, some women who had returned started to tell stories of violence.

In the meantime, Tarsiah had also worked in paid domestic service in Jakarta, but her health did not allow her to work any longer. She was now back in Kalembah for good, she said, together with her husband and younger son, but she lamented the fact that her house for now remained uncompleted. Other houses in the village were more obviously 'in process', lacking paint or windows. So just as the completion of concrete house signifies a migrant's success abroad, the changing material landscape of the village and in particular the unfinished houses along the road are material reminders of the risks involved in transnational labour migration (Sandoval-Cervantes 2017). This was also well illustrated in the case of Elia, who had spent five years in Malaysia as an undocumented migrant after having been illegalised upon running away from her employer. She was never able to even start building a modern, concrete house and was still living in a wooden house when I last visited her in 2016. She was by then working on the rubber plantation – every morning, for five or six hours. She was paid 20,000 IDR (US$1.50) per day, which is 'better than nothing', as she said, but it was clear that it was not enough. As Sandoval-Cervantes (2017) has argued, unfinished – or

in this case, planned but never actually materialised – houses stand for the risks involved in migration and for villagers' uncertain futures.

Moving on

As has become clear by now, in Kalembah, villagers have migrated to a large variety of places, ranging from the next big city 35 km away, to Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur or Riyadh. All of them have migrated 'temporarily'. Temporarily can actually mean for many years, as the example of Suyekti makes clear, yet overseas labour migration is still considered to be a *transitory* move. In line with their temporary contracts, many migrant women who have been abroad come back after their two-year contracts expire, rest at home for a few weeks or months, and then go abroad again. These frequent movements between home and abroad do not lead to permanent settlement. Women keep moving; they do not just migrate once and then return for good; and most of them choose to migrate to new destinations every time they leave the village.

Typical migration 'careers' can be identified, from employment in the surroundings of the village to Malaysia to Saudi Arabia or Taiwan, and each destination has a different level of prestige associated with it. Consider, for instance, the account of Yusriah. When I met her, she had recently returned from Malaysia, where she had worked for three years. She told me that she was now considering travelling to Saudi Arabia, 'to give it a try'. Her estranged husband reacted to this with disbelief:

> My husband was surprised when he heard that I wanted to go to Saudi Arabia: 'How come you want to go to Saudi Arabia, how come you are so fearless (*nekat*)? ... He asked me not to go and to go back to my previous employer instead, to Malaysia. He said that if I were to go back to Malaysia, he would allow it. But by now he has agreed to me going to Saudi Arabia. The truth is that if I want to go somewhere, I go. I won't accept other people stopping me from going by saying 'don't go'. He said he was afraid that I would be abused and affirmed that Saudis are barbaric. But I think it all depends. We may just as likely get a kind employer, and if we don't, then what can you do about it? But hopefully my fate will be good (*nasibnya baiklah*).

Women's mobility expands from employment in the area of their native villages to jobs overseas. Claudia Liebelt has observed similar trends among Filipina domestic workers. Filipina domestic workers have

often been described in the literature as 'classical transmigrants who keep in touch with family members back home and commute between their countries of origin and their destinations' (2008: 568). However, Liebelt shows that Filipina migrant domestic workers are 'transnational' in a much wider sense. Because they travel through a whole range of nation-states, Liebelt argues, these women move 'on and on' rather than 'back and forth'.

In Kalembah, Malaysia was usually seen as a 'stepping stone' (*batu loncat*) to other destinations. Ipsah, for instance, planned to work in Saudi Arabia at a later stage: '*Inshallah*, but I don't know if my mother will allow it'. In most cases, migrating 'on and on' implies moving further and further away, and thereby moving forwards, as 'making progress' or 'advancing' (*meningkat*). However, migrating 'on and on' can also be interpreted as a way of staying away from a difficult situation in the village for as long possible – Nicole Constable has coined the term 'cycle of atonement' to refer to 'the almost inevitable draw for single mothers to reenter the migratory cycle' (2014: 22). At any rate, rather than becoming permanent settlers abroad, Indonesian migrant domestic workers become, as Parreñas put it, 'permanently circular' (2010: 306).

There is, however, a time to migrate. With age limitations for domestic workers wishing to work overseas, Javanese women cannot travel abroad for work in paid domestic service forever. As I have explained earlier on, recruitment agencies generally recruit women between 21 (the legal minimum age) and approximately 35 years old. Receiving countries define age limits, too: Malaysia only allows foreign women up to 45 years old to be employed as domestic workers. In other words, the global labour market requires workers who are young and healthy – in the prime of their lives. At some point, women are considered too old to migrate overseas, and while some react by seeking work as domestics within Indonesia, in many cases their daughters continue the project of migrating for a better future.

Daughters on the move

When we met in Kalembah, Juwairah lived in one of the modern houses made of bricks and decorated with tiles. She had worked as a domestic worker in Malaysia for four years. By then, her only daughter, Nurdjana, who was herself married and the mother of a little boy, was working in Malaysia. Juwairah recounted how her daughter had taken the initiative:

> My daughter said: 'Mum, you're already old, stay at home … I'll be the one to leave … look for experience (*cari pengalaman*)'. So she kind of replaced me abroad.

During her daughter's absence, Juwairah had to carry out most domestic work, including cooking and washing clothes on her own. Her grandson moved back and forth between the house belonging to his grandparents on his father's side – where his father had been living since his mother's departure – and Juwairah's house. Juwairah clearly found that she had more work to do since her daughter had gone abroad. But, she said, it was for a good reason: after all, her daughter wanted to earn money in order to be able to build a house of her own, on the land just behind Juwairah's house. By doing this, she would be able to look after Juwairah in her old age.

Ipsah, the daughter of Elia who followed her mother to Malaysia, experienced contract labour migration both as a child whose mother was 'temporarily' away, and as a migrant domestic worker herself. She recalled what it was like when her mother was away:

> I was still small when my mother left, in the third year of elementary school. My mother was here [in Malaysia] for a long time, but we didn't think she would be away for five years. That's why she is making such a fuss (*cerewet*) about me having to be strong.

The unpredictable nature of the length of a migrant's absence puts a strain on many familial ties in Kalembah. Since everyone back in the village knows that a standard contract abroad lasts two years, people start wondering aloud why a migrant does not come back 'on time'. When I asked Ipsah how people in the village had reacted to her mother's long absence, she said: 'I didn't want to listen to that. I don't know what they said about the fact that she didn't come home … but she didn't come home for a very long time (*lama tak balik-balik*)'.

As I have previously mentioned, Elia was only able to travel back to Indonesia after five years, during one of the amnesty periods granted by the Malaysian state. Her experiences as a child prompted Ipsah to take a different path from the one her mother took, and to redefine the role of migration in relation to marriage and motherhood. In contrast to her mother, who had gone abroad after having children – as most migrants in Kalembah do – Ipsah decided to migrate before even getting married. Here is why:

> While my mum was in Malaysia I lived with my grandmother, and so did my elder sister. My father left to work as a fisherman ... So when I had to go to school, my mother wasn't there. Of course you can succeed in school but you need the support of your mother. And I didn't have that. I don't want my children to be left, like I was. I want to be there for them when they're still at school. That's why I have decided to leave while I am still young. Earn some money first.

Ipsah's account was in no way unique – the daughters of migrant mothers often emphasised that they would not leave their own children. At the same time, her account confirms Parreñas' analysis that children have higher expectations of their mothers than of their fathers: Ipsah resented her mother for having been away in Malaysia, but she did not seem to resent her father for having left her and her sister after their mother was already in Malaysia (Parreñas 2005b).

It is noteworthy that conceptions of marriage and motherhood have been evolving, and this is reflected in the fact that the daughters of migrant mothers increasingly conceive of migration differently: more and more, migration is viewed as a way of attaining the ideal of the modern, middle-class nuclear family. As the following quote illustrates, the modern, concrete house (that her mother was never able to build) is key to modern, middle-class family status:

> I just want to build a house so that when I'm married, we will have a house. So that there is at least some form of progress (*kemajuan*). I don't want to marry without having a proper house, bear a child, and *then* leave abroad .... No way. I want to go and look for money *first*. (Emphasis mine)

With new, middle-class ideals about marriage and motherhood gaining ground in Kalembah, the timing of migration is changing. Ipsah has made her decision to migrate overseas before marriage by reflecting on her own experience as the child of a migrant mother. Marriage and the birth of the first child, which for so many women in Kalembah mark the beginning of migration, are not appropriate moments to leave, according to Ipsah. In the view of Ipsah and other women of her generation, migration serves to *establish* a household rather than *sustain* it. Migration is still undertaken in order to build a house – but this house is envisioned as the home of a future, happy, middle-class, modern nuclear family (see also Peluso 2011: 828) In this ideal, there is no room for the image of

a wife and mother leaving behind husband and children in the care of other relatives. Ipsah imagines her own future as a stay-at-home mum, and thereby she differentiates herself from her mother, and from many other women of her mother's generation.

Clearly, middle-class ideals of marriage and motherhood can be identified here that relate to broader national discourses. In fact, in Indonesia, the *azas kekeluargaan* or 'family principle' is a key element of state ideology, 'which holds that the family is the fundamental unit of the nation' (Boellstorff 2005: 117). As Tom Boellstorff writes, 'crucially this is not the extended family, but the *nuclear* family, whose ubiquitous smiles illuminate television ads and government posters: husband, wife and two children, with a car, a home with smooth white tiled floors, a television set, and other paraphernalia of the new middle class' (ibid., emphasis mine). To Ipsah, migration is a way of getting closer to this ideal. As she put it when she was still in Malaysia in 2008: 'Being in Malaysia allows me to advance in life (*meningkat*). If I had stayed back in the village, I would only have been able to evolve little by little'.

By 2016, Ipsah was working as a domestic worker in Jakarta. She had come back from Malaysia disillusioned, as her employer ended up never actually paying her the full wages for her two-year contract. Wrongly accused of stealing, Ipsah was forced to accept a lump-sum at the end of her contract that corresponded to only a small portion of her total earnings. She later on worked in Singapore for two years, and then married and moved to Jakarta, where her husband worked as a gardener for an upper-class Javanese family, while she was employed as a domestic worker. Dreams for establishing her own middle-class family did not seem in immediate reach yet, but she continued to work hard and pursued the project of *kemajuan* ('progress').

Indonesian dreams

Since my first visit in 2007, I have travelled back to Kalembah many times. While in 2007 villagers were enthusiastic about the possibilities opened up by transnational labour migration, almost ten years later numerous brick houses were unfinished and a certain sense of disenchantment could be felt in the village. Problems of underemployment and unemployment remained, and many women had left home again for work at least once since I first met them. While migration was first envisioned as

a temporary activity, it became increasingly clear that for many villagers, one-time overseas migration did not allow them to fulfil their dreams of a better future. In contrast to romanticised views of migrants' return 'home', this chapter has thus problematised the very notion of 'return' in the context of contemporary domestic worker migration from Java.

On the one hand, 'return' remains unquestioned – contemporary contract labour migration legally requires migrants to travel abroad for a set, standardised period of time and to subsequently return to Indonesia. From the moment they leave Indonesia, migrant domestic workers are told to think about their return 'home'. Sending back remittances to be invested in a modern house in the village is widely seen as the most legitimate way to spend remittances, as houses materially signify a migrant's will to return. This emphasis on return also points to the significance of time in contemporary contract labour migration – migration is always considered to be temporary, and can thus be seen as a 'temporal rather than a spatial project' (Xiang 2014b: 192). In fact, Xiang Biao has argued that in Northeast China, migration is expected to change migrants' lives not because it allows them to travel to new lands, but because it 'enables them to join the rapid development in China. It [is] no longer about American or Japanese dreams. It [is] about *Chinese dreams*.' (ibid.: 192, emphasis in the original). Similarly, like Ipsah, young women from Kalembah planning to return want to invest in *Indonesian* dreams – they want to participate in the Indonesian national development project.

On the other hand, for relatives in the village the anticipation of a migrant's return is a period marked by uncertainty. This uncertainty is related to multiple ruptures in transnational social ties. The deliberate severing of social ties through the confiscation of mobile phones and through seclusion in private homes impedes many Indonesian domestic workers in Malaysia from actively and regularly maintaining ties with their families. The same constant uncertainty and the absence of 'set routines' that play an important role in the Filipino context (Parreñas 2005b) impede Indonesian lovers, mothers and children, and husbands and wives from achieving long-distance intimacy.

Consequently, younger women's experience of growing up with migrant mothers has affected the ways in which they view migration: they still see overseas labour migration as a legitimate way to earn money, but they increasingly seek to migrate *before* getting married and having

children. Thereby, they are also redefining the meaning of marriage and motherhood in relation to migration. The ideal of the modern, middle-class, nuclear family that lives in a modern, clean, 'healthy' house is becoming more important among second-generation migrants in Kalembah. Consequently, the meaning and the timing of migration is being renegotiated in relation to women's reproductive lifecycles.

In sum, a closer examination of 'return' from the perspective of those who stay in a sending village reveals that return is both highly valued and very ambivalent. Returns do get delayed, and in many instances, return can be likened more to a temporary pause in serial migration. With recruiters setting age limits for overseas contract labour migration, women are anxious to migrate before they are too old: many do so by migrating 'on and on', from one destination to the next.

Conclusion

During a recent visit to Kalembah, I stayed in Nastiti's house, as I had done so many times before. Since my first stay in 2007, the house had gradually been renovated with the remittances that Nastiti had sent back from Saudi Arabia. One evening, as I was chatting with Nastiti's daughter, I noticed a tiny piece of graffiti that she had written on the wall of her room, just above her bed: 'Change your fate (*Ubahlah nasib*). The future is waiting for us to find the power to change it.'

To Nastiti and many of her co-villagers, migration holds the promise of changing one's fate, of building a house of one's own, and to catch up with what is perceived to be development and progress. In fact, this writing on the bedroom wall in Nastiti's house captures something broader about Javanese migrants' conceptualisation of the future: Fate, *nasib*, can be acted upon. *Ubahlah nasib* is not a fatalistic posture, but rather one that encourages those who can to take action in the present to transform the future.[1]

Long integrated into the global economy through a tea plantation established under colonial rule, the village of Kalembah, like so many other villages throughout Indonesia, has witnessed labour migration on an unprecedented scale over the last twenty years. The gendered requirements of the global labour market have deeply affected local migration patterns, and women migrate in much larger numbers than men: some leave to work in paid domestic service in the next big city, others look for employment as domestic workers abroad. From the feminised work on the tea plantation, women from Kalembah have thus entered another highly feminised labour sector: paid domestic service. In both cases, ideologies of gender, race and class have structured village women's participation as low-paid workers in the circuits of global capital.

1. For a discussion of *nasib* in migrant women's narratives, see Prusinski (2016).

How Indonesian women leave for work in paid domestic service across Asia lies at the heart of this book. Following the paths of migrant women from one specific village in upland northern Central Java to Malaysia and back, the book has explored various stages and sites of the migration process and unpacked the moral, social, economic and legal processes by which village women are turned into 'maids': from negotiations between migrants and their kin before departure to the recruitment by local brokers, training in secluded camps, pre-departure briefings taught by state officials, placement by Malaysian maid agents, to actual employment in private households across Malaysia and their return home to Java. Although they start in a specific upland Javanese village, these women's journeys can tell us something about the migration of thousands of women who leave Indonesia each year to work in domestic service overseas.

In 2016, an estimated 9 million Indonesian migrant workers (both documented and undocumented) remitted US$8.9 billion home from overseas (World Bank 2017). A considerable number of these migrant workers are women, and most of them are employed in paid domestic service in Asia and the Middle East. Over a relatively short time, Indonesia has emerged as one of the main labour-exporting countries in Asia.

In public accounts across Indonesia, the transnational migration of women is viewed in extremely contradictory terms. On the one hand, migrants are celebrated as the country's 'heroes of foreign-exchange earnings'. In pre-departure briefings taught by state bureaucrats, migrants are increasingly enlisted in the project of national development. On the other hand, the cases of abuse continually portrayed in the national media have triggered heated debates about the legitimacy of the state's encouragement of overseas labour migration. State officials react ambiguously to these contradictions, and a very common trope is to assert that the numbers of domestic workers sent abroad will soon be reduced and replaced by 'skilled' – and, it is often implied, male – migrants. Indonesian President Jokowi publicly announced that he intended to stop the national 'export' of domestic workers by 2017 to preserve the country's dignity (*martabat bangsa*), thereby prolonging a long-standing paternalistic discourse on domestic worker migration. At the time of writing, women are still migrating abroad, though in lesser

numbers than before, and it seems unlikely that the government will act on its promise to completely stop sending Indonesian women overseas as contract domestic workers.

Since the fall of ex-President Suharto in 1998, under NGO and international pressure, the Indonesian state has increasingly regularised labour emigration. This regularisation has resulted in the bureaucracy being more and more preoccupied with the production of legal migrants. Concurrently, Indonesian state officials have tended to criminalise irregular emigration, which tends to be conflated with trafficking. Workers are urged to respect their contracts, to remain with their employers for the duration of their agreements – and to return to Indonesia immediately afterwards.

In line with the state's policy of brokering temporary contract labour to wealthier parts of Asia and the Middle East, migration from Kalembah is of a temporary nature; although a migrant may be gone for years, she is never expected to be gone forever. Labour migration is thus both spatially *and* temporally structured. In fact, in the village, the question of who migrates, when and to where is socially negotiated. There is a 'right' time to leave: because of the requirements of labour markets, women cannot migrate when they are too old, but they are also kept from doing so when they are 'too young'. Young, unmarried women are encouraged to work as domestic workers on Java. It is only marriage, the birth of a first child and legally, being 21 years of age, that make a woman 'ready' to travel overseas. The scope and timing of labour migration is thus connected in intimate ways to marriage, motherhood and also divorce – in other words, to the stages of women's reproductive lifecycles. However, more recently, younger women like Ipsah, themselves the daughters of migrant women who have worked as domestic workers abroad, increasingly contest the idea that only married women can leave for work overseas. They thereby redefine the meaning of transnational labour migration in relation to marriage and family.

As this ethnography has shown, once they have decided to leave their village, Indonesian women migrating as domestic workers do not simply migrate abroad individually. They are recruited, trained, certified and placed abroad through a labour-brokerage regime that produces temporary contract workers who are sent abroad for set periods of time – and expected to return to Indonesia as soon as their contracts end.

The numerous actors involved in – and making a profit from – domestic worker migration in and from Indonesia indicate that paid domestic service involves more than two parties, an important point since it has often been envisioned as a relationship between two women, the 'maid' and the 'madam' (Mendez 1998: 144).

By moving beyond an exclusive focus on women migrating as domestic workers, I have brought into view a whole range of intermediaries who make the transnational care chain work: brokers, recruitment agents, state bureaucrats, maid agencies. In doing so, I have been able to draw a more complex picture of these intermediaries, and shown, for instance, that despite the dominant, long-standing image of brokers as unscrupulous criminals, in many cases middlemen such as maid agents do care about the moral legitimacy of their work. In accounts of intermediaries such as Rina, Harry or Joyce, there is a distinct 'will to do good' that draws on various (and often gendered) discourses of protection and development.

The specific articulations of such discourses, however, are always contextual. In Kalembah, the transnational mobility of women migrants is tied to the networks of male brokers. Essential actors in the Indonesian migration industry, brokers connect women willing to leave the village with recruitment agencies in cities such as Semarang and Jakarta, and 'protect' these women throughout this first internal migration. In the context of high-profile cases of abuse of domestic workers abroad, brokers emphasise both their sense of responsibility (*tanggung jawab*) and the legal dimension of their recruitment activities to legitimise their interventions. The distinction between 'legal' and 'illegal' recruitment has come to play an important role in the village, as migrants and their kin have come to see 'legal' migration as crucial in providing some sort of guarantee against the uncertainties and risks they believe to be inherent in transnational labour migration. Tellingly, this emphasis on legality and contracts is also taking on greater significance at the level of domestic worker migration within Indonesia. When I met him again in 2016, Supomo, one of the most successful brokers in the region of Kalembah, proudly showed me the catalogue of an ILO-sponsored programme in which he now participates, recruiting women to work as contract domestic workers across Indonesia. Domestic service within Indonesia is thus undergoing increasing formalisation, and middlemen such as Supomo have an important role to play in this process.

Following the paths of migrant women and male brokers from Kalembah, I have been able to shed light on the articulations of contemporary care chains – and especially on the *ruptures* in these chains. In fact, the worker's transfer to a recruitment agency and entry into a secluded training camp marks a defining moment in the migration process. Away from women's villages of origin, training camps operate as crucial sites of liminal transformation: women are separated from their former lives and collectively trained to become unattached labourers, ready to be sent abroad in the name of Indonesian development. As I have shown, in this process of recruitment and placement, a specific image of the Indonesian maid is produced and made to suit the (perceived) expectations of middle-class employers overseas. While Javanese women from rural areas of the island are constructed as particularly 'suited' for domestic work by the marketing efforts of maid agents such as Jeni, they are also perceived as being in need of 'training'. Indonesian recruitment agents in Jakarta, Semarang or Surabaya see the rural villages most migrant women come from as uncivilised, backward places in need of an 'upgrade'. To Malaysian, Saudi or Taiwanese employers, upland central Java is imagined as being even further away, a primitive place marked by poverty and underdevelopment. The 'training' of prospective domestic workers is hence emphasised as a necessary step in the recruitment process, and a guarantor of 'quality'. However, domestic worker training is very much about acquiring deferent and submissive behaviour. Ironically, then, it is by engaging in transnational labour migration, pursuing dreams of a better future, that migrant women from various parts of the Indonesian archipelago learn to be part of a growing global serving class.

While Malaysian employers scroll through the online 'biodata' profiles of hundreds of women and select their domestic worker with a few mouse clicks, migrant women themselves have no say in the selection of their employer or in the setting of their wages. The employment contracts of Indonesian domestic workers in Malaysia tie them to an employer for a set period of two years. Not only do they work for their Malaysian employers, they also live with them. The tying of residence permits to working for and living with the family of a particular employer produces dependency. This dependency on employers came to light very clearly during my fieldwork in Malaysia. Access to domestic workers or their

employers was hampered by the idea that the 'maid issue' was a decidedly private one and that only the employer (and not the worker) could decide whether to talk about it or not. In the context of widespread moral panics about the presence of thousands of Indonesian domestic workers in the most intimate, well-guarded spaces of middle-class Malaysian neighbourhoods, practices of immobilisation and, at times, seclusion of domestic workers are not only very common but also widely accepted. This acceptance is related to the normalisation of paid domestic service as a form of middle-class consumption in Malaysia, as Christine Chin (1998) has argued, but it also relates to the prevalence of what is essentially an indentured labour regime. Not only do employers pay sizable agency fees; they also advance the fee that their domestic worker has to pay in order to migrate. Domestic-worker employment in Malaysia thus rests on the idea that employers pay first and get the service they have paid for only later; as with coolies in colonial times, this situation leaves the employer with a certain risk, namely that her investment may not pay off – or worse, 'run away'.

Despite the high demand for the services of Indonesian domestic workers in Malaysia, domestic workers operate within a 'bounded labour market' (Lan 2006) that strips them of their most important negotiation instrument, 'the proletariat's trump card' (Lan 2006: 259) – market mobility. Under regulations in force at present in Malaysia, domestic workers cannot choose or change employers at will, and they are kept from negotiating their wages individually. Discourses that infantilise the women by arguing that they would not be able to negotiate good working conditions by themselves actually obscure the fact that there is an economic rationale behind the binding of domestic workers to particular employers: it is standard employment contracts that keep Indonesian domestic workers from achieving the wages that their Filipina counterparts receive, not Malaysian employers. Tellingly, migrant women were highly critical of these contracts. Before coming to Malaysia, many women from Kalembah, like Ipsah, had worked as domestic workers on Java for several years. During that time, most of them had made extensive use of 'market mobility' by frequently changing employers in search of better employment conditions, a new environment or simply adventure. These women tend to view the employment contract that they have signed when coming to work in Malaysia not in

terms of the *rights* that the contract supposedly guarantees but, rather, in terms of the obligations it contains – most importantly the fact that they have to live and work for an employer they have not chosen for a non-negotiable period of two years.

Moreover, the work contracts of foreign domestic workers in Malaysia are backed by immigration regulations that reinforce the disciplinary logic of the employment contract, and that can be read as a contemporary version of the penal sanction: a worker who runs away from her employer is illegalised and at constant risk of detention and deportation, a condition that Nicholas De Genova has called 'deportability' (2002). The counter-narrative of Arum which I relate in Chapter 5 – who managed to negotiate her own employment situation in Malaysia, but only through operating 'illegally' – clearly shows that contemporary legal contracts are not in the workers' interests. In this context, some experienced women workers consciously choose 'illegal' migration to resist the legal but exploitative labour arrangements of both sending and receiving states.

From the training that Indonesian village women have to undergo in order to become 'quality maids' to contracts that produce a very specific employment relationship by forcing them to live-in with their Malaysian employers, this book's focus on the *process* of domestic worker migration from Indonesia has allowed me to reveal key insights into the ways in which village women are turned into maids. At the same time, with an ethnographic focus on practical encounters between migrant women and their kin, local broker figures or recruitment agents, the book has also shown that – beneath the compliance and deference expected of domestic workers – migrant women are highly aware of the injustices they face, and they offer a critical commentary on precisely these injustices. Finally, the book has also revealed the ruptures and frictions that emerge along the care chain, for instance in the very conceptualisation of domestic labour: while middle-class employers in Malaysia or the political elite in Jakarta tend to consider domestic work a degrading activity, for villagers in upland Central Java, it is precisely the *domestic* dimension of the work that is emphasised and that makes women's migration socially legitimate.

The focus on the migration *process* implies not just a spatial but also a temporal dimension. Importantly, the migration journey in itself

is made up of various moments and involves different temporalities – from the urgency to leave to the long days of waiting in transit, the rushed transfer to foreign employers, the around-the-clock availability as live-in domestic workers in Malaysia and the anticipation of (often temporary) return. In fact, in Kalembah, migration is always envisioned as a temporary activity, undertaken for the sake of a better future. This future is firmly envisioned as taking place in the village, and migrants are both legally required and socially expected to return. The expectation of return materialises in migrants sending back remittances to build modern, concrete houses. However, return can be delayed, and is often uncertain or even contested altogether – as the cases of Elia or Suyekti have shown. Many return migrants remain in the village only temporarily, subsequently seeking new employment, often in new destinations. From Jakarta to Malaysia to Saudi Arabia to Taiwan, domestic workers move across countries as long as they are young enough to do so, with no possibility of claiming permanent residence anywhere. Instead, they tend to become 'permanently circular' (Parreñas 2010).

Time structures the migrant experience, and it also allows us to better understand the rationale for migration: it is only by grasping migrant women's aspirations, their distinct orientation towards the future, well expressed by the expression *ubahlah nasib* written on the bedroom wall in Nastiti's house, that we can understand why women decide to leave, again and again. In many ways, and like the Chinese migrants that Xiang Biao (2014b) has talked to, Kalembah women forgo the present for the sake of the future. The modern brick houses in various stages of completion that stand in the village are material testimonies both to the promises of labour migration, and to its risks.

I hope to have done justice to the narratives that the women and men I have met have shared with me. May these narratives contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the multi-layered processes that lead Indonesian women to leave their villages, again and again, on and on.

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*=pseudonym; f=figure; n=footnote;
bold type=extended discussion or term emphasised in the text