Reluctant Intimacies

Japanese Eldercare in Indonesian Hands

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I, Beata Świtek confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

The thesis explores the tensions in Japan between national ideologies of cultural homogeneity and the demographic and economic realities which increasingly point to the unavoidability of immigration. Based on research among the Indonesian eldercare workers who arrived in Japan in 2008 under an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), the thesis focuses on the foreign workers' working practices, shared experiences, and interactions with their Japanese colleagues, employers, and elderly residents, and on the public discourses surrounding the Indonesian workers' presence in Japan. In doing so, it emphasises the saliency of essentialising cultural representations. However, the research reveals that these representations become paralleled by identifications based on other, non-cultural areas of immediate experience. Such identifications suggest the possibility of discussing the ideal of Japanese society as moving away from its homogeneous model. The thesis uses the notion of intimacy to organise and connect the discussed data on the levels of bodily, interpersonal, and national identifications. Following the politico–economic background of the Indonesian workers' presence in Japan and the introduction of the idea of culture laid out in the vocabulary of intimacy, the consecutive chapters focus on different sets of relationships forged by the Indonesian workers. The thesis concludes with the discussion of media representations and a suggestion that the 'seeding' of foreign workers and residents within local communities in Japan constitutes the arena in which cross-cultural intimacies emerge.

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Acknowledgements

As in any ethnographic piece of research the centrality of those whose lives and experiences became the basis for the researcher's analysis is a testimony to their indispensability for the project. They are all the more important if they choose to welcome and support the researcher who out of individual professional interest probes into their most private affairs, asks to live with them, and shadows their steps. My first and foremost words of gratitude are therefore directed towards those who were my informants and friends in Japan. These were, of course, the young Indonesian workers who so readily became my hosts and teachers and put up with my presence, sometimes around the clock, in their lives. Their hospitality, humour, and patience made this project possible.

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Note on Language

In the text I indicate quotes translated into English by a subsequent qualification 'from Jpn.:' and 'from Ind.:' and the original quote in brackets, when I use the translation as a part of a sentence. When the original quote is used instead, the translation is provided in brackets with the preceding 'Jpn.' or 'Ind.' to indicate which language the quote is in. I omit these qualifying elements when the original language is evident from the context. The majority of short citations from the Japanese newspapers and other sources are provided in the corresponding footnotes. However, the longer cited paragraphs can be found in the endnotes.

All Japanese words are romanised according to the modified Hepburn system. Long vowels are indicated with macrons, apart from in words commonly used in English—for example, geographical names such as Tokyo. In the romanised transcriptions I capitalise personal and geographical names which would be capitalised in English as well. Japanese names are presented according to the standard ordering in Japan, with the surname followed by the given name.

I use the terms 'foreigner', 'migrant', and 'immigrant' fairly liberally and sometimes interchangeably. To an extent, this reflects the meaning conflation of the terms used in Japan. On the other hand, the ubiquity of the two latter terms in this thesis is not reflective of the popular expressions used in Japan, where representation of Japan as a 'country of immigration' is still nascent.

The names of the main informants are pseudonyms. I only use real names in referring to people whose opinions as presented here have been made public elsewhere by the individuals in question.

Introduction

Thinking about contemporary migration is almost impossible without linking it to the idea of a nation or nation-state. One of the primary distinctions made when talking about migration is that between international and internal—that is, movements within nation-state borders. In fact, if left unqualified, migration will likely be assumed to be international. It is at this level of nation (or nation-state) that migration becomes a contentious issue which flares up into discourses on security, rights and obligations, and cultural differences. It is also almost impossible to think about migration without reference to culture. Not without reason, migrant communities have been at the centre of discussions about assimilation, integration, and multiculturalism which more often than not debate the (in)congruities between the migrants' and the accepting nation's cultures. This is because contemporary nations are imagined as fairly bounded entities which at one level or another share in what is imagined to be a fairly homogeneous culture. It is in reference to this culture that many a difference is represented, although what popularly counts as national culture varies. I am using the term *culture* here as a kind of a representative for the imagined shared ideas and ideals which are meant to guide actions and interactions of co-nationals in similar ways. Various processes of reification of these imaginations distinguish between who is seen as culturally 'ours' and 'theirs', as typically national or alien. These broad, rigid but at the same time mouldable, and often elusive generalisations and stereotypical categorisations come with certain assumptions about individuals. People are expected to act in certain ways and not know certain things if they have or belong to a different culture. Also, a foreigner or a member of a minority group is often taken to be 'more ethnic'—that is, more predisposed to follow his or her culture and more visibly so, than a local, representing the majority, person. The identification of nations with given cultures suggests a degree of cultural incongruity between the national *us* and *them*. In Japan, too, there exist powerful ideas distinguishing Japanese

from non-Japanese. These ideas influence the perceptions of individuals and affect the experiences of foreigners in Japan.

Against this background, the present thesis looks at the formation of relationships between the Japanese personnel, the employers, the cared-for elderly, and the Indonesian care workers employed in Japanese eldercare institutions under the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) initially implemented in 2008. While primarily focusing on the negotiation of relationships at an interpersonal level, the thesis also considers the intersections between the ageing of society and Japanese discourses of nationhood. Shifting between these scales of observation, the project discusses the interplay between bodily, interpersonal, and cultural intimacies. It examines how they are formed, maintained, negated, negotiated, and lost. In doing so, the thesis shifts the emphasis away from (but does not completely abandon) the ethnic or national underpinnings of the migration process as a lived experience for migrants and hosts alike.

I use the idea of intimacy to organise my observations from field research and other data used in this thesis. Although not always explicitly mentioned by my informants, intimacy is a composite idea encompassing the themes which regularly made their way into our conversations, which marked their presence in the media coverage of the EPA acceptance, and which appeared in the relations of those Japanese who worked directly with the Indonesian candidates. Admittedly, some of the themes were direct opposites of what intimacy would imply. However, I took them to point towards intimacy by negating it, such as with the case of discomfort or distrust. As a term which is relatively easy to define, yet not so rigid as to disallow its transplantation between contexts and scales of observation, I found intimacy to be a handy tool in bringing together data which at first glance had little to do with each other. I hope I was able to convey this connectedness.

Japanese multiculturalism

With foreigners accounting for only 1.7 per cent—that is, around 2 million—of the total population of 127 million (according to data published by Japan's

Ministry of Justice in 2008), Japan can hardly be perceived as a popular emigration destination. The relatively small proportion and therefore low visibility of foreigners has contributed to the common (mis)perception that there has been no migration to Japan (Roberts & Douglas 2000:11). This perception has sustained the idea of Japan as a closed country in isolation from external influences. Such popular discourses 'omitting' the foreign presence in Japan support and feed into notions representing Japan as a country-wide 'gated community' (Blakely & Snyder 1997 in Fechter 2007:61) preventing access to outsiders in the proclaimed interest of the nation's safety and ethnic homogeneity. Such a discursive historical practice, combined with the relatively small and often inconspicuous (although increasingly less so: see Graburn *et al.* 2008) foreign population, has added to the popular folk theories (Gelman & Legare 2011) that, from physical traits to norms of interaction to socio-economic standing, the Japanese share extensive commonalities, the accumulation of which and some in their own right differentiate the Japanese from other peoples (see Befu 1992; Lie 2000). This essentialised representation has become 'not merely the attribution of innate characteristics, including a specific mentality, but the conflation of images with the experienced reality' (Geertz 1973:240–241 in Herzfeld 1997).

Japan-based research on immigration has typically been framed within the discourses of such alleged Japanese homogeneity. The latter idea gained prominence in post–World War II Japanese self-representations via a rich body of literature devoted to the 'discussions' or 'discourses' of Japaneseness, collectively called *Nihonjinron* (Befu 1992). Within what perhaps could be termed (nascent) studies of multiculturalism in Japan, up until the 1990s the tendency was to focus on Japan's minorities, defined as either indigenous to the Isles or foreign. The first group was represented by the Ainu, Okinawans, and Buraku (e.g., DeVos & Wagatsuma 1967; Higler 1971). The latter referred to the Korean and Chinese residents who were brought to Japan by force during World War II and their descendants, and to the more recent migrant workers from Asia. While providing vivid examples of cultural plurality in Japan, studies of these groups focused on their marginality within Japanese society,

contributing to the dominant representations of 'the Japanese' as homogeneous. The arrival of the so-called newcomers—that is, the post-war groups of refugees from Indochina in the 1970s, the female entertainers from Asia in the 1970s, the (sometimes undocumented) male migrants from South and Southeast Asia in the 1980s, and, in particular, the *Nikkeijin*, that is, people of Japanese descent—since the 1990s (Burgess 2008) propelled scholars to challenge the ideal of homogeneity (e.g., Befu 2001; Yoshino 1992; *cf.* Weiner 1997). Scholarly efforts turned to examine how the understanding of 'the Japanese' was shaped by the plethora of 'historical engagements' within Japan and between Japan and other countries (Morris-Suzuki 1998 in Graburn & Ertl 2008:5; *cf.* Goodman et *al*. 2003; Goodman 2008:331). One such engagement relevant to the current study is Japan's involvement in the global market economy, the underlying cause of the economic agreement which brought the Indonesian workers whose experiences form the core of this thesis.

Internationalisation (Jpn.: *kokusaika*) has been said to have happened in Japan in two ways. At first, it involved familiarising the Japanese travelling abroad with local cultures and spreading knowledge about Japan rather than accepting foreign elements within the Japanese milieu. However, as Japan's engagements on the global scene continued and multiplied and the number of foreign workers finding employment in Japan was on the increase, as Graburn and Ertl (2008:7) argue, 'parts of the nation have been "internationalized" through migration'. Hence came the second, 'domestic' incarnation of internationalisation. The *uchinaru kokusaika* or *kokunai kokusaika*, internal or domestic internationalisation (Morris-Suzuki 1998:194 in Graburn & Ertl 2008), posed a challenge to the notion of a homogeneous Japanese society. 'Multicultural coexistence', or *tabunka kyōsei*, a term usually translated as 'multiculturalism', has emerged in the popular discourse to account for the progressing acknowledgement of the changing face of Japanese society. It has also become one of the ideals for the future shape of the society. This is not to say that immigration and the growing (visible) presence of foreigners in Japan or the future prospects of accepting even more foreign workers to mitigate the effects of Japan's population ageing and declining in numbers have not been

contested. Particularly in popular media discourses, the presence of migrants has been seen as disruptive to the national fabric of Japanese society. Although the authors of articles in compilations such as those edited by Douglass and Roberts (2000), Goodman *et al.* (2003), Graburn and Ertl (2008), Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu (2008), and Roberts and Vogt (2011) discuss a plethora of cases exemplifying the undergoing changes and formation of new constellations of (multicultural?) meanings, they also point to the still powerful national sentiments which resist but also shape these processes. The current thesis aims to contribute to this literature by focusing on these tensions, but also on alliances within a workplace which until recently has been outside the arena of internationalisation, that is, eldercare institutions.

Project background

The majority of the foreign population in Japan comes from neighbouring countries. In 2008 there were slightly more than 550,000 Koreans and about 400,000 Chinese, including the *Zainichi* permanent residents whose presence in Japan dates back to World War II. The third largest group registered as foreigners in Japan was *Nikkeijin*, people of Japanese descent. This group was heavily dominated by Brazilians, who alone accounted for 14 per cent of the registered foreigners in 2004. The last particularly numerous group of foreigners was Filipinos, who at about 200,000 continued to be the third largest Asian, and the fourth largest in general, foreign group in Japan. Other Asian nationalities, coming from South and Southeast Asia, make up a much smaller fraction. People from Thailand, Burma, India, Pakistan, Iran, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and other countries together accounted for about 14 per cent (288,213) of the registered foreigners in 2004. People from Europe and North America were estimated to number a little over 50,000.

Indonesians in Japan

Indonesian migration to Japan is a relatively new phenomenon. Even among the so-called newcomers who began arriving in Japan in the late 1970s,

Indonesians were said to be the late ones (Komai 2001). Although a limited exchange of people between the two countries has been taking place since the years immediately prior to World War II (Gōtō 2003; *cf.* Hugo 1995), a more significant increase in the movement of Indonesians to Japan has been documented since the 1980s. According to data provided by Okushima Mika (2008) there were 35,717 Indonesians residing in Japan in 2007, including seamen and those whose legal status in Japan was irregular. One of the largest groups within this overall Indonesian population were technical trainees who arrived in Japan under a scheme run by the Japan International Training Cooperation Organisation (JITCO). Between 1992 and 2005 Japan accepted 748,679 foreign technical trainees, 70,328 of whom were Indonesians (Kashiwazaki 2006), primarily living in Osaka, Nagano, and the Kanto region (Romdiati 2003). Indonesians constituted the second largest, albeit not comparatively numerous, group among technical trainees after the Chinese. With a figure of slightly more than 12,000 in 2000 they reached a number equal to one fifth that of the Chinese, but greater than Thais, Filipinos, and Malaysians (Romdiati 2003). Among those interviewed by Romdiati (2003), the majority of these technical trainees were men in their twenties and thirties with education up to a senior high school level. They were concentrated in the manufacturing sector, working in electrical equipment assembly; manufacturing of metal and plastic products, transport machinery, and tools; and computer assembly. Only a small number of Romdiati's informants worked in the construction sector. She also noted that in 2001, 11.5 per cent of Indonesian trainees were women. She did not, however, specify in which industries these women were undergoing training. Other legally employed Indonesians could be found working in restaurants and bars as cooks or managers, or as administrators in international services. Those with relatively low skills were employed in small- to medium-sized manufacturing companies, mainly in the industrial areas of Osaka, Shizuoka, and Nagoya. A limited number of Indonesian women have come to Japan on entertainment visas to work in bars, pubs, and karaoke bars. In contrast with female migrants from the Philippines, Indonesians employed in this sector were mostly legal, and their

participation in the Japanese sex industry was very rare (Douglass 2000; Romdiati 2003). There were also about 1,500 Indonesian students in Japan in 2006.[1] Detailed data on this particular group were not available at the time, but the general foreign student population was primarily enrolled in higher education at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The three dominant areas of study were humanities, social sciences, and engineering. The gender composition of the group was balanced and the majority of the foreign students attended universities in the Kanto region.

A small Indonesian Minahasa community based in the city of Ōarai in Ibaraki Prefecture is believed to have been established by Indonesian *Nikkeijin*, descendants of Okinawan fishermen who lived in Northern Sulawesi during World War II. At the end of 2004 Meguro recorded 444 Minahasa Indonesian Japanese in Japan (Meguro 2005), who, according to Tirtosudarmo (2005), adapted practices of village association, *kerukunan*, as a means of organising their community life in Japan. Finally, among Indonesians there was a significant group who resided or worked in Japan in clandestine conditions. They were concentrated in the Ibaraki, Kanto, and Kansai regions. In Tokyo, in Ueno Park, many such Indonesians gathered waiting to be approached by potential employers or brokers (Romdiati 2003).

Idea behind the project and research questions

All in all, the number of Indonesians in Japan is small compared to such groups as Chinese, Koreans, Brazilians, or Filipinos. They are clustered in more or less the same sectors as these other groups, but have received significantly less scholarly attention. There has been little research published on Indonesians in Japan, particularly in English. In 2007, when in preparation of a doctoral project I was looking into research conducted on the topic of migration to Japan, I came across information about the forthcoming acceptance of Indonesian nurses to work in Japanese hospitals and eldercare homes under the rubric of an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). Although the numbers

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1   According to statistics for the year 2006 provided by the Japan Student Services Organisation (JASSO).

were not expected to be high—1,000 workers in a two-year period—the planned arrival of Indonesian workers struck me as something worth looking into in terms of Japan's changing national landscape and the broader questions of the way global processes (the EPA was, after all, a result of Japan's economic engagement in global markets) combine with their local imaginings.

As an anthropologist I was interested in understanding how these ideas would play out on the ground level of day-to-day interactions. In this respect, I found the EPA acceptance an ideal case study for two main reasons. Firstly, I was attracted by the newness of the Indonesian group and the chance (at the time, only potential) to observe the early stages of their lives and work in Japan when the grounds for encounters would still be under negotiation and mutual representations and ideas would still have to be established. Such timing for research promised to offer a unique glimpse into how different national and cultural ideas inevitably converge in a setting which, thanks to the nature of the work involved, almost by force would bring and keep the Japanese and Indonesian workers together. This inevitability of contact and interactions within a workplace such as an eldercare home was unlike other, already described working locations for Indonesians or other foreign workers in Japan. This was the other reason why the EPA acceptance presented itself as a good study case of Japan's domestic internationalisation seen through the prism of individual experiences.

Before going to the field my main question was whether it mattered that the Indonesian workers would be providing direct care to the Japanese elderly. Would their immediate and unalienable positioning in direct proximity to the Japanese bodies influence the experiences of the Indonesians and the Japanese? Would the intimate nature of their work matter, and if so, how? Also, would it have any bearing on their mutual perceptions and experiences that the arrival of the Indonesian workers was organised and strictly controlled by the Japanese government in cooperation with the accepting institutions? After two months in Japan a further question proved impossible to ignore: Why was it that the Indonesians, despite almost negligible numbers, received such extensive and, more importantly, positive media attention? Was it to do with the kind of work

they came to perform in Japan? If so, why would it matter? Why, I also started asking after a few months, were the Indonesians receiving such exceptional treatment from their employers? Was it again about the nature of their work in Japan, or did it have something to do with the way the acceptance programme was organised, or both? Thinking through these questions, I was looking at a broader issue of which the EPA acceptance was but one incarnation. I was looking at how Japan's international engagements engendered small-scale sites of 'multicultural coexistence' within the accepting institutions which, although unique, could not be understood without reference to a broader system of values, beliefs, and practices. The reactions, relationships, experiences, and discourses represented the anxieties of coming to terms with the abrupt change of the social landscape of the institutions, and the Japanese society by extension, caused by the processes of global interconnectedness.

I extended my research focus beyond the immediate sites of contact because, although anthropological methods more comfortably fit the analysis at the micro and meso levels of the selected group—that is, the level of the individual and the family, or community—the need to 'recognise … how global capitalism has fostered the often exploitative relationships that exist between developing and labour-supplying countries and developed labour-receiving countries' (Brettell 2003:2; *cf.* Massey *et al*. 1993) and how these influence migratory flows and experiences has also become part and parcel of anthropological discussions of migration. Hence, the next chapter opens with a short geopolitical and economic genealogy of the particular migratory movement discussed here and suggests the ways this genealogy affected the workers' experiences and to what extent the state-level regulations of migratory flows gave shape to this instance of migration. The remaining part of this chapter, however, remains primarily on the micro level and explains how the research was conducted, the specificities of the eldercare setting, the scope of investigation, and, of course, its limitations.

Representations

Before moving on, however, one note is due on the representation of persons in

this thesis. When referring to the individuals whose actions and interactions appear on these pages, I substitute their names with pseudonyms and sometimes transpose events into a different setting in order to preclude the possibility of identification of those involved. I report real names only of those individuals whose opinions to which I refer have already been made publicly available. When referring to those Indonesians who arrived under the EPA programme, I interchangeably use such collective terms as 'the EPA Indonesians', 'the EPA candidates', 'the caregiver candidates', or 'the Indonesian workers'. Although each of these expressions may encompass a different group of people, I use them all to refer to those Indonesians who arrived in Japan under the EPA scheme to train towards obtaining a Japanese caregiver qualification. Whenever I refer to a different group, this is clearly indicated in the text. Finally, it should be remembered that although the above expressions serve to distinguish the group of my informants from other Indonesian workers or residents in Japan, and although they shared many conditions of life and work in Japan, each of them experienced the sojourn in his or her own individual way. The abbreviation *EPA* and any other collective term should not, therefore, be taken to stand for a set of inherent characteristics which the Indonesian workers shared, but merely as an indication of their formal status in Japan.

I also refer to the Indonesian candidates as my 'informants', although I remember my non-anthropologist friend recoiling at this term when, in an attempt to explain what my research was about, I used it to refer to the people I studied. The uncomfortable connotation of shadowy collaborators made the word sound too impersonal for people I claimed to have created intimate relationships with and suggested their complicity in some illicit plan. Perhaps due to my being accustomed to the term I did not feel this discomfort. An informant could be a friend, and a friend could be an informant—that is, a person who simply offers information. There is, of course, a need to recognise a difference in practice which comes with dealing with a non-informant friend compared to a friend whose knowledge or narratives a researcher plans to use for research purposes. With this in mind and in acknowledgement of the double

role the Indonesian candidates fulfilled in my research experience, I refer to them interchangeably as friends and as informants.

Research process

As already mentioned, in this thesis I concentrate on the early period of the EPA Indonesians' presence in Japan. This spans the final weeks of linguistic training (discussed later) undertaken by the first batch prior to their employment, and their reunion a year later. In 2008, when this research began, there were 104 caregiver candidates and 104 nurse candidates accepted from Indonesia who took up positions in a total of 99 institutions (52 care homes and 47 hospitals). Since then, up to the 2011 year acceptance an additional 324 Indonesian caregivers have arrived. Also, since 2009 a total of 360 Filipino caregiver candidates were accepted in Japan as well, but they do not feature prominently in this thesis. With 28 Indonesian and 48 Filipino caregiver and nurse candidates having resigned from the programme, as of January 2011, there were 400 Indonesian and 312 Filipino candidates training in Japanese care institutions.

A great part of the material used here comes from my first-hand experiences and observations, or conversations I had with either the Indonesian candidates or Japanese individuals in one way or another linked to the EPA acceptance programme between December 2008 and March 2010. However, I also use information, such as media reports, statistical data, and, occasionally, e-mail exchanges with my Indonesian friends, which originated outside of this time-frame, but which is relevant to the story told in this thesis. In places I also weave in my own experiences in Japan which, I feel, reflect the ideas I am discussing here.

Although my primary research sites were the eldercare institutions, parts of this research took place outside of them as well. In order to move observation beyond the micro level of quotidian occurrences, I participated in numerous meetings of various support groups which emerged in Japan in response to the EPA acceptance, attended conferences and workshops related to the subject, and visited religious centres frequented by my informants as well as other

Indonesians living, working, or studying in Japan. In addition, I travelled to Indonesia to follow some of my friends during their home visits, but also to visit eldercare institutions in Indonesia as well as migrant worker training centres near Jakarta, and to interview Indonesian officials involved in the organisation of the EPA acceptance.

Access: connections matter

Before zooming out to the international relations level, this is the place to mention the ways in which I obtained access to the workplaces of the Indonesians whose experiences constitute the basis of this thesis. Through this, I also explain why I concentrate primarily on the care workers and refer to the nurse candidates only sporadically. Unsurprisingly, the choice was to a great extent dictated by the possibilities of access. In preparation for the field research I considered the EPA Indonesian group as a potential focus of my research, but at that stage I still was not certain that I would be able to gain access to them. The arrival of a new group in a sector which at the time had not seen many foreign workers was a promising field of investigation into the formation of mutual imaginations and into the negotiation of newly forming relations. However, aware of possible challenges linked to access to the workplaces, I planned to cast my net wide and considered searching for potential informants through typical places of community contact, such as churches, mosques, ethnic shops, schools, the Embassy, and Tokyo's Ueno Park, where, as I read, Indonesian technical trainees gathered on Sundays. The plan was to meet as many people as possible and narrow down the focus once I decided that I had gained satisfactory trust of a certain group to concentrate on it. However, this issue was solved for me before I arrived in Japan in November 2008, when I received an e-mail from Professor Glenda Roberts, who was my local supervisor for the length of the Japan Foundation funded fellowship paying for my field research in Japan. In the message, Professor Roberts sent me contact information for a person who was at the time a director of one of the training centres where EPA Indonesian caregiver candidates were undergoing training in the Japanese language. I promptly sent an introductory

e-mail to the director and as a result of the exchange that followed I was able to arrange my first visit to the centre for the beginning of January 2009.

Encouraged by this success in meeting the caregiver candidates, I tried to organise similar visits to other training centres were I would be able to meet the nurse candidates as well. I wanted to get to know the Indonesian candidates under circumstances with as little constraint as possible. Meeting them during the training period meant that we could negotiate our mutual engagement more freely, and I hoped that under such circumstances their choice of whether to talk to me or not would be less influenced by a sense of obligation which might have been a problem if I had requested the meeting through the accepting institutions. However, I was simply declined access to the training centre for the Indonesian EPA nurses. Later on, when my focus was already set on the caregiver candidates, I managed to meet with several nurse candidates as well. By then, however, I had decided to limit my project to eldercare, and general nursing presented itself at this stage as a topic which should be dealt with in its own right rather than incorporated into the scope of research. I also failed to secure official access to the centre where the second group of the EPA Indonesian candidates trained. During the second Indonesian intake, which saw the candidates arriving in Japan in November 2009, the training was run by a different, private organisation with which I had no connections. Although I did conduct an interview with a person responsible for the training within this organisation before the training began, he was not sympathetic to my research. He also declined my request for permission to observe parts of the language training, despite approval granted to me by my contact person in the organisation overseeing the acceptance on behalf of the Japanese government, the Japan International Cooperation of Welfare Services (JICWELS).

During the second EPA intake, out of the six months of preliminary language training, four were run in Bandung, Indonesia. When I decided to travel to Indonesia to conduct interviews with individuals involved in the organisation of the EPA acceptance and to visit migrant worker training centres and Indonesian eldercare homes (*panti jompo*), I also planned for a visit to Bandung. Although my contact person in the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo

arranged for me to meet with the dean of the university where the training was taking place, I was soon informed that, having rented out the university's premises to the Japanese organisation running the language training, the dean temporarily had no jurisdiction over the premises and was not in a position to guarantee my access to the training space.[2] However, because Iffah, a female candidate from the first intake, knew some of the candidates from the second group, she gave me their Indonesian phone numbers and I managed to contact them in Bandung. Nevertheless, I was unable to meet the candidates as freely as during the first round of acceptance. When I entered the premises of the Bandung university for the first time, searching for anyone involved in the EPA training, everyone was in classes and the buildings looked empty. As I waited in a lobby, a group of young women appeared and sat on the sofas next to me. They turned out to be EPA candidates, but before I managed to talk to them at greater length, the person responsible for the training appeared as well and admonished me that I did not have the right to access the premises they were renting from the university. I had to leave, but in a last moment I managed to exchange phone numbers and e-mail addresses with one of the women. We agreed to meet later that day in the dormitory where they all stayed (within the university grounds and also rented out for the time of the training). There, too, I had to be 'smuggled' in. After an hour of group conversation I had to leave, as the person overseeing the training was supposed to be back in the building and neither I nor the candidates wanted to be discovered in breach of his banning order. We agreed that I would visit them again once they were transferred to Japan for the remaining part of the training. However, when I arrived there, the situation of being ousted from the premises repeated itself. I only managed to meet one of the Indonesian women, who showed me the premises from the outside and told me about her life during the training. After that visit we tried unsuccessfully to meet again several times before she was dispatched to an

2   Although we had a very friendly conversation with the dean about the future of the Japanese language training in Indonesia, I had strong suspicions that his statement of inability to grant me access to the university buildings was linked to the dean's acquaintance with one of the language teachers, an Indonesian person who, as I later found out, had familial connections to a person within the Indonesian Embassy (but not my contact person) and to one of the nursing schools which dispatched the largest number of candidates during the first EPA intake. He was present during my meeting with the dean and often directed the conversation away from the current EPA training.

institution in Kyushu. Unfortunately, I was also unable to visit her there, as my time in Japan was coming to an end and the time constraints associated with leaving the field simply did not allow me to embark on the trip. Faced with problems I had managed to avoid at the beginning of my research, I decided to directly approach the institutions accepting candidates from the second EPA batch and ask them for an opportunity to talk to the Indonesian candidates they had accepted. I was aware that such an approach left virtually no choice to the Indonesians but to accept the proposition of meeting me. Later in this section, in the notes on language, I describe in more detail my attempts at mitigating the coercive nature of the circumstances.

Meeting main informants: Indonesians, Japanese staff, and the elderly

I met my future Indonesian friends for the first time on the 4th of January 2009 in the language centre where they lived for six months immediately after their arrival in Japan. Once I checked into one of the centre's rooms, I was taken on a tour of the facilities and had a chance to have an introductory interview with three representatives of the centre, including the director. Over the next three days I participated in a range of classes and other activities organised for the EPA Indonesians by the centre. Being formally introduced to the candidates at the beginning of each class meant that by the end of the first day I was already known to the majority of the 56 EPA candidates who were at the centre at the time. This helped me to approach them during meal times, and indeed resulted in the Indonesians initiating conversations as well. These three days, during which I was welcomed not only by those about whom I wanted to conduct my research but also by the centre staff, who proved very open to my inquiries and accommodating of my requests, were decisive of the direction my field research would take. Although in the following months I continued my visits to churches, mosques, and Indonesian shops and maintained quite close relations with other Indonesians who did not arrive in Japan under the EPA programme, the caregiver candidates became my main focus, and interactions with them and research into the issues surrounding the EPA acceptance gradually filled up most of my time. I came to be known as Mbak Beata, sometimes simply called

mbak by the candidates. *Mbak* is a form of address usually used towards women of roughly the same age as the speaker, but somewhat more formal than using the person's name directly. It also contrasts with the word *ibu* which, if followed by the person's name, is used in formal situations towards women older than those addressed with *mbak*. I stayed in regular contact with three women, Iffah, Lanny, and Irdina, and four men, Lazim, Amir, Jasir, and Ramelan, whose experiences of work at care homes and in private life constitute the basis of this thesis. There were, however, a number of other people, both Indonesian and Japanese, whom I met less regularly, but who also occasionally appear in the following pages.

Securing access to the institutions did not necessarily mean warranting access to people. In the case of my main Indonesian informants, our relationships were already initiated prior to my arrival at the care homes. This was not the case with the Japanese members of staff or the elderly. At Iffah's and Lazim's institutions I was officially introduced to the members of staff and I had a chance to say a few words explaining my presence there as well. Those present at the time of my introduction also had an opportunity to ask me questions. This seemed to break the ice and the encounters which followed built on these initial exchanges. Thanks to such introductions it was also possible for the staff members whom I had met to introduce me to those who had not been present at the time. Such a chain of introductions greatly facilitated my later interactions with the staff. This was not, however, the case in the institution where Ramelan, Jasir, and Amir were employed. There, at the beginning of my first visit I was taken directly to the staff changing room, asked to change into my 'working clothes', and left to myself to follow the Indonesian workers. There was no official introduction that day. As I walked in to the ward nearest the changing room it was already breakfast time and every member of staff was busy either assisting the residents with eating, preparing tea or toothbrushes, or wheeling back to their rooms those residents who had finished eating. It was not a good moment for personal introductions. As it turned out, I could only use staff lunch breaks to explain what I was doing in the institution. Since I was not allowed to help, I was not actively engaged in

any of the tasks the staff performed and therefore could not use this as an excuse for staring up conversations. Several times I tried to ask for explanations of different aspects of their work, such as what the various symbols on charts meant, or what the powder was which they were adding to some of the residents' tea.[3] I hoped that once a conversation was started we would be able to continue beyond the immediate answer, but this was rarely the case. The problem was exacerbated by the division of the institution into three wards with different staff (and a different Indonesian) working on each. I found it impossible to explain who I was to everyone. When I asked for a more official introduction, the deputy manager referred to me as a *kenshūsei*, a trainee, during a morning staff briefing. This created further confusion, as a *kenshūsei* entering the institution would usually be someone aiming to become a care worker and therefore expected to actively engage in the caring tasks. I was just walking around the institution. During my third visit to this particular institution, at lunch when only two of us were left in the break room, I had a short conversation with one of the male employees. It turned out that he thought I was the Indonesian workers' instructor. Such confusion and lack of opportunities for direct interaction resulted in my forming close relations only with a handful of the Japanese staff in this institution. I return to the topic of my relations with the Japanese members of staff below when I discuss the impact of conducting research in three sites almost simultaneously.

Collecting information from the elderly was limited by the poor mental state of the majority of the residents living on the wards where the Indonesian candidates worked. My contacts were therefore limited to those who were still able and willing to share their thoughts and impressions with me. This meant that on Iffah's ward I could not acquire much information from the elderly point of view because none of the residents were lucid any more. However, every week and sometimes twice a week, Iffah was sent to another ward on a floor above her own to help during the bathing of the residents who were in a better physical and mental state. There I would wait outside and help the elderly with their activities before and after bathing. Sitting in front of the

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3   It was a thickener added to liquids to prevent choking on too runny a liquid among the elderly who had problems with controlling their swallowing motion.

bathroom together with the elderly waiting for their turn to get inside, and being one-to-one during drying and combing hair, drying feet and putting on socks and shoes, or giving water to the elderly who left the hot bathroom provided opportunities for me to chat with them, as well as with the member of staff who I was sometimes assisting. In the wards where Lazim and Amir worked there were more elderly who had no problems engaging in conversation, even if sometimes this was obstructed by various physical impairments making verbal communication difficult. I managed to develop close relations with four elderly on Amir's ward, and with three on Lazim's. They were all very accommodating of my presence in the care homes and offered their impressions about life in the institution, about the Indonesian workers, and, at times, a useful piece of advice as to how I should go about my engagement with other, less accommodating elderly. Ramelan and Jasir, who were based in the same institution as Amir, were assigned to wards where it was impossible to communicate extensively with the majority of the elderly. Those who were physically able to speak were in advanced stages of dementia and our (rare) conversations were confined to comments on food or repetitive fragments of stories from the past. These elderly, if they noticed my presence, did not seem to remember me when I arrived for a following visit and were often unwilling to interact with me. I therefore resigned myself to observing from a distance on these wards in order to minimise any possible anxiety which my presence might have been causing those elderly.

Main research sites: care homes

This research was concentrated in three care homes for the elderly which accepted caregiver candidates from the first Indonesian EPA intake in 2008. One of the facilities was situated within the Tokyo Metropolitan Area and run under the auspices of the local government. This is where Lazim was based. Iffah, initially his girlfriend and later his fiancée, was based in a privately run institution located in a small town in the Kanagawa Prefecture. Amir, Jasir, and Ramelan, three men, worked together in a care home located in the countryside in the Hyōgō Prefecture. These were the sites where I managed to obtain

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continued access. Others, which I visited only sporadically, were similarly spread across Japan. Lanny lived and worked at the outskirts of Tokyo, while Daris, a young man, was based in the northern part of the capital. Diah, a young woman, and two men, Abdul Hakim and Wayan, were sent to the Kansai region but all lived in different towns within the area. Irdina and Omar worked in the same institution in the region of Hokuriku.

Apart from the institution which accepted Irdina and Omar, all the others were special nursing homes for the elderly, or *tokubetsu yōgo rōjin hōmu* (*tokuyō*). Under the EPA scheme only selected eldercare institutions whose services fell under the provisions of Long Term Care Insurance (LTCI, explained below) could accept the Indonesian candidates. Apart from *tokuyō*, these were institutions such as *kaigo hoken rōjin shisetu* (Long Term Care Insurance Institution) providing temporary care and rehabilitation for the elderly recovering from illness, day service centres for the elderly, or group homes for the elderly with dementia. The latter were institutions which accepted residents for permanent stay in units where small groups of residents, supported by staff, led group lives as a community. Irdina and Omar worked in such a group home. The two types of institutions where my informants worked provided nursing and personal care to the elderly who were unable to lead independent lives and required continuous support due to physical or mental impairment. Under the provisions of LTCI, introduced in 2000, the fees for residence and care received in the homes were divided between the individual and the local authority. The *tokuyō* accepted only those over 65 years of age, and the majority of the residents there had dementia to a degree which obstructed communication with them. Many were also bedridden. Admission to *tokuyō* institutions was based solely on the health condition of the elderly and there was no income threshold set as a qualifying requirement. The group homes were designed for those elderly who were comparatively able physically, but could not function independently due to the progress of dementia.

All three of the care homes I visited regularly were divided into wards where the elderly were accommodated according to their health condition.

Jasir, Amir, and Ramelan worked on three separate wards of the same institution which cared for 96 permanent residents, with more or less an equal number living on each ward and, on average, looked after by a total of 25 staff. Iffah's ward accommodated 30 residents of the 150 living in the institution as a whole, and she worked alongside a team of ten staff members. Lazim, together with 20 staff, was in charge of 35 residents, which meant that he was placed in the ward with the highest ratio of staff to residents, therefore allowing more time for the staff to perform their tasks.

Although the physical space of the wards differed in detail, each of them was structured in a similar way. There was a dining area, which was the largest open space in each ward. Some of the elderly would spend all day sitting there watching television (also a common element in all care homes) or just simply sitting. The more vivid residents would cluster together and have short conversations punctuated by easy tasks, such as folding towels, and visits to the toilet. A space where all the members of staff could gather was the nursing station. This was where the staff briefings took place when shifts were changing. This was also where all the resident documentation and daily reports were produced and stored. In Iffah's institution, the nursing station served as a place to go for a short break and a snack, although lunch was to be eaten in a staff canteen. At Lazim's institution there was a small *tatami* room adjacent to the nursing station where most of the staff ate their lunch. Lazim, however, preferred to return for lunch to his flat only a few minutes away from the institution. Where Jasir, Amir, and Ramelan worked the nursing station had a small rest area separated by a curtain, but it was used only by the night shift staff. Lunches were eaten in a rather small *tatami* room near the main entrance to the institution, which was used by staff from all wards.

Tempo of work and taking research notes

Life and work in an eldercare home are regulated by a tight schedule detailing tasks for the staff and activities for the residents. The following is an example of a morning shift schedule in Lazim's accepting institution. Although details of tasks were different in other care homes and during later shifts, I hope that

this example will give an idea about the kind of work the Indonesian candidates were performing (the translation reflects the telegraphic style of the original morning schedule sheet).

7:15   collect individual information (from daily reports and personal files);

check residents for bowel movement, prepare enema;

7:20   distribute breakfast, assist with eating, distribute medicines (if nurse not present);

mouth care – help with brushing teeth; take residents back to the rooms; collect dishes;

room visits – administer enemas planned for the day;

blood and urine sample collection – take samples to the doctors' room on 1st floor;

respond to nurse calls during morning report;

8:45   on 2nd Monday of each month hairdresser arrives – take residents to the west wing hallway;

9:10   change diapers, support in getting up;

change bedsheets;

heat up tube feeding for mid-day meal, take out mouthwash cups;

turn on the *oshibori*[4] machine;

10:00 distribute tea;

10:45 break;

12:00 mid-day meal – distribute plates, assist with eating, mouth care;

take residents back to the rooms;

one member of staff collects the dishes, wipes the tables, washes utensils not returned to the kitchen;

12:45 day and late shift break;

room visits;

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4   Small dampened and heated towels used before and during meals to wipe one's hands.

bath preparation (fill up the bathing pool); respond to nursing calls; if late shift did not manage, help prepare change of clothes for bathing residents (Wednesday and Saturday);

take residents to the afternoon activity clubs they participate in;

if time allows, clean those residents who cannot bathe on the day;

13:45 write reports, staff meeting, respond to nurse calls;

14:00 change diapers (those residents who do not bathe on the day);

bathing preparation – assistance before bathing, bringing residents to the bath, assistance with removing clothing;

15:00 turn on the *oshibori* machine;

distribute pre-meal snacks (one member of staff), on the day of *kikaiyoku*[5] one member of staff responds to nurse calls;

heat up tube feeding for evening meal, take out mouthwash cups;

15:30 planned x-ray checks – deliver x-ray images and booking forms, collect x-ray images from external examination; respond to nurse calls;

16:00 end of shift.

What this schedule does not show is the intimate knowledge of each and every resident which was required to fulfil the listed tasks. For example, knowing on which side of a tray to place a bowl with *miso* soup; what bodily ailments to look out for when 'toileting' each individual in order not to harm him or her; and being aware of the various tastes and preferences the elderly might have, their dietary requirements, and a plethora of other information not included on the schedule was indispensable to fulfil the assigned tasks. The schedule does not indicate the requirement to note down on a specially prepared chart how much of each meal each elderly person ate, or the type and amount of their excreta, either. How baffling the initiation into care work can be was described by Henderson (1995), who reflected on a number of mistakes he made within the first seven minutes as a Certified Nursing Assistant at the beginning of his

5 A bathing method used for bedridden residents who are washed with dampened towels while lying on a horizontal board which, once the soap is rinsed off their bodies, submerges into a bathtub of warm water.

field work in a nursing home. In the care homes I visited, the multitude of small adjustments and pieces of information which needed to be applied to every task was further confounded by the almost constant pressure of time. From waking up the residents and bringing them to the dining room for breakfast and feeding, through toilet visits, changing diapers, tidying the rooms, changing bedding, arranging toothbrushes, and emptying trash bins, to bathing and changing the clothes of the elderly, every activity needed to be finished within a specified time frame and in a given order. Henderson (1995:46) refers to such organisation of work as a 'cult of time and task'. It appeared, however, that my Indonesian informants were less baffled by the intricacies of care work, presumably thanks to their previous practical training in Indonesia and the work experience as nurses for some of them.

While my Indonesian friends were in the thick of work in the care homes, I was involved in the tasks only marginally. At Iffah's institution I was told by the employer that I could perform some basic and safe tasks, such as wheeling the elderly in their wheelchairs. Initially, this was all that I was doing, but in time, I was also allowed to feed some of the elderly who did not have problems swallowing and could therefore be safely assisted by somebody unqualified like myself. I also helped with drying and combing hair, putting on socks and shoes, and providing tea for the elderly who had finished taking a bath. Lazim's supervisor was more strict about my participation in care tasks, and I was asked not to get involved. Although I assisted during meals, for example, my role was limited to distributing meals and drinks, and sometimes to wheeling the elderly back to their rooms. The situation was similar at the care home where Ramelan, Jasir, and Amir were employed. I was asked to take a hands-off approach, even though the supervisor appreciated the awkward feeling this would cause, seeing how the staff were rushing with their tasks. Here too, however, I was gradually allowed to support some of the elderly in such tasks as walking them to a toilet, bringing their favourite sweets from a cupboard in the nursing station, or helping during shopping when a mobile shop arrived at the institution.

My position as mainly an observer rather than a full participant in the

workings of the care homes meant that I was able to follow nearly all activities in which the Indonesians were engaged. This led to multiple occasions on which to witness not only their performance at work but, most importantly, their interactions with the Japanese staff members and the patients themselves. However, because the pace of work was very quick (although that differed depending on the ward), there was not much time for me to have conversations or even ask questions during working hours. I strove to compensate for this after the shifts were over. Since I was hosted by the Indonesians during my stays in their towns, I could go back to the issues I observed during the day over the evening meal and have clarified whatever was not clear at first sight.

Such a research setting in quick-tempo workplaces, followed by living together with my informants, left very little room for producing comprehensive notes on a daily basis. Although during the day I was able to note almost everything I observed at the very time of the observation (about the ease and normalcy of taking notes in a nursing home from the residents' perspective see Vesperi 1995:19; but Henderson 1995), I had no time to transform these short notes into a more exhaustive piece of writing. Sometimes I would write a few pages while relaxing with the Indonesians in the evening, but the majority of field notes had to be produced in the week following my visit to the care home.

Familiar and unfamiliar world of eldercare institutions

Entering an eldercare home can be a bewildering experience. For Mason (1995:73), who based her writing on a 3-year experience as a volunteer in two nursing homes in Denver, Colorado, US, it was a 'culture shock' (*cf.* Tisdale 1987). Vesperi (1995:7) compared her impressions of life inside an eldercare institution to the sense of a parallel world existing alongside the bustling of everyday life. This sense of eldercare homes as being somehow different to what one may experience in everyday life originates from two of their attributes. Firstly, they are total institutions in the sense elaborated by Erving Goffman (1961), where the lives and work of people are subjected to regulatory forces in the name of the institution's lasting command over individuals (*cf.* Vesperi 1995). In fact, the vast majority of ethnographies based

in eldercare homes, especially the early ones, focused on the experiences of the elderly seen as shaped by their institutionalisation in one way or another. In the American context these were the works by Henry (1963), Shield (1988), Kayser-Jones (1981), and Savishinsky (1991); and there were Clough (1981) in Great Britain and Bethel (1992a, 1992b) and Wu (2004) in Japan. The majority of people lead most of their lives outside of such confined environments and therefore eldercare institutions present themselves as unfamiliar.

The other characteristic of eldercare institutions which makes them appear alien to researchers is the rather obvious fact that the majority of people one encounters in them are elderly. With the exception of Laird (1979), who was admitted to a nursing home as a resident, all ethnographies have been produced by people significantly younger than the residents. Mine is no exception here. Ageing and 'elderhood', although unavoidable for most, represents a state unknown to younger people and has been an object of investigation in its own right. Asking about meanings of ageing in different societies are care home–based works compiled by Sokolovsky (1987) and Somera (1995). The age difference in itself does not, however, make the elderly appear unfamiliar. That is the result of the deterioration of bodily and mental functions, disabling conditions, and loss of independence which come with age (Thomson 1997). Mason (1995:74) expressed her consternation in encounters with the elderly in the following way: 'How does one begin conversations with those strapped in wheelchairs in the hallway dozing or gazing into space and seemingly oblivious to everyone and everything around them?'. For Mason the elderly's unfamiliar ways of being, both in terms of their physical comportment as well as their apparent (in)action, were a source of confusion about how to interact with them on the premise that these interactions would be based on a different set of rules from those to which she was accustomed.

Although I cannot claim that I am more familiar with institutional life or ageing than others, my experiences of the care homes I entered to conduct research were not as striking to me. Personally, I was never immersed in either of the institutions to the extent of any of the workers or elderly. This was due to the fact that I travelled between three care homes, visiting all of them only

temporarily. I discuss the influence this mode of conducting research had on my relationships in the field and the collected data below. The institutionalisation of work as well as lives in the care homes did shape the experiences of my Indonesian informants. In fact, their becoming a part of the institutions was the very reason why they remained in close proximity to both the Japanese members of staff and the elderly. However, my investigative focus was on the interpersonal relationships and not on a quality of life, the latter of which would have brought the 'totalism' of the institutions more to the fore, both in my own experiences as well as in the analysis of the data collected. With regard to entering an environment of elderly 'strapped in wheelchairs in the hallway dozing or gazing into space', I believe I was prepared for it thanks to my work experience in the year prior to the field work. As a first year PhD student I took up a part-time position of personal assistant, or, as my contract stated, travel body to the head of a policy department in one of the larger disability charities in the United Kingdom. My employer needed support since, born without legs, he relied on assistance in getting in and out of vehicles, sitting down and getting up, and so on. As the head of the policy department and in connection to his other public roles, my employer travelled around the country attending conferences and meetings, but also visiting various facilities for people with disabilities and for the elderly. I accompanied him. Many a time during these travels I spent my time helping others who were hard of hearing, blind, or unable to verbally communicate as a condition linked to cerebral palsy. That year I moved in and out of a world where age or disability were not marked, although, of course, there was awareness that the very formation of this world was predicated on the markedness of the disabling differences in a wider society. When I entered the care homes in which I was to base my research in Japan for the first time, they felt familiar. I did not feel any inhibition in talking to the elderly, perhaps sometimes appearing too eager to do so. I still did not know the details of each elderly person's condition, or the proper way of reacting to or dealing with individuals with far-advanced dementia; neither was I aware of the specific working patterns on a given ward. This caused anxiety. The smells were also different. A discomforting mix of

excreta, chemicals, and medicine odours was not unknown but new in its preponderance over the 'usual' daily smells. All in all my anxiety and discomfort upon arrival at the care homes were built on the details of the inside world, rather than on the distinctness of the entirety of this world.

Language and provenance

The ability to speak both the Japanese and Indonesian was, unsurprisingly, the key to forming relations with people I encountered. Being able to communicate was the obvious issue, but equally important was a degree of familiarity, commitment, and interest in the culture or the country of which the linguistic ability was seen as a proof. Even if neither my Japanese nor Indonesian skill was that of a native speaker, but at a level I usually describe as fluent and conversational, respectively, my familiarity with the languages was recognised as indicative of my greater familiarity, and perhaps sympathy, with the issues pertinent to both countries. At the same time, my being Polish, which is to say foreign to Japan as well as to Indonesia, placed me in a neutral position of sympathiser with both and member of neither. Not partaking in the intimate workings of the two national and cultural communities of people whose experiences I was researching, and therefore not bearing the responsibility for whatever either of the groups could be resented for, I was able to balance, and sometimes manipulate, my perceived allegiance to either or neither of the sides. Such fusion, of being an affiliate and an outsider at the same time, made it possible for me in conversations with the Japanese supervisors of the Indonesian candidates to align myself with their concerns over the Indonesians' ability to communicate sufficiently with the cared-for elderly or discuss certain Indonesian 'cultural traits' as observed by the Japanese. On the other hand, I shared in some of the experiences and frustrations of my Indonesian friends who, like me, were foreign to Japan. On other occasions still, I was able to take a detached stance and comment on both, or on the interactions between them, from an outsider's point of view.

Being able to switch between the languages helped me to mitigate the somewhat coercive nature of the interviews I conducted with the Indonesian

candidates who arrived as the second batch. Our conversations were often held in the presence of their Japanese supervisor, which was potentially another factor (alongside the lack of choice on the Indonesians' side whether to meet with me or not) to affect the responses of the candidates. On such occasions, however, I asked the Japanese person for permission to speak with the Indonesians in the Indonesian language, justifying my request by the Indonesians' beginner's level of Japanese at the time. I would then explain to them in Indonesian that they were not obliged in any way to talk to me, or to give any information they were not comfortable giving. The possibility of sharing their experiences in a native language, and perhaps the oddity of a Polish person talking to them in Indonesian in Japan, made our encounters very amicable and the Indonesian workers seemed eager to share whatever observations and experiences they had. The linguistic connection and the mutual interest helped to create a more intimate relationship between the Indonesians and me. But it was also the joyous aura of being able to talk in secret from the Japanese supervisors despite their physical presence in the room, the inversion of roles where the Indonesians were conveying information of interest to the Japanese but in a language unfamiliar to the latter, which made our encounters feel very relaxed and open. There was no spite in these conversations, however, but a cheerful enjoyment of temporary control over the situation which seemed to make the interviewees particularly sincere and bold at times, as when the candidates openly complained about certain arrangements at work.

Language of eldercare

Communicating with the elderly, the Japanese staff, and any other Japanese person with whom I discussed the EPA was particularly difficult in the first two or so months of my research. Although I arrived in Japan with seven years of active language training in Japanese behind me, the subject area I was dealing with in my research was linguistically new to me. Moreover, I had had a break of two years during which I had very limited opportunities of speaking the language, although I kept it alive through reading, learning song lyrics, and

watching news in Japanese over the Internet. Nevertheless, I was anxious to regain my speaking fluency and to supplement my vocabulary with expressions referring to the Japanese care system, the ageing society debates, and eldercare. Getting back into the rhythm of everyday Japanese conversations proved surprisingly straightforward, thanks to my old Japanese friends who offered their time upon my arrival to Japan. Watching television also proved useful in catching up on the latest popular topics and expressions. This was, however, insufficient when it came to conducting research within eldercare homes. For me, as for my Indonesian friends, knowledge of the standard version of the Japanese language had to be augmented by specialised vocabulary and ability to understand some of the regional dialects.

It has been often pointed out that the terms used in the eldercare context are rarely understood by Japanese who have no experience of care provision and are one of the first hurdles for Japanese care worker aspirants as well. I bought myself the same study book the Indonesians were given during their training and a dictionary of medical terms. Sometimes we would quiz each other's comprehension and ability to write care-related terms with Lazim, who was particularly fond of learning *kanji*, one of the writing systems in Japan. It took some time, however, to get a grasp of the language in the care institutions and, admittedly, I sometimes returned home with words noted down the meanings of which I did not know. On such occasions, I would search a dictionary and try to deduce the meaning from the context. This was not always successful. Initially, I had a similar problem, as I know my informants did too, with a regional dialect used in the countryside care home where Jasir, Amir, and Ramelan worked. Both the residents and staff had very strong accents and used the dialect in private conversations as well as during work. Fortunately, in time and with the support of some of the elderly the dialect and accents stopped being a big problem, although occasionally they confounded my comprehension. Clarification of uncertain meanings was easier in contexts which were less rushed than working on or observing a shift in an eldercare institution. During interviews or informal meetings it was possible for me to ask for explanation if there was something of which I was uncertain.

In my interactions with the Indonesian candidates I primarily used the Indonesian language. Having completed a year-long course at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London and a two-month one-to-one intensive course in Yogyakarta, by the time of the present research I was able to hold an everyday conversation and read easy newspaper articles. When I met my future informants my Indonesian skills proved more apt for our interactions than their Japanese and therefore it was the Indonesian language which became our shared means of communication. This is not to say that I had no problems understanding or conveying meaning in Indonesian. Many a time, particularly in the first months before we developed a shared vocabulary which incorporated some Japanese words as well, I had to rephrase or have something rephrased to gain understanding. This was, however, a relatively harmless exercise since the conversations with my Indonesian friends were always very informal and there was no pressure on either side to be able to construct perfect sentences. In a sense, we were all linguistically disadvantaged since, just as the Indonesians were still trying to get comfortable with their Japanese language, I was equally anxious to improve my Indonesian.

Circulatory ethnography

Once the language training was over and the EPA Indonesians took up their positions in the elderly care institutions across Japan, I contacted all those with whom I had previously exchanged contact details and who had agreed for me to include them as my potential informants in the research. Then, equipped with a letter of support from Professor Roberts as my supervisor, I contacted the employers of my Indonesian friends. On one occasion I paid an unexpected visit to an institution and introduced myself in person, another time my arrival was preceded by my Indonesian friend's introduction, and on a third occasion I introduced myself to my friend's employer during an official event for the EPA accepting institutions. These three encounters resulted in an arrangement according to which I would pay week-long visits to the three institutions on a rotation basis. During each week I lived with the Indonesian candidates and went to work with them. The situation varied from institution to institution,

from ward to ward, and across time, but in general I was free to move around the institutions and mingle with the elderly as well as with the members of staff. I usually followed the Indonesians and sometimes helped them in their tasks, but occasionally I talked with the elderly or with the Japanese members of staff regardless of whether my Indonesian friends were around or not. Once my routine visits were established, I tried to enlarge the number of institutions I could visit, but these attempts resulted only in shorter, often one-off visits, which sometimes were limited to interviews supplemented by a short tour of the facilities. These conversations and fleeting encounters did, nevertheless, help to supplement the information I gathered during the visits to my main three sites of participant observation.

The circulatory nature of visits to the workplaces employing my main informants had its advantages and disadvantages. Although dictated by practical limitations (I was restricted by the length of time the employers were willing to let me shadow the Indonesians at any one time), it allowed me to observe the development of the relationships between the Indonesians and their Japanese colleagues, supervisors, and employers almost simultaneously in three different settings. Importantly, it meant that I was getting to know a larger number of people at the same time. Were I to have committed myself to observation in only one care home at a time, it would have limited my contact to only one, two, or three Indonesian candidates. Due to the nature of the EPA acceptance, which spread the candidates across Japan, in order to study their experiences as a group I had to study the 'local ecology of their activities' (Hannerz 2003) rather than the entirety of the institutional social milieus in which they were immersed. This meant that I needed to be 'there ... and there ... and there' (*ibid.*), a stance which also applied to my visiting Indonesia and participating in events outside of the eldercare homes (*cf.* Marcus 1995).

Moreover, the comings and goings, the welcomes and good-byes accompanying my travelling between the institutions seemed to ultimately speed up the development of close relationships between my informants and me. My periods of being away from any of the institutions introduced intervals to my otherwise almost constant interactions with the informants. Although we

stayed in touch through e-mail and mobile phone between my visits, upon my next arrival we felt we had so much to say to each other that these first-night conversations were almost as full of information as all the much shorter exchanges which we would have over the coming week taken together. The temporary detachment was not, as Candea (2010) argues, a negation of engagement, but helped as if the periods of separation were used to skip the gradual familiarisation which would have been necessary if I had lived and worked together with my informants without intermission. Thanks to the possibility of building on the somewhat romanticised memories of previous encounters, my Indonesian friends and I were able to be 'up and running' with our relationships from the very first visit, which was preceded only by one short encounter at the language training centre.

On the other hand, unlike continuous relationships between a researcher and members of the group on which the research focuses, my truncated presence in the care homes and in the flats and lives of my Indonesian friends meant that I was unable to take part in or observe many of their experiences. Undoubtedly I missed a plethora of observations. Therefore, I had to rely on my informants' subjective accounts and reconstruct the events from any reverberations (if such were detectable at all) I encountered during a following visit. In this sense, parts of the material used in this thesis are based on the narratives of my informants. As narratives they should not be understood as providing an objective record of events, but as expressing the subjective interpretations of the events and experiences the Indonesians had during my absence from the given site (see Gubrium 1993).

Another important downside of the intermittent nature of visits to the three care homes was that my relations with the Japanese members of staff were not as extensive as I would have wished. During the short visits I spent most of my time with the Indonesians, and I returned home with them as well. During working hours I participated in or witnessed the interactions between the Indonesians and the Japanese, but it was more common for me to later have a discussion about the day's events with the Indonesians than with the Japanese. On various occasions I had an opportunity to have one-to-one conversations

with the Japanese staff during lunch or when there was a moment to pause and chat, but these discussions were far less numerous than those I had with the Indonesians. The gaps between my visits also meant that on return I would not necessarily meet the same members of staff, who might have been on leave or on different shifts to the Indonesians, or, as it happened, might have quit the job all together. Therefore, I am able to discuss Japanese motivations and interpretations of the events presented here primarily thorough inference from the Indonesians' experiences. A similar limitation, although to a lesser degree, applies to my relationships with the elderly. Although, contrary to my concerns, those elderly with whom I talked did not forget me during my absence, the limited time we spent together affected the type and amount of information I was able to gain. However, as with the Indonesian candidates, so too with the Japanese staff members and the elderly, my circulating between the institutions created the impression that our knowing each other had a history due to the memories of my previous visits. This historicising effect helped to maintain, if not deepen, the intimacy of our relationships.

Husband in the field

One other intimate relationship I was engaged in during field research was with my husband. For a year beginning in February 2009 I was accompanied by my partner. When he arrived in Japan we were an unmarried couple, but decided to get married in April that year in order to secure a dependent visa allowing him to stay in Japan for as long as my research lasted since his dual British–New Zealand citizenship allowed only up to six months of residence in any 12-month period. Being accompanied in the field by a partner, of course, had its consequences, but it did not affect the data I collected in any substantial way. This was thanks to the fact that my research sites were separate from where I lived with my husband. When I went away on research visits, to conduct interviews, or to participate in events related to my research I was never accompanied by him. My informants knew about his arrival in Japan and our later marriage, but they did not meet him until several months into the research. In some ways, being married, or at least in a relationship, proved helpful in

finding commonalities with my informants as well. Before my husband-to-be joined me in Japan, I could share in the experiences of separation from loved ones with those of my informants who left their partners in Indonesia. Although the length of separation was incomparable between us, the similarity of experience became a starting point of several conversations I had with my future main informants. Similarly, when we got to know each other better, the teasing of the three male informants at whose place I was a returning guest, about staying with three men while having a husband waiting in Tokyo, oftentimes allowed me to probe into similarly intimate aspects of their own relationships with their female partners. In addition, some of the experiences of my husband in Indonesia and in Japan which I conveyed to them provoked my informants to reflections to which I also refer in this thesis.

Collecting mediated data

Finally, in the thesis I also refer to the content of the media coverage of the EPA programme. I am using the term *media* here to refer collectively to what is known as *mass media*—that is, printed newspapers, television and radio programmes, and the content available on the Internet. In my search I also included several instances of printed professional magazines and books which may not have as wide a readership as, for example, the most popular national newspapers, but are available for anyone who wishes to purchase and/or reference. Similarly, when searching the vast content of the Internet, apart from pieces produced by journalists in their professional capacity, I decided to include examples of blogs and Internet-based discussion as well. I did this for two main reasons. Firstly, I felt that it would have been detrimental to the present report to exclude some of the first-hand quotes I came across in the commentaries produced by unaffiliated individuals, which in my mind exemplified and supplemented very well the themes emerging from the stories published by the institutionalised media channels. Secondly, these voices represented the spread of interest in and concern about the EPA programme among Japanese who may not have been directly involved in it, and these were the voices which I did not have the chance to concentrate on to a great extent

during my research among the Indonesians. Hence, I collected any piece of publicly available information which I came across, either as a result of a purposive search, or purely by chance.[6] However, the multiple trips to my research sites, and the trip to Indonesia, often meant that I was unable to access the daily newspapers. Therefore, in order to produce a comprehensive compilation of related material from at least one source, upon return I searched the electronic databases of three Japanese national newspapers, *Asahi Shinbun*, *Yomiuri Shinbun*, and *Nippon Keizai Shinbun*[7] (henceforth *Asahi*, *Yomiuri*, and *Nippon Keizai*, respectively) and chose all articles referring to Indonesia (search term used: *indoneshia*), care (search term used: *kaigo*), and this particular EPA (search term used: *keizairenkeikyōtei*) published between January 2004 and December 2010.[8]

In the first instance I coded the material obtained from the online resources in the same way as one would code field notes to produce a pool of themes or key terms around which the stories told by the texts revolve. I did not specifically concentrate on the titles of these texts (and some of them were without such) since, due to the nature of their means of publication (less omnipresent and opinion-shaping than those of major newspapers), I did not consider the titles to be considerably more influential than the contents of the full text. On the other hand, when analysing articles published in the three main newspapers I first listed the titles and subtitles and coded them in search of the key themes emerging from the titles only. I was motivated to do this by my belief that the titles work as catch-phrases and are often the only parts of articles read at all (van Dijk 2006). The next step was to code the articles' content, and finally to choose specific articles which represented the emerged themes and served as a source of quotations and references. My intention was

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6 This is also the reason why I do not include these texts in numerical calculation of the frequency of references to the EPA Indonesians appearing in the media. I cannot claim that this set represents a comprehensive sample of the material available on the Internet. Rather, it is a collection of different voices coming from a range of individuals and sources.

7 According to the data from 2005 published by the World Association of Newspapers, out of the three titles, the *Yomiuri* had the greatest circulation at 14.067 million, followed by the *Asahi* with 12.121 million, and the *Nippon Keizai* with 4.635 million. The *Yomiuri* is considered to be centre-right, or conservative; *Asahi* centre-left, or liberal; and *Nippon Keizai* (Japan Economic Newspaper) is economics and business oriented.

8 I gained access to the three databases thanks to the resources available in the library of School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

not to assess the *ideological* stance of the individual newspapers. Rather, the goal was to extract the general flavour of the publicity the EPA acceptance and the Indonesian candidates within it received in the period of six years of immediate temporal proximity to the first arrival of the EPA candidates.

A final digression refers to the physical extent of the analysed material which should help to imagine the boundaries, and hence limitations, of the venture. The number of items from outside the material published by the three corporations publishing the *Asahi*, *Yomiuri*, and *Nippon Keizai* newspapers on the Internet adds up to 46 items constituting 139 pages of Japanese text. The earliest text in this group is dated 22.05.2008, and the latest 22.10.2010. The pieces published by the three publishing corporations amount to 312 items, including those obtained through the database search.[9] In addition, I included several video clips from local television stations accessible for on-line viewing, which were often posted on YouTube or embedded in their Facebook pages by the candidates themselves. There is also a longer feature programme screened on the NHK Sōgō channel, which I received directly from its producer. Finally, I refer to the special editions and special feature articles on the EPA Indonesians, or the acceptance programme more generally, published by professional care and health-related publications. I do not account in this listing for the texts referring to immigration in Japan or the Japanese care system which do not directly mention the EPA programme or the people involved.

The chapters which follow this Introduction deal with intimacies at different levels within a framework of the EPA caregiver candidates' acceptance. Chapter One opens with a review of literature on migration to Japan and care work which situates the current case within broader debates in the two fields. This is followed by an overview of the political–economic circumstances which resulted in the arrival of the Indonesian workers in Japan. I suggest that the origins of the very programme and its ultimate shape gave rise to the discussions of the Japanese ideology of nation. Chapter Two is concerned with the idea of intimacy and defines it in relation to ethnographic examples from

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9   I did not include here those short telegraphic news items which report on the arrival of a new group of candidates, report on the schedule of programme information sessions, or simply provide a short explanation what the term *EPA* or its Japanese equivalent stands for.

the current field research as well as to the already existing scholarship on nationalism, culture, and care. Chapter Three follows the EPA Indonesian candidates into the institutions of their employment in Japan. The main theme here is the co-salience of the cultural and interpersonal dimensions of intimacy. They appear to coexist and inform relationships between the Indonesians, the Japanese staff, and the cared-for elderly. The following chapter, Chapter Four, remains inside the institutions, but this time the focus is on the relationships between the candidates and their employers. The particularly cordial and/or speckled with special provisions relationships between my informants and their employers enabled both parties to exercise a degree of control over the other. I suggest that intimacy became a tool of management in a situation where the employers could not rely on the usual ways of knowing and retaining their Indonesian employees. This is also where I signal the role of a reluctant stance of the Japanese state on the acceptance of long-term foreign workers. I return to this issue in Chapter Five, where I focus primarily on the discourses produced by the mass media coverage of the Indonesian EPA acceptance. Referring to the arguments offered by the proponents and opponents of the acceptance and to the representations of the Indonesian candidates in overwhelmingly positive terms, I propose that even if the discourses were reproducing and confirming the dominant ideologies, they were at the same time questioning their legitimacy. The Conclusion brings together the different levels of intimacy and places them on an equal standing, suggesting that although often represented in cultural terms, the day-to-day experiences of the Indonesian EPA candidates were shaped by different (non)intimacies. I make a claim that concentrating on the intersections between the essentialised notions and the minute interpersonal interactions can help to uncover the double register according to which the application of the established divisions between *us* and *them* has to become more reluctant.

Chapter One

From International Economy to Interpersonal Care

At the outset, it is important to situate the acceptance of Indonesian caregiver candidates within the wider context of international interdependencies which lay behind their arrival in Japan in 2008. This will enable the drawing of connections between the experiences of the Indonesians in Japan and the broader processes affecting Indonesia and Japan alike. Equally, such contextualisation will make it possible to see how the experiences were structured by the political–economic mechanisms beyond the immediate lives of the workers and beyond the operations of the accepting sites. In offering a brief look at the genealogy of the programme which brought the Indonesian eldercare workers to Japan, this chapter also shows why certain discourses about Japan's ideas of nationhood, which are discussed in later parts of this thesis, emerged in response to this particular instance of labour migration. It also considers how the particular mode of the programme's implementation affected the Indonesians' outlook at their sojourn to Japan. Before, turing to particulars, however, I look at how this study fits within a broader spectrum of migration and care-based research.

Migration to Japan

Studies of migration have undergone several shifts in terms of the subject at the centre of investigation. In the decades immediately following Frederick Barth's (1969) publication of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* the focus was on the ethnic identities of the migrant groups, and the maintenance and construction of so-defined migrant communities in their countries of destination. Around the 1990s there emerged in migration literature a noticeable theme of transnational links between migrants and their communities, and countries of origin which

carried back and forth ideas and capital, and which were imbued with newly appreciated social, economic, and political powers (e.g., Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992; Basch *et al.* 1993; Ong 1999). Concomitant with this latter interest were considerations of the impact which processes of globalisation (of which migrants were just one of the agents) had on the definition of local and migrant cultures (e.g., Harvey 1989; Hannerz 1992; Kearney 1995; Appadurai 1996; Featherstone 1996; Gupta & Ferguson 1997; Eriksen 2003). Consequently, cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism, both as individual orientation and practice and as state ideology, have come to be analysed, proposed, and criticised as a mode of coexistence of peoples conceived in terms of their cultural or ethnic identifications (e.g., Hannerz 1996; Povinelli 2000; Mandel 2008).

As I have already pointed out in the Introduction, Japan-based studies underwent a similar shift. Of course, this is not to say that there do not exist current accounts focused on the identities and community networks of migrant groups. To the contrary, ethnographies of *Nikkeijin,* people of Japanese descent, produced by Roth (2002), Tsuda (2003a), and Takenaka (2003), and such accounts as Morita's (2003) work on Iranian workers, Okushima's (2006) study of the employment system of Indonesian seafarers, and Hattori's (2007) discussion of religious adaptations among Indonesian Muslims in Japan, provide continuously salient depictions of the migrant minorities' experiences under Japanese migration regulations and in the face of common Japanese ideas about national belonging. These studies in a more or less explicit manner touch on the issue of the migrant potential to redefine the dominant ideologies of Japanese nationality. However, this is perhaps more explicitly addressed in studies in which, unlike the above accounts, it was possible to observe sustained and direct interactions between the immigrants and the Japanese. These are, in particular, accounts of international marriages (from Jpn.: *kokusai kekkon*), such as those provided by Burgess (2008), Kyo (2008), and Yamashita (2008), and the full-length ethnography based around the lives of 'Filipina brides' in rural Japan by Faier (2009).

Obvious as it may sound, all of the migrant groups which have become

objects of investigation in Japan arrived there within a certain constellation of personal motivations and structural opportunities shaped by, among other things, international treaties, economic disparities between countries, complementary labour market demands, or demographic composition of societies. For example, the *Nikkeijin* arrived in great numbers under the special visa category allowing for permanent residence and employment in Japan, while the Filipina women arrived largely on entertainer visas. This is not to deny the decision-making powers of the individual migrants, or the influence of national ideologies on the shape of immigration policy. I will return to this latter issue in the context of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) acceptance later in this chapter. Rather, I wish to highlight here the salience of these external factors in shaping migratory flows, and therefore affecting the configuration of day-to-day encounters between migrants and members of the accepting societies.

Migration and care

One such external factor shaping migratory flows is a result of changing family structure and the increased participation of women in the labour market. Traditionally performed by women who have now left the home to enter various paid jobs, domestic work and care for family members have had to be outsourced to hired workers. The tendency has been increasingly to meet the demand for care personnel by accepting migrant workers (Huang *et al*. 2012). Not surprisingly, then, since the late 1990s, there has been a growing interest in international migration to perform care and domestic work as creating new sites of international or multicultural encounter. In these studies, care provided by migrant workers has commonly been represented as an additional service provided to the employer, often outside of what the work of the migrant in question was defined to be. Therefore, the emphasis was on the exploitative nature of the relationships between the migrant workers and their employers (see Parreñas 2001; Lutz 2008). There emerged discussions on the boundaries between work and care, or formal and informal care (Ungerson 2004, 2006; Litwin & Attias-Donfut 2009; Lyon 2009), and on the reconceptualisation of

care coming with its marketisation (Finch & Groves 1983; Graham 1991; Tronto 1993; Lee-Treweek 1996; Qureshi 1996; Folbre & Nelson 2000; Williams 2001; Thomas 2003; Simoni & Trifiletti 2004; Fine & Glendinning 2005; Zelizer 2000, 2005). Furthermore, stressing the double role of migrant women as (traditional) caregivers to their own families and to their employers, the ideas often underlying the accounts of domestic work have been reflected in such concepts as 'global care chains' (Hochschild 2001; Parreñas 2001), 'care drain' (Bettio *et al.* 2006), or 'the international division of reproductive labour' (Parreñas 2001; *cf.* Glenn 1992; Yeates 2009). Also, given that the majority of migrant care workers are women—a wider trend sometimes referred to as the feminisation of migration—research focused on their experiences has contributed immensely to the discussion of changing gender roles in modern societies (e.g., Parreñas 2001; Libelt 2011), and the power structures within the domestic sphere and within the wider context of economic disparities between sending and receiving countries (e.g., Sassen 1984; Glenn 1992; Phizacklea & Anderson 1997; Momsen 1999; Lutz 2002, 2010; Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2003).

Within East and Southeast Asia the major countries receiving migrant domestic workers from the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, and several South Asian countries have been Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Domestic worker migration from Indonesia concentrated primarily in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, where they were either the second largest group to the Filipina migrants, or the largest as in the case of Taiwan (Yamanaka & Piper 2005). Research which looked at the experiences of Indonesian domestic workers concentrated on what Lovebond (2003) calls 'ethnicisation'—that is, the use of essentialised stereotypes based on ethnicity, nationality, or gender as a means of constructing hierarchies between workers affecting their employability (Chin 1997; Rudnyckyj 2004; *cf.* Anderson 2000; Lister *et al.* 2007; Williams & Gavanas 2008).

Through the ethnographic prism of the accepting sites, this study looks at Japan entering the international stage as a country receiving migrants to provide care for its citizens, rather than to work on its assembly lines. As such,

it focuses on a new configuration of personal and structural factors giving shape to the zones of encounters (Faier 2009). While such issues as the relationships between migrant workers and their employers or the workers' ethnicisation, as highlighted in the domestic work context, featured in the experiences of the EPA Indonesian care workers as well, they played out in different ways. This was partly because of the way the acceptance was organised, as I will show in the following chapters. Importantly, the current research was based in eldercare institutions where the employer was not the one cared for, and where the carers worked alongside and together with other workers looking after not one but many elderly. In this study there is, therefore, less emphasis on the boundary between work and non-work. I pay more attention to the nature of the work the Indonesians performed, what meanings they attached to it, and how it affected their relationships with the elderly, the Japanese staff, and the employers. Also, because the vast majority of the EPA care worker candidates were not caregivers to their own families at the time of their arrival in Japan, rather than looking at the 'care chains' caused by the Indonesians' relocation, I emphasise their private goals as young, educated individuals and the ways their move to Japan featured in their respective life projects.

Ethnographies in eldercare institutions

The demographic changes in the industrialised nations resulting in a growing proportion of elderly combined with the increasing participation of women in the labour market has brought about an issue of outsourcing eldercare to non-family members. Hiring a domestic worker has been one solution. However, increasingly it has become an accepted practice to place the elderly or to choose to be placed in one's old age in an external facility dedicated to providing professional care and support throughout the day and night. While studies of domestic migrant workers have emphasised migrants' experiences, in the scholarship on the care provided in institutionalised settings the emphasis has been divided between the experiences of those cared for and the care providers.

The earlier ethnographies of institutionalised eldercare focused on the plight of the elderly, usually presented in terms of diminished quality of life and the adverse effects of institutionalisation (Henry 1963; Laird 1979; Kayser-Jones 1981; Vesperi 1987; Shield 1988). Those studies which incorporated workers' experiences initially limited the accounts to the higher-level staff who do not provide direct care. For example, Savishinsky (1991) concentrates on the health professionals, such as physical therapists or social workers, and only mentions in passing the caregivers who provided direct care to the elderly. Savishinsky's predecessors, too, such as Gubrium (1975) and Clough (1981), only briefly pause on the 'bed-and-body work' (Gubrium 1975) and discuss some of the tactics the staff deployed to mitigate its unpleasantness. These studies lack information about the relationships among the floor staff and the managerial staff, or about more nuanced understandings which the front-line staff ascribed to their job. While the elderly 'clientele' are represented as forming a network of relationships, the members of staff are discussed as a group of individuals whose network of relationships remains unaccounted for (see Somera 1995).

More attention to the sociality of an eldercare home as a workplace is paid by Foner (1994) in her *Caregiving Dilemma*. Foner stresses the 'pressures for rapprochement' and the 'strong ethic of cooperation' (1994:142) among the staff despite the different tensions and personal dislikes. Foner was also the first to pay closer attention to the ethnic (racial) identifications of the staff and the elderly. She concludes that although 'racial differences magnify the opposition with patients … race had little, if any, effect on actual patient care in individual cases [and] ... racial and ethnic similarity between patients and aides did not lead to better relations with patients or more sympathetic care' (1994:45). A turn towards the conceptualisation of experiences of direct care by the care providers is visible in the writings of scholars concentrating on 'body work' in care provision. This research focused on the embodied and emotional nature of care work (Diamond 1992; Lee-Treweek 1996, 1997), body work's ability to break privacies (Twigg 2000a, 2000b), the stigma of the 'dirty work' (Jervis 2001; *cf.* Lawler 1991), and the gendered meanings and

perceptions of body work (Isaksen 2002, 2005; Dahle 2005).

In the Japanese context, looking from the perspective of institutionalisation, ethnographic works in institutions for the elderly have predominantly focused on the lives of the elderly. Framing the residents' lives in the context of the Japanese cultural norm of familial co-residence and eldercare provided by family members, Bethel (1992a) shows how the elderly residents overcome the stigma of institutionalisation and recreate a thriving community around the structures provided by the institutionalisation of their lives. The elderly in Bethel's account reconstruct a community along the Japanese norms of interaction as well as through introducing new norms in defiance of those accepted in the wider society—for example, in relation to the cohabitation of men and women. In Bethel's work (1992a, 1992b) the focus is on the elderly, but she also signals the different relationships between the elderly and the staff of the institution depending on the latter's apparent degree of willingness to bend the institutional rules. All of the members of staff as well as the institution described by Bethel are Japanese and the encounters with the new or the unknown are limited to the newness of institutional life and the encounters with Japanese strangers with whom the residents need to form neighbourly relationships. This was also the case in the institution visited by Wu (2004). Wu, too, concentrates on the 'quality of life' dimension of institutionalised life, but unlike Bethel, she pays more attention to the experiences of the staff as well. The staff voices she presents in her book consider the position of the elderly within the institution from the perspective of people who look after them, touching on such themes as professional satisfaction in terms of ability to provide personalised care and the rewards of being able to help people in need, and discussing their motivations for working with the elderly. Overall, however, Wu's ethnography is structured to show how the idea of Japanese eldercare is based on the notion of dependency, and the experiences of the care providers fulfil there only a supportive function. Both Bethel's and Wu's studies are set in a uniformly Japanese environment—that is, one where all residents and care workers are Japanese.

The current study builds on this body of work in several ways. Although

institutionalisation is not my subject of investigation I pay attention to the discourses of the elderly residents' welfare in relation to the arrival of foreign carers at the institutions. However, I particularly draw in this thesis on the line of thought combining the bodily and emotional aspects of care work with the sociality of the workplace, showing their interplay with the ideas of national or cultural difference. I also draw a link between the structure of the acceptance and the embodied nature of care work. Attending to the complexities and discourses surrounding care provision, both in terms of direct contact with the bodies of the cared-for Japanese elderly and in terms of its impact on interpersonal relations among the staff, I pose the experiences of the EPA Indonesian workers and the discourses surrounding their arrival as a case study in multicultural coexistence (*tabunka kyōsei*) which has something to tell us about contemporary Japanese ideas of a nation. In recognition of the fact that these particular *internationalised* sites would not have existed without processes expanding beyond their premises, the following section provides a short overview of the history behind the Indonesian care workers' arrival in Japan in 2008.

Indonesian care workers' acceptance under the Economic Partnership Agreement

Economic deal

From the economic perspective, the bilateral Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with Indonesia, as well as with other countries, was for Japan a bid to maintain Japan's position as one of the world's leading economies, a matter of economic necessity. This, at least, was the case according to such political stakeholders as the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), and the Keidanren, the Japan Business Federation. Finalising the agreement with Indonesia meant securing access to Indonesia's ample deposits of natural resources (although Japanese negotiators did not manage to secure the desired extent of access to Indonesia's liquefied natural gas) and attending to its position within the Asian trade market, particularly *vis à vis* the growing competition from the United

States, South Korea, and China. A similar motivation was behind most other EPAs concluded by the Japanese government, which through such deals counteracted Japan's decreasing share in international trade as Japanese goods were losing to the more preferably tariffed products of other countries which had already entered into multiple bilateral relations. Not surprisingly, then, while conducting talks with Indonesia, Japanese representatives were almost simultaneously engaged in group negotiations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as well as in bilateral talks with the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. According to the information provided by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by March 2011 Japan had signed 15 EPA/FTAs,[10] primarily with Southeast and East Asian countries, but also with Mexico, Chile, India, and Switzerland.[11]

The reduction or complete abandonment of tariffs on goods exported to the partner country, opening new and wider venues for Japanese investment in Indonesia, and the clauses on 'capacity building' (albeit not unconditional) in Indonesia, to name just a few areas covered, were expected to boost bilateral trade, benefiting the economies of both countries. However, from the perspective of Indonesian commentators, the potential economic benefits of the agreement for their country were more debatable. Views on the degree to which the treaty promoted fair economic dealings were varied.

'Japan got to expand their production in Indonesia for some bananas' commented one of the Minister-Counsellors during our first meeting at the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo in early 2009. This was a reference to the free access to raw materials granted to the Japanese firms operating in Indonesia under the EPA on the one hand, and to the relaxation of the import tariff on Indonesian tropical fruit on the other. The Minister-Counsellor felt that the profitability of the agreement's provisions for the two countries was of completely different, incomparable scales, where Japanese companies would

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10 An EPA was essentially a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), but the difference in name given to this and other similar deals proposed by Japan was said to reflect the wider spectrum of issues covered. In the case of the agreement with Indonesia, apart from the usual customs relaxation clauses, the EPA included an agreement on the movement of people and capital.
11 Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
    Internet URL http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/fta/ (accessed 10.03.2011).

benefit greatly, while, for example, Indonesian fruit exporters would still be unable to export significant amounts, not least due to powerful non-economic barriers posed by the internal Japanese market, such as customer choice and stringent quality control regulations.

The agreement was seen as having opened the door for Japanese investors to locate their resources in Indonesia, but by no means obliging them to select Indonesia as the destination of choice for their investment. Indonesian commentators pointed to the need of lowering the cost of and simplifying the investing environment in Indonesia before the potential of Japanese and other, foreign investment could be realised to a sizable benefit of the Indonesian economy (see, for example, *Jakarta Post* 20.08.2007). According to David Adam Stott of Kitakyushu University in Japan, the

> obstacles revolve[d] around the high costs of conducting business transactions; the expense of financing investments when interest rates [were] higher than elsewhere in the region; an uncertain legal climate regarding foreign investment; an inadequate physical and institutional infrastructure; and, in many instances, the lack of a viable supply industry. Whilst efforts have been made to speed up the opening of new business ventures, investors often cite[d] complicated bureaucracy and overlapping regulations as major drawbacks to investing in Indonesia when compared to its neighbours. Such red tape [fed] the rampant corruption in the archipelago and hamper[ed] many aspects of business from investment approvals through to the smooth flow of goods. (Stott 2008)

As free to invest in Indonesia as in other Asian countries with which Japan had entered similar economic partnerships, Japanese investors were expected to avoid the challenging Indonesian business environment and direct their resources to other countries, rendering the provisions of the EPA meaningless. A lack of a similar sustained public debate focused on the industry and business related clauses of the Japan–Indonesia EPA in Japan suggested that what was perceived as promising dubious profits by the Indonesian commentators must have seemed at least agreeable to their Japanese

counterparts.[12] Comments to this effect, made either in a public domain of mass media reporting or in private conversations, pointed to the imbalance of power between Japan and Indonesia, where the former was able to control the conditions of mutual economic engagements. This relative positioning was presented as having resulted in the EPA's clause on the acceptance of Indonesian nurse and caregiver candidates into Japan.

Agreement on movement of people

Before the EPA talks between Indonesia and Japan were finalised, Japan had been engaged in similar negotiations with the Philippines. The Philippine government was the first to demand that a number of its workers, nurses and care workers, be allowed to take up employment in Japan. The negotiations were taking place at the time when a United Nations report on trafficking in people criticised the Japanese government for not taking sufficient steps to curb the practise in their country. At the time, the majority of trafficked victims were brought to Japan on entertainer visas from the Philippines. Although not all Filipina women who came to Japan as entertainers fell victim of human traffickers, the stricter regime of receiving the visa resulted in a significant decline in the number of Filipina women finding work in Japan. It has been suggested that the request from the Philippine government to establish a new route for their nationals to seek employment in Japan under the EPA was related to these changes (Vogt 2006). Once the negotiations had been concluded, however, the ratification of the Japan–Philippines EPA had to be postponed, as the Philippine Senate was divided over the issue. The opposition to the agreement in the Philippines stemmed from the popular perception that under its provisions the Japanese side acquired undue privileges, such as being able to dispose of nuclear waste in Philippine territory. As a result of these Philippine internal debates, it was not until 2009 that the agreement was

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12 By contrast, strong opposition was voiced to the Japanese government entering the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations. It could be argued that the position of Japan *vis à vis* other (more) powerful players, such as the United States, which had the leverage to dictate or significantly influence the conditions of the mutual trade and privileges in the internal markets, was the reason for the protective stance taken by those involved in, for example, Japanese agriculture.

finalised. In the meantime, the Indonesian negotiators, knowing of the provision contained in the Japan–Philippines EPA, also requested that Japan accept its nurses and carers. Ultimately, it was from Indonesia that the first ever group of foreign workers to be deployed to care and health institutions under a government-led scheme arrived in Japan. This short history of the decision to accept Indonesian caregiver and nurse candidates to train and work in Japan shows its contingent character which, at least initially, was not officially dictated by the internal needs of the Japanese labour market.

There was one more side to the story. The decision to accept foreign workers under the EPA was not made unanimously in Japan. In line with the arguments coming from the nurses' and caregivers' professional associations, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) were adamant in their position that there were enough native Japanese workers to fill the existing labour shortages, and that the priority should be placed on improving working conditions to attract Japanese workers rather than simply importing workers from abroad. Therefore, the EPA acceptance was not to be a means of addressing the internal problems of the Japanese labour market. On the other hand, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) both also engaged in the negotiations on the EPA, as long-standing proponents of an opening of the Japanese labour market to people from a far wider range of occupations were in favour of the proposed acceptance, particularly in light of Japan's changing demographics. I will return to this issue in the following chapter. Gabriele Vogt (2006:11) observed that MoFA saw EPAs such as the one signed with Indonesia as a means to 'bypass the lengthy process of legal revisions by shaping new immigration policies via bilateral agreements with selected states', removing them from under direct jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), an authority regulating immigration to Japan. Seemingly, as a result of a compromise in the interdepartmental talks, and perhaps as a relatively minor concession in an already profitable deal for Japan, the conditions of the EPA acceptance were settled. The Indonesian candidates themselves suggested that, given the incongruities of the system, there was an ulterior, hidden motive (from Ind.:

sesuatu di belakang) for their being sent to Japan under the EPA. They, too, believed that they were simply used to buy a good deal for Japan in an agreement which was primarily aimed at economic cooperation. Such divergent stances on the issue of accepting Indonesian workers within the Japanese central administration were later reflected in the conditions of the acceptance, which, in turn, triggered debates over Japan's overall position on welcoming foreign workers.

Ambivalent goals of the EPA acceptance

While granting the requests of the partner governments to accept their workers and responding to the Japanese MoFA's and METI's influences, the EPA programme contained several important restrictions. Firstly, the accepted foreigners were not to be considered workers but trainees, or literally candidates, until they passed the Japanese national examination. This examination was required to be taken in Japanese in the candidates' respective target professions within a specified period of time: three years for the nurse candidates, and four years for the caregiver candidates. In the event of failure, they were required to leave Japan. Secondly, the candidates were to be remunerated according to the standards applied to Japanese nationals performing the same tasks, but as trainees were not to be counted in the minimum staff to care home resident ratio of 1:3 until they obtained the Japanese qualifications.[13] Also, until they became certified caregivers or nurses, they were not allowed to change employers, although they could report any problems to a help-line established by Japan International Corporation of Welfare Services (JICWELS) overseeing the EPA acceptance on behalf of the Japanese MHLW. Importantly, however, if the candidates passed the Japanese national examination, they were to be able to remain and work in Japan indefinitely.

The qualification required of the Indonesian caregivers-to-be was possessed by only around 30 per cent of the Japanese care personnel in 2009. The majority of Japanese care workers held the non-obligatory entry level

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13 The ratio varies slightly depending on the type of care facility.

qualification of a helper, which at vocational level two, entailed 132 hours of theoretical and practical training, but did not require any examination or minimum educational level. Some of the care workers working in institutional eldercare had no qualifications at all. Meanwhile, it was required of the Indonesian trainees that they pass the Japanese national caregiver examination in order to be granted the right to remain and work in Japan beyond the 4-year period specified by the agreement. The examination, administered in Japanese, where the occurrence of technical terms written in Chinese characters was unavoidable, posed for them a considerable challenge. Passing it required knowledge covering not only medical and practical areas, but Japan-specific laws and regulations as well. Combined with the lack of a structured, uniform language and professional training programme, it was widely believed that the majority of the candidates would fail the exam and would have to return to Indonesia. These predictions were based on the low pass rate among Japanese, which each year oscillated around 50 per cent, and the zero pass rate of the Indonesians during a mock examination. If the candidates were to fail the examination, not only would the accepting institutions be unsuccessful in securing additional members of staff, but it would also mean a lost financial investment. However, according to some institutions, the certainty of having someone remaining in employment for the period of four years was already a bonus and worth the investment in the light of the high turnover rates of the Japanese staff.

Such terms of acceptance of foreign nurses and care workers, which on the one hand opened a path to permanent residence in Japan in an unprecedented provision, and on the other made it nearly impossible to use this path, sent an ambivalent message about the official intentions of the acceptance. Represented as a skill-transfer scheme, and in light of the stern conditions of the acceptance, the scheme's provisions were taken to suggest that, having gained experience and knowledge in Japan, the foreign workers would be expected to return to their countries and implement the newly acquired practical capital in order to enhance the local professional practice. On the other hand, however, once qualified as caregivers according to the Japanese

system, the Indonesians and others who were still to arrive under similar agreements were to be able to renew their working visas as many times as they wished without a time limit on the permitted length of sojourn in Japan. This was unlike provisions of any other training programme introduced in Japan. The condition for the Indonesian workers to be eligible to obtain such renewable working visas—passing the Japanese national professional caregiver examination—was seen as an unreasonably, if not purposefully, high hurdle for the Indonesians. This apparent ambivalence of the programme was picked up by the observers and so, given the unprecedented concessions granted the EPA workers, the acceptance came to represent Japan's stance on accepting foreign workers and foreigners in general. It was posed to represent the unwillingness of the Japanese government to deal with this politically delicate but increasingly pressing issue and, as I will show in the penultimate chapter of this thesis, was consequently connected to the ideas of Japanese nationhood.

Workers' acceptance 'on the run'

The almost accidental origins of the EPA acceptance seemingly contributed to the lack of a long-term vision for the development of the scheme. In December 2009 during a presentation at the Sasakawa Foundation in Tokyo, Furuya Tokurō of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), who took part in the EPA negotiations with Indonesia, gave his (semi-official) account of the talks concerning the movement of 'natural persons'—that is, the workers' acceptance under the EPA.[14] Furuya admitted that at the time of his talk, the MoFA were considering ways of solving problems which had emerged in the process of the acceptance. In the light of the first batch of the Indonesian workers not having achieved the expected fluency in the Japanese language by the end of their introductory Japanese language training, the possibility that they would not ultimately pass the national examination loomed large. Furuya admitted that he had expected the problem to emerge while still negotiating the agreements, but it was only after the Indonesians had been dispatched to the

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14 A term directly translated from the Japanese *shizenjin*, questioned by one of the attendees, was explained by Furuya to signify an individual physical person as opposed to a legal entity, or *hōjin*.

institutions that the problem suddenly became tangible (from Jpn.: *semete kita*). It was only then that the Ministry started looking for measures to mitigate the lack of a comprehensive plan for the acceptance. The lack of a long-term vision for the development of the scheme was also acknowledged by the Minster of Foreign Affairs, Okada Katsuya, who was reported by the *Nippon Keizai* newspaper as having admitted that 'the country [i.e., the government] as well as the accepting sites are searching in darkness for effective ways to learn how to secure an effective way of teaching [the EPA candidates]' (*Nippon Keizai* 27.09.2009).[15] This approach of merely initiating a process and waiting to rectify any shortcomings until they actually appear, taken by the Japanese government towards the organisation of the EPA acceptance, was once directly described to me as a situation in which one, here the government, comes up with solutions as problems emerge, without planning ahead. *Hashirinagara kangaeru*, or thinking while running, was cited to me by an employee of the MoFA, with whom I managed to have an informal, although constricted by the public setting, chat about the EPA acceptance over lunch in a restaurant near the Ministry. While the term implies a degree of skilfulness in suggesting an ability to swiftly adjust to the demands of changing circumstances, particularly in business environment, in the context of our conversation it directly hinted at the inability or unwillingness of the Japanese state to take a decisive and structured stance on the issue of admitting foreign workers to the Japanese labour market. Indeed, when I asked my contact person at JICWELS about what would happen once the agreed quota of 1,000 workers was met or once the initial two-year period was over, he was unable to answer. Although I never managed to directly ask the question of those involved in the decision-making process on the Japanese side, the general understanding among the accepting institutions, support organisations, scholars, and others connected to the acceptance was that this issue had not yet been settled.

Again, the lack of a clear way forward and the going awry of the part of the acceptance already underway suggested reluctance on the part of the Japanese government to commit to securing a successful finale of the acceptance

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15 "どういう勉強すれば効率がいいのか、国も現場も手探りの状況".

programme allowing the candidates to remain in Japan. Although officially argued in terms of the self-sufficiency of Japan's labour market, this reluctance was also posed to symbolise Japanese unwillingness to accept foreigners in an attempt to preserve the society's homogeneity, an issue to which I will return towards the end of this thesis.

Objectives and objections of the accepting eldercare institutions

Despite the official stance on the aim of the EPA acceptance programme—that is, international transfer of skills—the vast majority of the institutions decided to participate in the programme to mitigate labour shortages, those currently experienced or those foreseen for the future. However, the fact that the accepting institutions could not include the Indonesian trainees in their employee counts meant that they were unable to meet the legally required ratio of staff to cared-for residents without hiring still further personnel. To compound this, the overseeing of training activities required investment of additional resources. Therefore, from a financial point of view, participation in the EPA programme did not seem cost effective for the institutions, either. The output required from the prospective participants in the scheme had to cover the costs of the initial language training, the travel from Indonesia to Japan, and all the administrative fees, including a commission for JICWELS. Before the candidates started to work, the accepting institutions had to invest around 600,000 yen (4,700 pounds sterling) per person.

In contradiction to the official stance, according to the questionnaire survey conducted in autumn 2009 by one of the support groups which emerged in response to the acceptance of foreign workers into the Japanese health and care institutions, the majority of the accepting eldercare homes decided to join the programme in order to 'examine [the possibility of hiring foreigners] as a means to tackle future labour shortage' in the sector.[16] The accepting elderly homes' responses clearly concentrated on four options which, along with the

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16 In a survey focused on hospitals with more than 300 beds conducted by scholars at the Kyushu University Research Centre before the EPA acceptance began, around 50 per cent of the hospitals responded that they would want to accept foreign nurse candidates to countermeasure the shortage of nurses (Kawaguchi *et al.*2008 in Vogt 2011).

one already mentioned, also included 'international contribution, international exchange', 'using [the current acceptance] as a test case for the future acceptance of foreigners', and 'in order to invigorate the work place'. A similar picture emerged from an analogous investigation carried out by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) in March 2010. Here, out of 37 respondents, who incorporated care home as well as hospital representatives, 33 said they treated the EPA acceptance as a test case for future acceptance of foreign workers (the question was formulated in exactly the same manner as in the survey conducted by the support group), 30 saw it as an opportunity for 'international contribution, exchange', and 29 hoped that the EPA workers would revitalise the workplace.

There was, therefore, a clear disjuncture between the official aims of the EPA acceptance and the accepting institutions' view of it. The shape of the programme did not fit the expectations and needs of the eldercare institutions, which openly shared their concerns over the problems they were facing with securing adequate staffing levels. As I will show in the penultimate chapter, the fact that despite such calls from the ground the MLHW delegated oversight of the acceptance through the proxy of JICWELS and denied the need for the acceptance of foreign workers to mitigate the internal labour force situation means that the issue had already started to be seen in ideological terms.

Lobbying and governmental response

Somewhat surprisingly, given the small scale of the EPA acceptance, the mass media in Japan devoted much attention to it. I look at the content of the coverage in more detail later in the thesis. Here I briefly look at other activities within the Japanese society and what effect they had in terms of shaping the acceptance programme.

The running media commentary on the consecutive EPA acceptance stages, anniversaries, examinations, seminars, and problems, and the everyday experiences of the Indonesian candidates and their colleagues was accompanied by lively lobbying for improvement of the programme by several support groups. Some of these were formed anew soon after the first

acceptance, and some emerged from within already existing associations and institutions dealing with issues concerning Indonesian or Filipino workers in Japan. Many others were rather informal groups of people who came together to teach the Japanese language, offer to spend time together, or provide home-stay so the candidates had the occasion to become familiar with the Japanese way of life, customs, and people.

In the beginning of 2010, the support organisation Garuda Supporters held a meeting at the MHLW Press Club (*kisha kurabu*) where they presented its motion proposing a reform of the acceptance system. The motion contained a long-term vision for an acceptance of nurses and care workers based on the idea of *fostering* foreign workers in order that they would not only be able to communicate in Japanese but also have knowledge of the Japanese style of providing care, whether in nursing or in eldercare. Around the same time a collective of four hospital associations jointly submitted their motion addressed to the MHLW, MoFA, MoJ, METI, leader of the Democratic Party of Japan, and Head of the National Policy Unit, requesting modification of the current EPA programme. The request included revision of the national examination in order to facilitate the foreign trainees obtaining the qualifications, extension of their time in Japan, and ultimately aiming for a more comprehensive and sustainable system of foreign nurse and caregiver acceptance. Another proposal submitted to MHLW came from the Cooperation for Overseas Nurses and Caregivers, which also demanded revision of the national examination, extension of the residence permit for the trainees, and inclusion of the caregiver candidates in the employee count. These formalised calls were an expression of what had been discussed within the accepting institutions and among the candidates who conveyed their concerns through the support groups.

In response to these calls, the MHLW initially insisted that changes to the national examinations could not be a part of the solution, while the Minister of Foreign Affairs agreed that the examination should be more considerate of the foreigners' difficulty in acquiring a sufficient level of Japanese proficiency. Ultimately, in October 2010 the MHLW released their decision to simplify the

carer examination by rewriting the questions in a straightforward manner, attaching a phonetic guide to the less common Chinese characters, and providing English translation of the illness names and legal or academic terms. In March 2010, the MoJ responded with a statement that they had plans to revise the time limitation of the nursing visa, and that they would consider the acceptance—that is, creating a new visa category—of those foreigners who had obtained caregiver qualifications in Japan. On the 11th of March 2011 the Kan government announced that they would grant a one-year extension to those of the 794 caregiver and nurse trainees from Indonesia and the Philippines who fulfilled specified conditions. Given that by March 2011 only three nurse candidates had succeeded in obtaining the Japanese qualification, diplomatic considerations were likely to play a part in the decision as well (*Asahi* 11.03.2011). The candidates coming under the future rounds of the EPA acceptance were excluded from this latter provision on the basis that they would be receiving expanded training support from the Japanese government.

This change came with the new fiscal year following the first batch of Indonesian candidates taking up their posts. The resources designated for the EPA acceptance implementation in the MHLW budget rose from 41 million yen in 2007 to 83 million in 2009. However, after the first batch of Indonesian trainees spent a year in on-the-job training, the amount was increased to 874 million yen (around 6.87 million pounds sterling) for the fiscal year 2010. According to JICWELS, these funds were to be spent to cover tuition fees, wages for the training supervisors hired by the institutions, translation of the national examination questions into English and Indonesian for training purposes, and inspection visits by representatives of JICWELS assessing the progress of the trainees and the overall system implementation in the accepting institutions.

What this section points to is how the provisions of the EPA programme which did not match the needs of the accepting institutions led to an activation of this professional environment to support foreign workers' acceptance. It has also led to the activation, and formation in some cases, of Japan's grassroots organisations lobbying for the same cause. Ultimately, the EPA, an economic

deal, had the unintended consequence of the MHLW actively engaging in a programme supporting acceptance and fostering of Indonesian care workers. Perhaps this could be seen as the MOFA and METI succeeding in opening new ways of entry for foreign workers, with the proposed change of immigration policies by the MoJ only confirming the already established *status quo*. Such changes in response to the calls from the accepting institutions and other corners of Japanese society, although most likely initially unintended (at least by the MoJ or MHLW), send a signal that Japan has taken a step closer to diversifying its labour force and, by extension, society. The formal engagement of the MHLW in making sure that the EPA candidates have every chance to obtain the Japanese qualifications highlights the view of the EPA acceptance as a means of supplying the Japanese eldercare workforce with foreign workers, rather than the officially stated contribution to the training of eldercare specialists for Indonesia. Hence, as the genealogy of the EPA acceptance shows, Japanese eldercare institutions became the sites where global political-economic processes converged with localised discourses over national ideals and needs. These processes took the tangible form of Indonesian candidates working alongside Japanese staff to attend to the most intimate needs of the Japanese elderly. There, the national imaginations mixed with the discourses and practices of care. Just how this mixing happened is detailed in Chapters Three and Four.

Recruitment in Indonesia

Having considered how the acceptance of Indonesian care workers came about and what kind of debates it triggered, I now turn to the very individuals in question to see what motivated them to use the opportunity to migrate opened by the government-led EPA scheme. It will become clear that the structured nature of the acceptance shaped the Indonesians' encounters with 'Japan', something to which I will return in later chapters as well.

With a possible exception of some 40 successful caregiver and nurse candidates who at the time of the recruitment process were reaching the end of their education or had recently graduated from one specific school of health

sciences in West Java province, the majority of the 208 Indonesians from the first EPA batch were said to have found out about the programme only about a week to ten days before the deadline for submitting the required documentation. Some of them learnt about the programme from commercials broadcast by Indonesian television, and some had the information conveyed to them by friends who saw the commercials. Many, however, received the information via their 'connected' parents or via teachers from the above mentioned school which had been connected to the programme through certain individuals engaged in the Japanese language training. I have already mentioned these connections in the discussion of my access to training sites in Indonesia.

Once in Japan, the Indonesian candidates I worked with unanimously recalled that the fact that the information about the programme reached them so shortly before the application deadline meant that there was no time for them to really dwell on what their potential success in the selection process would entail. They simply grasped the opportunity without much emotional or intellectual investment in the process. Only about a week later, they found themselves qualified for the programme. The decision had to be swift; those who took the chance were sent to a pre-departure training centre in Jakarta and left for Japan only two weeks later. In a programme focusing on the EPA nurses shown by the Japan Broadcasting Corporation in January 2010 the nurse candidates recalled stories they had heard of people signing their EPA contracts on the bus taking them to the airport in Indonesia.

The short period of recruitment meant that the information about the programme reached in time for application primarily those who were in some way closer to the source of the information. Those whose parents occupied administrative positions were more likely to learn about the EPA acceptance. In the majority of cases, the candidates who arrived in the first EPA group came from families of a better than average economic position, since in Indonesia working in the state administration means better income and more secure employment. This shows how the organisation of the EPA acceptance preselected the individuals who arrived in Japan.

Those who hurriedly applied for the programme did not necessarily desire or plan to work abroad and in particular in Japan before the information about the opportunity reached them. For those of them who were considering, if not actively seeking, employment opportunities outside of Indonesia, one of the main and feasible destinations of choice was Australia. There, however, one of the eligibility criteria was proven proficiency in the English language and the recruitment procedure presented itself as more complicated. Hence, when the relatively condition-free (no language requirement) offer was made by the Japanese government, many of the potential candidates for overseas labour seized the opportunity and redirected their consideration towards Japan. Such sudden decisions meant that there was no time for in-depth investigation into the actual content of work on offer, or into the nuances of the Japanese payment system. This lack of knowledge became a source of disillusionment.

Financial disappointments

When advertised and published by the media in Indonesia the information about the salaries the candidates could expect was presented as 'will be paid up to 200,000 yen' (about £1,600), which was said to have misled the candidates into thinking that this was the amount they would receive. Their assumptions were not clarified during the recruitment process (whether purposefully or unintentionally was an object of debate); neither were the candidates told of the various standard deductions, such as the obligatory national insurance contribution, from their salary. Some candidates also suggested that they were convinced the amount was calculated after such expenses as rent had been deducted. Moreover, despite the Indonesian government's insistence during the negotiations of the programme, there was no guarantee of a minimum amount each Indonesian candidate would receive. As a result, not only did the salaries vary substantially between institutions, ranging from about 140,000 to 250,000 yen, but they were also reduced by expenditures the Indonesians did not anticipate. Consequently, instead of the expected 200,000 yen, the majority took home about half of that amount each month.

Because the Indonesian candidates were used to the Indonesian system of

remuneration, in which deductions from one's wages do not happen automatically, it did not even occur to them that the system might be different in Japan. They simply expected what they were used to. It was not until they were faced with the reality diverging from their expectations that they realised the assumptions they had made. The realisation did not alleviate their feelings of disappointment, however, as their expectations were high. Those overseeing the EPA recruitment were suspected of having been aware of the misconceptions the candidates held about both the financial and the practical side of the EPA deployment, which I discuss below. They were believed to have purposefully withheld any clarifying information, as it was a strategically kept 'governmental secret', or *rahasia pemerintah*, in the words of one of the candidates. Just as in the case of remuneration system, the candidates also used the familiar images of nursing and Indonesian homes for the elderly to construct an image of *kaigo* they were expected to engage in as EPA candidates. In this respect as well, the image did not exactly match the reality they encountered.

Professional expectations and confounded *kaigo* in Japan

As already mentioned, under the provisions of the EPA between Japan and Indonesia, the caregiver candidates were expected to train towards a Japanese caregiver qualification for four years. The examination which was to guarantee the title of caregiver and the right for the candidates to continue working in Japan consisted of two parts, a written test and practical demonstration. Administered entirely in Japanese, the written test in particular was thought to present a 'high hurdle' (from Jpn.: *hādoru ga takai*) for the Indonesians to overcome. The pass rate among the Japanese, averaging around 50 per cent, was often used as an indication of the difficulty of the exam. The Indonesian candidates were made aware of the requirement for them to sit the examination when they were recruited in Indonesia. However, when I talked to them shortly before their arrival at the accepting institutions, the candidates were not concerned about the examination's difficulty. At the time, in January 2009, either it was still too far away to even think about, or it did not feature as

anything particularly challenging. The information about the level of difficulty did not seem to have reached the candidates. Those of them to whom I spoke at the time assumed that they would pass the examination and stay on in Japan for a few more years. Some, of course, clarified from the outset that they were in Japan solely for the money, and hence the examination was not anything they worried about.

Around the same time, I asked the Indonesian candidates what their plans were for the future beyond the four-year training period, whether they were linked to Japan or not. Apart from those few who decided to openly strip their intentions of any other motives and claimed that they were only interested in the financial side of their sojourn, the responses were usually more thoughtful and oftentimes suggested a degree of openness to what the future might bring. Settling in Japan was not written off as an option. Abdul Hakim, a 25-year-old man who was already fairly fluent in Japanese, said that his plan was to work in Japan for ten years, then return to 'his country' and set up a nursing home applying whatever knowledge he was about to gain in Japan. Wayan, an equally fluent and eloquent man of a similar age to Abdul Hakim, planned to remain in Japan for a 'few more' years after the examination, then return to Indonesia and teach nursing. Irdina, a 33-year-old woman, mother of two, and experienced nurse, wanted to bring her husband and two children to Japan once she was a qualified caregiver. She was looking to learn something new in Japan and also wanted her family to have greater prospects than in Indonesia. Another person, Diah, a woman in her early twenties, said that she was not sure if she would stay in Japan or go to another country. She planned, however, not to return to Indonesia for 'many years', her goal being to obtain a diploma as a certified nurse, which did not exist in Indonesia at the time.

The caregiver candidates who arrived in Japan in 2008 were all trained nurses. This was a requirement to qualify for the programme in the first year it ran, because at that time the training course for care workers was not yet established in Indonesia; neither did there exist a profession of caregiver. Hence, familiar with nursing in Indonesia, the candidates imagined the tasks of a Japanese caregiver to be similar to those they were performing in hospitals

and clinics as nurses. Therefore, despite embarking on care work in Japan, some of them still planned for their future careers to be in nursing and imagined their experience in Japan would add to their array of nursing skills. Others imagined that their work in Japan would be 'talking to the elderly', a view which was based on their experiences in the elderly homes in Indonesia, where the majority of residents were independent and did not require bodily care.

Development of kaigo

The Japanese *kaigo*, care, as an occupation is in itself a fairly new phenomenon. The qualification of caregiver (Jpn.: *kaigofukushishi*) which the Indonesian candidates were required to obtain by the end of their training was established in Japan in 1987. At the time of research, *kaigo* as a profession was still perceived as in need of better definition, a suggestion made to me by Professor Itō Ruri from the the Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo during our interview in July 2009. This underspecification of what counted as *kaigo* as a profession manifested itself in the care institutions I visited, where there was virtually no difference between the tasks performed by the personnel with and without the qualification of caregiver. The differences in pay levels between these members of staff also were very small, and sometimes there was no difference at all. In fact, only around 30 per cent of care workers in Japan were qualified *kaigofukushishi* in 2009.[17]

According to a 2011 publication tracing the history of the Japanese caregiver profession and its current premises, *The Fundamentals of Care* (*Kaigo no Kiso* 2011), *kaigo* as a word is relatively new as well. It appeared for the first time in a Japanese dictionary in 1991 in the 4th edition of *Kōjien*, one of the most popular and highly regarded Japanese-to-Japanese dictionaries, although the practice of providing 'personal care/help' (from Jpn.: *mi no mawari no sewa*) to those members of society who are unable to do it for themselves dates further back in history. The first recorded official use of the term *kaigo* is found in an 1892 directive establishing the practice of assistance

17 The Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare statistical data.

to war veterans who became permanently disabled as a result of injuries sustained on duty. In the 1950s the term sporadically appeared in local and national regulations referring to support for the elderly, people with disabilities, and the sick, when *kaigo* and nursing assistance began to be offered at people's homes. During that time, the term referred to the support of a family in their role of looking after a person who was entitled to public benefits based on the degree of their disability. It was officially acknowledged as a 'human' (*jinteki*) or 'personal' (*taijin*) service focused on an individual rather than on a family with the promulgation of the Elderly Welfare Law in 1963. The law, responding to calls for 'taking measures to provide separate accommodation in order to efficiently provide appropriate treatment to the elderly who need daily *kaigo* due to their considerable mental or physical deficiencies' (*Kaigo no Kiso* 2011:3) became a basis for establishment of specialised care homes for the elderly (*cf.* Wu 2004).

At that time, the elderly in such homes were looked after by 'dormitory mothers' (*ryōbo*) who had no professional training, and it was not until 1987 that the need for specialised knowledge and skills to perform elderly care was codified in a law establishing the profession of caregiver, *kaigofukushishi*. Despite the introduction of this officially recognised qualification, the question to what extent the work or services offered by the caregivers actually required professional knowledge and skills remained. As mentioned earlier, the majority of people employed in care institutions at the time of this research did not possess the formal qualification, but were able to perform the same range of duties as those who did. At the same time, many people care for their elderly at home, either by choice or by force of circumstances, without any previous training, and the care they offer to their relatives is also referred to as *kaigo*, the supposed domain of the certified *kaigofukushishi*. The definition of *kaigo* and therefore of the responsibilities to be performed by its practitioners is also confounded by the practical overlaps of tasks between *kaigo* and nursing.

Kaigo—*care beyond nursing?*

It is said that the very term *kaigo* was constructed through a combination of the

term *kango*, nursing, either with *kaihō*, attending to somebody, taking care of somebody, or with *kaijo*, support, assistance. Central to the work of Japanese caregivers, *kaigo*, although morphologically tracing its roots to nursing, did not emerge from within this latter profession. The similarity of the tasks performed continues to blur the boundaries between the two, despite efforts in both camps to clearly define their respective domains. Although more readily recognised as possessing professional (medical) skills and knowledge, in Japan nurses often perform the same tasks as caregivers. This is particularly the case in the care homes for the elderly, where the boundaries, even if formally set, are often ignored when it comes to, for example, administering medicines, preparing a care plan for an elderly individual, or attending to the physiological needs of the elderly. With all the necessary information already written down by doctors for everyone to access, the tacit understanding is that regardless of one's professional background, anyone is, for example, able to match the information in a notebook with the elderly's name and the medicines they require. Similarly, the bodily care associated with 'tidying' (Twigg 2000b:407), which is more readily associated with the responsibilities of caregivers, is commonly required of nurses as well, even in hospitals. A former nurse engaged in lobbying for improvements to the EPA acceptance programme was indeed worried about the impact this conflation would have on the Indonesian nurses. She feared that they would be disappointed once they found out that they would have to change patients' diapers.

Both *kaigo* and *kango*, nursing, are considered vocations (from Jpn.: *shimei*). This means that regardless of professional training one is expected to apply at work not only one's educated knowledge but also one's personal qualities. In other words, vocation requires one to possess not only training, but a particular kind of human or social capital as well. While in nursing compassion for patients has been an integral part of the professionalised vocation, the interaction between a nurse and a patient is in a sense limited to the cause of a patient requiring nursing care either in a temporal or practical sense (see Gubrium 1975:48-49; Wu 2004:107). A care worker, on the other hand, is expected to provide support (*kaijo*) regardless of the source of the need

for the support, and beyond the immediate needs stemming from the particular condition requiring nursing (*kaihō*). *Kaigo* is imbued with the ideas expressed in the concept of quality of life, which began to be directly linked to the provision of care in the 1960s in Japan. This is not to say that *kango*, nursing, is not concerned with the general well-being of patients, or that nurses do not provide wholesome emotional support alongside their more specialised, medical care. The shorter temporal engagement with patients is also particularly hard to argue as a distinguishing factor in eldercare homes, where both nurses and caregivers (and other care workers) provide the same care to the elderly on an everyday basis. In general, however, *kaigo* seems to be imagined as encompassing all areas of an individual's life to a greater degree than *kango*, aiming at improving or maintaining the highest possible quality of life of the elderly, sick, or people with disabilities regardless of and beyond their physical or mental incapacitation. This requirement of wholesomeness imbued in *kaigo*, and its lack of direct connection to a medical condition of those requiring support, contributes to the ambiguity of the definition of *kaigo* and therefore to the definition of the scope of tasks to be performed by *kaigofukushishi* but not by others. This usually means that the *kaigo* personnel attend to any and all bodily functions in order to support not only the physical but also the mental well-being of the cared-for. Julia Twigg (2000b) provides an astute description of the ideas behind the distinctions between medicalised and non-medical engagements with the cared-for body. It is worth quoting at length. Twigg writes:

> Though medicine deals with the body, it does so in a particular and circumscribed way, constructing it in terms of the object body of science, distant and depersonalised (Lawler 1997). Medical practice is presented in such a way as to limit involvement in the body, and professional status is marked out in terms of distance from the bodily. Doctors perform relatively little direct bodywork and, where they do, it is largely confined to the high-status activity of diagnosis, or is mediated by high-tech machines. Where it is part of treatment (with the exception of the elite virtuosi activity of surgery), it is often delivered by lesser

practitioners like physiotherapists or nurses. Nursing ironically shares many of these ambivalences. Though bodywork is at the heart of nursing, it has an uncertain status. Nursing is organised hierarchically so that, as staff progress, they move away from the basic bodywork of bedpans and sponge baths towards high-tech, skilled interventions; progressing from dirty work on bodies to clean work on machines. Dunlop (1986) argues that the recent emphasis on psychological dimensions of the patient and indeed the whole educational project, with its tendency to academicise nursing, represents a further flight from the bodily in pursuit of higher status forms of knowledge and practice. (389–390)

Care workers such as the EPA candidates are at the end of this chain of shifting the work on the body through various distancing techniques (Dyer *et al.* 2008; *cf.* Douglas 1966; Jervis 2001; Wolkowitz 2006) down the hierarchy of professions. In Indonesia, too, the medicalised side of care is delegated to nurses, and the bodily tasks associated with the given medical condition are attended to by family members, even if the patient is in a hospital. The apparent scarcity of explanation of what would be expected of the EPA Indonesians as *kaigofukushishi* candidates in Japan caused disillusionment in some of the candidates to whom I talked. Iffah started looking for nursing learning materials on the Internet in order to keep up with the latest developments in the field. For several months after her training began, she did not tell her father what she was actually doing and kept him believing that she was developing her nursing skills, feeling uneasy or even *malu*, ashamed, of what she was doing in Japan (see Lindquist 2009). In Indonesia when I met two of Iffah's friends coming to work in the same institution as her, I asked them how they imagined their future work in Japan. They answered that it would be just talking to the elderly. When I prompted them for a more elaborated answer, they added that there might be some help with eating involved, too. Iffah did not seem to have conveyed any information about the more challenging, 'dirty' aspects of body work involved in caring for the elderly. When back in Japan I asked Iffah why she did not tell her friends the whole truth about the kind of work they were going to embark on, she replied

that she did not want to discourage them. Although once in the care institutions my Indonesian informants wanted, in general, to learn how to provide care to the elderly, the taste of disappointment remained. Two female candidates based in central Japan enjoyed their work and the people they worked with, but felt that they were 'lied to' (from Ind.: *dibohongi*) during the recruitment process about what being a caregiver candidate entailed, and what their conditions of employment would be.

The expectations and disappointments of the Indonesian EPA candidates point to the saliency of the organisation of their move to Japan in the experiences of the sojourn. They embarked on a pre-organised scheme which, run by the government, seemingly guaranteed a certain level of income and a particular kind of employment. Had it not been an officially organised enterprise, their expectations about its outcome might have been more provisory and therefore less susceptible to disappointment, and most likely the individuals who grasped the sudden opportunity would not have decided to travel to Japan (or to any other country) in search of work, either. The majority of my informants expected to obtain 'respectable' employment in Indonesia anyway, and the decision to go to Japan was based on the promising and seemingly guaranteed conditions of the EPA employment. Faced with a different reality to what they expected, it was relatively easy for the candidates to resign from participation in the programme, especially because the majority of the costs associated with their deployment were covered by the accepting institutions, not by themselves or their families. Were they to return, the loss of incurred costs would not be theirs. Several of the candidates, although none of my informants, chose to return to Indonesia, something to which I return in a later chapter on the Indonesians' relationships with their employers.

However, to say that their arrival in Japan was for my friends a chain of disappointments would be foreclosing the importance of other sources of motivation which also contributed to their choice. The closing section of this chapter shows how 'dreams' (Mahler 1995) about Japan featured in the Indonesians' decisions to migrate and provides the first glimpse into whether or not these dreams were met within the framework of the EPA acceptance.

Japanese dreaming

Sarah J. Mahler (1995) in *American Dreaming: Immigrant Life on the Margins*, in which she focuses on the experiences of undocumented Salvadoran and South American immigrants living in Manhattan, shows how the vision of migrant life in the United States is constructed by the narratives of those who have already been there and by media representations. Both of these channels, Mahler argues, produce 'unrealistic dreams' (*ibid.*:84), especially given the fact that even 'if the information does arrive in a pure state, people do not accept the bald truth' (*ibid.*). A similar observation is made by Johan A. Lindquist (2009) about the information fed back to prospective migrants who contemplated searching for work on the 'fantasy island' of Batam in Indonesia. Indeed, Iffah's refusal to disclose to her friends the details of the job in which they were coming to engage in Japan was an act of such illusory construction. When the first batch of the Indonesian EPA candidates were deciding to go to Japan in 2008, they had no obvious predecessors, however (perhaps with the exception of two candidates who I know had siblings working or studying in Japan; none of them, however, was employed in care provision, and hence they could not reflect on this particular environment). It was therefore the more diffused image of Japan on which the EPA candidates relied.

One weekend in November 2008, together with my husband I was sitting on a sturdy wooden bench in the middle of a spacious concrete balcony surrounded by an Indonesian family. We had just finished playing several rounds of card games. Although we had just met, we started playing without any extensive introductions and during the game nothing more than comments about how to play were exchanged. Only once our zeal for the game died out did we begin investigating each other's stories. We all had come to this seaside hotel for a short break, but while for my husband and I it was just a weekend away from Yogyakarta where I was taking an intensive course in the Indonesian language, for the family it was the only holiday they could afford to spend together each year. Inevitably perhaps, our conversation took us to explore where we all came from and where we were heading, two days from that point in time, as well as in our lives. Poland, my country of origin, did not

feature prominently in the imagination of the family members, New Zealand, my husband's native land, appeared somewhat more sharply, but Great Britain, where we both conceded to have settled down for the time being, was a prominent representative of the affluent Europe. None of the family members had been to any European country, but they all had heard stories, seen films, or watched the news conveying images of Europe on which they could build their imaginations. A distant relative had actually left for *Belanda*, the Netherlands, in search of work.

I protested against being thought of as leading an affluent life back in London, although we agreed that with the exchange rate between the British pound and the Indonesian rupiah, my husband and I were in a better financial position while in Indonesia than many of the Indonesians working there and earning standard Indonesian salaries (for example, my Indonesian language teacher was earning one million rupiah a month, an equivalent of around 60 pounds sterling; this was, however, a very low salary, albeit one not putting a person below the poverty line at the time). The crux of our conversation about money that is most relevant here was, however, the argument presented by one of the men that the difference between us was not just the amount of disposable income at home, but that a trip like ours from Britain to Indonesia in a reversed direction was simply out of their financial reach. Moving from one coast of Java to the other was the ultimate excursion the family could imagine possible for themselves, as they were acutely aware of the insurmountable financial limitations that living in Indonesia with an average salary imposed on them. The price of travel between Indonesia and Europe would be the same for them as it was for my husband and me, despite the differences in the purchasing power of our respective salaries on the global market. No matter how much they worked, they did not expect to be able to ever venture to Europe. It was not just the cost of the flight but also the extremely low exchange value of the Indonesian rupiah which would have made a holiday in Europe prohibitively expensive, especially if they were to travel as a family.

It felt uneasy to answer the next question about where we were heading after my language course was over. I was coming from an affluent Europe and

going to another fairly wealthy country, merely stopping in Indonesia on my way there. From the reaction to my reply, it seemed that Japan, although geographically much closer than Europe, felt even less attainable. Although, like Indonesia, an Asian country, Japan was an entirely different world (from Ind. *dunia yang sama sekali berbeda*), the family would say. They knew Japanese cars, which they thought were good and which indeed were plentiful in the Indonesian streets. They imagined Japan as a country of advanced technology and prosperous economy, signs of which they could see around them, as well, in the form of various kinds of electronic equipment or through the proliferation of Japanese restaurants in the shopping malls of bigger Indonesian cities. Perhaps it was the combination of Japan's comparative geographical proximity and presence in the mundane artefacts with its simultaneous inaccessibility that made it seem even more elusive than the more geographically distant but not so mundanely present Europe. Merely hinting at its own existence somewhere out there through everyday objects, Japan was like an invisible ghost. Leaving only traces of its presence, it seemed even more of a mythical land to which one was even less likely to go than the unreachable yet somehow more real Europe.

This image of Japan as a kind of mythical promised land was shared by my informants. Two Indonesian care workers from the second batch of the EPA acceptance told me in January 2010 that they had chosen Japan as their destination because it was so inaccessible: 'usually [outside of a programme such as EPA] it is impossible to go [there], only in dreams' (from Ind. *biasanya mustahil pergi kesana, hanya bisa dalam mimpi*). This did not mean that it was easy to get through the selection process and beat other candidates for acceptance to the programme. As one of the young women put it, she chose to come to Japan because there were so many people who went to the Arab countries for work and so few to Japan. With the 'thousands' of people who applied for the EPA programme, she felt it would really be 'something' if she were to find herself among the selected candidates. That she and her colleagues succeeded meant that their achievement would be valued even more highly on their return to Indonesia and should guarantee far better career prospects in

comparison to those who went to work in other, more common emigration destinations, such as the Middle East or even Canada or Australia. The image of Japan as technologically superior to all the other countries and regions the two young women mentioned, and the perception of Japan as leading in *modernisasi*, modernisation, were to aid the value of their work experience and further elevate them above an average *TKI*, *tenaga kerja Indonesia*, Indonesian (migrant) worker.

Admired from afar, Japan was also, not least of all, the homeland of the locally well-known comic book and anime character *Doraemon*, a cat-like figure with supernatural powers. A wide selection of various series of the comic book translated into Indonesian were commonly available in book stores and garments with *Doraemon*'s likeness could be found on clothing bazaars when I visited Indonesia in 2008 and later in 2009. One of my teachers in the language school in Yogyakarta asked me to send her a few copies of the comic book in the original from Japan. She already had a collection in Indonesian and harboured a wish to one day learn Japanese, perhaps with the help of the comic book. When a colleague of Iffah, my female informant, presented her with one of the *Doraemon* soft toys he had received in large numbers on the occasion of his marriage, he made Iffah's day. The large size of the toy only added to the joy. The friendly-looking blue-and-white figure received a central position in Iffah's small apartment and the information about her new acquisition spread rapidly among other candidates. When, shortly after this, Iffah found out that her older sister was in hospital, the large *Doraemon* was an obvious choice for a present which she would take with her during a planned visit to Indonesia two months later. With *Doraemon*, Iffah received not just a toy. She received a physically tangible proof of her presence in Japan. She probably would not have bought the toy for herself, and if she did, it would not have been of such a large size (as the size came with an equally ample price tag). A symbol of the world of which she knew but never expected to be a part materialised in her hands and she *was* in this world: the *Doraemon* dotted the *i*s and crossed the *t*s for her. 'Iffah was there', the toy seemed to be saying when she delivered it to her sister. Iffah and her EPA friends went to Japan not only to gain professional

experience or for purely financial reasons, but also to enjoy this distant and usually inaccessible but somehow familiar place.

In Okushima Mika's edited volume *Indonesian Community of Japan* (Okushima 2009), Fukihara Yutaka notes that despite a significant increase since 1998 in the Japanese language as the second or third, after English, most popular foreign language taught in Indonesia, there remained very limited options for finding employment using it. This is notwithstanding the close political and economic links between the two countries. Similarly, despite Indonesia hosting the greatest number of Japanese learners in Southeast Asia (about 85,000 in 2003), the opportunities for them to go to work or to study in Japan were still limited to short-term sojourns under such schemes as those run by the Japan International Training Cooperation Organisation (JITCO) under which Indonesian and other nationals could undergo on-the-job training in various areas of Japanese industry (Fukihara 2009:69–84). The contrast between the popularity of things Japanese and the widely spread desire, or at least aspiration, to visit Japan and the comparatively low probability of this ever happening seemed to have created a phantasmagoric image of the country.

This section shows, therefore, how the EPA acceptance programme provided a path to enter a country which not only promised financial and professional bounty, but also, due to its inaccessibility, conferred a kind of status on a person who managed to go there. Given the frustrations caused by the disappointments discussed earlier, these other incentives of going to Japan were an important source of consolation for the candidates. Admittedly, the way the EPA programme was structured served to maintain, at least initially, this dream-like vision of Japan.

Introduction to life in Japan

For the majority of the candidates, their arrival in Japan was their first ever experience of a country other than Indonesia, and the employment which followed was to become their first 'proper' job. Only one among the candidates who later became my main informants, Irdina, a 32-year-old mother of two, had 12 years' worth of work experience as a nurse in Indonesia. She decided to

apply as a care worker hoping that it would be a more certain way to be selected. The age of the group I met ranged between 21 and 35 years with the majority of candidates being in their early or mid twenties. This was representative of the entire batch of the 104 caregiver candidates, too.[18] During the first EPA intake the number of men and women among those who arrived in Japan was more or less even, and that was also the case in a language centre where I met my future informants.[19] The vast majority of the candidates declared to be Muslim, and in the training centre I visited, as well, out of 56 candidates only four were Christian. Perhaps due to the small size of the group, there were no divisions between the candidates along the lines of their ethnic or religious affiliations (see Kassim 1986).

As explained earlier, before arriving at their respective institutions of employment, the Indonesian caregiver candidates spent six months in language training. At the time of my first visit to one of the centres towards the end of the introductory training for the first EPA group in early January 2009, the 56 caregiver candidates living and studying there were already well accommodated to their environment. They moved around the complex with the familiarity of people who managed to appropriate its spaces through various experiences which had taken place there. The candidates' weekdays were organised around the Japanese classes lasting from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. with an hour and a half break for lunch, which some of them used also for prayers. The late afternoons and evenings were meant to be devoted to self-study while utilising the computer laboratory and materials to be found in the adjacent library. When during my visit to the centre I was given 15 minutes to talk to a group of candidates during their Japanese speaking class, I asked what they were doing during their free time at the centre. The responses I received were univocal. They would either go together to a nearby shopping mall, or would stay at the centre because there were 'enough Indonesians there'.

The training centre provided somewhat sterile surroundings where the Indonesian candidates lived in a community of Japanese language learners and

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18 The nurse candidates were in general slightly older.
19 This proportion has changed to the advantage of women in the consequent rounds of the programme in response to the demand of the Japanese accepting institutions.

did not really need to use the Japanese language to go about their daily lives; neither did they need to know how to navigate in the outside (Japanese) world. They were enjoying their time in Japan, but in the intimate Indonesian space of the training centre. Situated next to a narrow strip of pebble beach in Osaka Bay in one of the suburban areas of the metropolis, the training centre had been teaching the Japanese language to foreigners since 1997. Accommodated in a purpose-built hotel-like 18-storey building complete with a library, computer laboratory, and karaoke room, with its roller-blind shaded glass wall forming cosy lounges and a large refectory overlooking the bay, it presented itself as a comfortable place to live and study. In the centre's refectory the daily menu was displayed in the form of photographs accompanied by cartoon-like images of animals depicting what meat was used as a component of a given dish. Alongside the pictures each meal carried a description translated into Indonesian as well. Every day there was a selection which allowed the Muslim Indonesian candidates to choose food not containing pork or its derivatives. During my tour of the centre, guided by a member of staff, I was shown two spaces specially selected for the purpose of prayer. They were small in size, empty tatami rooms, with arrows glued to the ceiling in one of the corners pointing in the direction of Mecca. The Indonesian candidates enjoyed their time spent in very agreeable conditions, without responsibilities other than attending the classes. Pocket money was already entering their bank accounts (set up on their behalf), food was provided by the refectory, and trips and other activities were organised by the centre's staff. All in all, the experience of the young Indonesians in this training centre seemed to be more reminiscent of a group package holiday rather than that of the training of migrant workers-to-be. Thanks to this happy-go-lucky prelude to their deployment to the accepting institutions, the Indonesians' tourist-like excitement about being in Japan did not die out, although the imminent separation and metamorphosis from semi-tourists into workers with real responsibilities did produce anxiety, arising especially from the fear of not being able to communicate in Japanese and the expected loneliness.

The initial comforts of the training centre allowed my informants to enjoy Japan as they imagined it. The freshness of experience for those for whom these first six months in Japan opened their careers and initiated independent lives added to the bustling excitement among the candidates when I met them in the training centre. Such an initially hospitable environment, where there was no need to pay much attention to the various impediments to everyday life which migrant workers arriving in a foreign country on their own account experience, increased the candidates' expectations towards what was still ahead of them in Japan. This was so even if thinking of the future was linked to the prospect of being separated from the group of friends which formed during the training. The imagined Japan of *Doraemon* and *modernisasi* presented itself as a hospitable place in these first months of the candidates' Japanese sojourn. When it later turned out to be less perfect than expected, the friendly group, which extended beyond the EPA candidates, became a safety-net, especially when their social life in the accepting institutions was not going smoothly. As I will show later, the relationships forged during training also played an important part in negotiations in which the Indonesians engaged, such as when an apartment did not feel suitable, when the candidates found themselves living on their own in an isolated village, or indeed when not all of the stated provisions of the EPA programme were granted or were what they were expected to be.

Chapter conclusions

What should be taken away from this chapter as a whole is the contention that looking at the EPA acceptance as a case study of migratory movements bringing about multicultural coexistence suggests the importance of paying attention to the ways the structural conditions not only regulate the very flow of people, but also influence the perceptions, motivations, expectations, and embedding of the migrant workers in the countries of destination. This can happen, for example, through promoting or precluding formation of relationships between the migrants. Also, even if unintended, the programme implementation may lead to selecting individuals of certain characteristics

which, in turn, will affect their orientation towards the migratory experience. As highlighted in the discussion of the genealogy of the EPA acceptance, the mode of opening the labour market to foreign workers can also affect the local discourses surrounding immigration. As I show in later parts of this thesis, a combination of these discourses and the migrant workers' orientation towards their experiences may affect the way the cross-cultural encounters are constructed.

Before entering the eldercare institutions to investigate the details of these encounters at a close range, the following chapter pauses on 'intimacy', the idea that helped me organise the ethnographic data into a narrative linking different levels of investigations: the national, the interpersonal, and the bodily. Focus on intimacy shifts the attention to the more personal side of migratory experience and therefore complements the more structural inclination of this chapter.

Chapter Two

Nation, culture and intimacy

When a Polish friend visited me in Japan during my field research, I asked him to bring a few boxes of various Polish sweets. I wanted to use them as a treat for the range of individuals involved in my project in the care homes for the elderly, my main research sites. In one of the institutions I opened a box of *ptasie mleczko*, marshmallow-like sweets covered in chocolate, and placed it on a table in a nurse station where everyone usually gathered for briefings and to eat their lunch. Towards the end of my lunch break, I offered one of the sweets to a Japanese female member of staff who had just entered the room. As soon as she bit into a piece, she commented that it 'tastes like a foreigner' (from Jpn.: *gaijin no aji o shiteru*) in a manner that made me think she found the sweet barely palatable. Although a matter of an individual taste, appreciation of different flavours is a question of familiarity as well. Being familiar with implies being able to predict the sensation one is to experience when exposed to that which is familiar. When the outcome is not what was expected, the sensation may be undesirable, coming with discomfort, confusion, uncertainty, or simply an unappreciated taste in the mouth, as seemed to be the case for the young Japanese woman who tasted her first Polish sweets.

Building on these propositions, this chapter traces the connection between the ideas of the national and bodily intimacies. The choice of care provision as the setting for observation of national ideas rendered making this connection unavoidable. In fact, one of the leading questions of this thesis, which asks whether it mattered that the Indonesian candidates arrived in Japan to attend to intimate needs of the Japanese elderly, probes exactly this connection. Using examples from the field research as well as already existing materials on

Japanese constructions of foreignness, I rewrite the mechanisms of constructing national identities in the language of intimacy. This exercise aims to suggest that the notion of intimacy can be a useful operating tool in understanding people's interactions since the notion's composite nature allows for more flexibility than such ideas as otherness or difference. In fact, intimacy allows me to foreground what experiencing the other and its differences is actually about. In the process of the exercise, this chapter introduces some general aspects of the Japanese and Indonesian perceptions on their mutual encounters. While the previous chapter showed how the expectations, later experiences, and discourses surrounding the Economic Partnership Agreement were shaped by the very provenance and structure of the deal, here, complementing this picture, is a look at the kind of imaginations which were also posed to shape the human experience of the programme. Considerations contained here will later serve the contextualisation of the interpersonal relationships the Indonesian candidates forged within the accepting institutions. They will also help to account for the media discourses surrounding the EPA programme as discussed in Chapter Five.

Care work as intimate labour

Care work as a profession, or a professionalised vocation, has emerged from the domestic domain, where it was primarily the role of women to attend to other members of the family, the children, the unwell, and the elderly. As a function of familial life, care work continues to carry strong associations with emotional attachment between the individuals involved in the relation of care. Such links underlie the distinction identified by Tronto (2001) between 'caring about' and 'caring for', where the former points to emotional and intellectual practices and the latter to the practical or physical actions taken for or on the other person (Tronto 1993; Williams 2001). This distinction suggests the possibility of one practice occurring independently of the other. With more women taking up paid employment in the market economy, the relations formerly imagined as domestic and based on an emotional bond had to be transferred and transformed into relationships not solely between familiar

family members but also between strangers. In such a context, the possibility of 'authentic' care—that is, combining caring about and caring for someone—has been denied since it has been argued that care, if formalised, may become merely 'substitutive services' (Graham 1983), especially if its provision is exchanged for money. Therefore care work has been understood in 'either-or' terms as labour and as love (Finch & Groves 1983; Graham 1991; Folbre & Nelson 2000), denying the claims to intimacy of care work done in exchange for money. In this context, intimacy has been understood as built on the basis of emotional attachment. This emotion-based intimacy of care has been particularly stressed in relation to care for elderly family members since, as Simoni and Trifiletti (2004) argue within an Italian context, attending to the elderly is an 'intergenerational pact' in which the character of exchange takes the form of 'delayed reciprocity' in a 'chain of obligations' (Fine & Glendinning 2005:612 in Huang *et al*. 2012). As a duty or obligation among family members (Qureshi 1996), intimacy of care cannot be easily conferred upon a hired stranger.

However, Viviana A. Zelizer, focusing on 'sexually tinged relations' (2000:821) as based on intimacy, dismisses the 'hostile worlds' approach to the (in)commesurability of intimacy and money transfers. She proposes to look at the two as coexisting in a variety of social contexts and relationships (*cf.* Zelizer 2005). Similarly, reflecting on the contemporary shift towards commercialisation of the personal and intimate relationships, particularly those linked to the domestic sphere as a (traditional) locus of reproductive labour, Nicole Constable (2009) defines intimate relations in the following way:

> The term intimate relations refers ... to social relationships that are—or give the impression of being—physically and/or emotionally close, personal, sexually intimate, private, caring, or loving. Such relationships are not necessarily associated with or limited to the domestic sphere, but discourses about intimacy are often intertwined with ideas about gender and domesticity, gifts as opposed to markets. In many cases, intimate relations are related to reproductive labor or care work in the broadest sense including, most

notably, child care, nursing, and hospice care (Hochschild 1983, Russ 2005) and also to entertainment such as stripping, erotic dancing, hostessing, and other types of sex work. (Constable 2009:50)

For Zelizer and for Constable it is, therefore, possible to think about intimate relations not in opposition to the economic exchange outside of the family realm, but in relation to it. Such commensurability makes it possible to talk about 'intimate labours' (Parreñas & Boris 2010) which '[entail] touch, whether of children or customers; bodily or emotional closeness or personal familiarity, such as sexual intercourse and bathing another; or close observation of another and knowledge of personal information, such as watching elderly people or advising trainees' (Parreñas & Boris 2010:2). Julia Twigg (2000a) stresses the importance of skin-to-skin contact and touch in the 'body work' of care and the construction of 'bounded intimacy' between the carer and the cared-for, similarly, Japanese studies highlights the achieving of 'intimacy through touch', or *skinship* (Tahhan 2010; *cf.* Clark 1994; Ben-Ari 1997; Rothbaum *et al.* 2000; Lebra 2004). The intimate labour of care, also referred to as 'emotional work' (Lee-Treweek 1996) or 'affective labour' (Lopez 2012), is therefore predicated on touch, but also incorporates emotional attachment (or its appearance), and eldercare in particular connotes intergenerational obligations. The Indonesian care workers who arrived to care for (and care about) the Japanese elderly were therefore invited, or expected, to partake in such bodily and emotional intimacies laden with familial values. This is particularly true in Japan where, despite ongoing changes, the ideals of filial piety remain powerful (Wu 2004; *cf.* Croll 2008).

Before moving on, one note on terminology is needed here. Although the terms introduced above encompass a range of work types, from sexual services through eldercare to manicure, I consider them interchangeable as referring to the kind of work which requires the ability to combine the care-about and care-for aspects of care work. I also do not, in general, differentiate between work and labour, although in my usage of the terms I maintain the nuance of labour as being a subject of economic exchange, a fictitious commodity (Polanyi 1944), work, on the other hand, being the very action performed, which may

not necessarily be labour.

Intergenerational care and intra-national trust

One of the objections to accepting foreign workers to care for the Japanese elderly was that Japanese people were more suitable as carers because they were indebted and grateful to their elderly for their war efforts. Such discourse pointed to the idea of reciprocity imposing a sense of transgenerational obligation and repayment on those who belonged to the same nation. The EPA Indonesians as outsiders who arrived to care for the Japanese elderly were not implicated in this transgenerational pact (Simoni & Trifiletti 2004), and therefore were considered less obliged to commit to the provision of care.

In 2005, a nurse with 17 years of professional experience, born in Japan to a Japanese mother (who later renounced her nationality) and a Korean father, heard the Supreme Court barring her from sitting an examination which would qualify her to be promoted, or appointed to a managerial position. She was a *Zainichi*, a permanent resident who had lived in Japan all her life (more on the *Zainichi* below). The 2005 court ruling, upholding a 1994 decision of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government prohibiting the nurse from taking the exam despite her professional credentials, referenced the Japanese nationality clause as a condition for becoming a civil servant in Japan. The condition that 'Japanese nationality is required for civil servants who participate in the exercise of public power or in public decision-making' (Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs)[20] is stipulated in the Second Periodic Report by the Government of Japan under Articles 16 and 17 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. The specific application of this criterion is left to the discretion of the local governments, which can decide where the cut-off limit is for the amount of power available, or allowed, to a non-Japanese national. Commenting on the outcome of the *Zainichi* Korean nurse's case, the Tokyo Governor Ishihara Shintarō was quoted as saying, 'what if a decision about the life or death of a critically ill patient has to be

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20 Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
   Internet URL: http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/human/econo_rep2/general.html.

made. How can we trust a foreign nurse?' (McNeill 2005). Never mind that technically such a decision would have to be made by a doctor, not a nurse, the message of the comment was that the Japanese cannot trust foreigners. The still persisting denial of voting rights to *Zainichi* Korean permanent residents could also be interpreted as demonstrating the lack of trust of non-Japanese. Such questioning of the loyalty of people not of a given state, or not of a given nationality, is codified in many if not most countries' regulations concerning appointment of civil servants. In the United Kingdom, for example, despite exemptions granted to nationals of the Republic of Ireland, the Commonwealth, the European Economic Area, Switzerland, and Turkey only a UK national is eligible to apply for so-called reserved posts (Cabinet Office 2007).[21] The latter, 'due to the sensitive nature of the work, require special allegiance to the Crown' and are primarily positions within the security and intelligence services (Cabinet Office 2007).[22] In comparison with the regulations in the United Kingdom, the Japanese definition of who can become a civil servant and at what level of authority is less rigidly defined and is therefore more liable to individual interpretation and broad application. The following chapter shows, among other things, how such lack of trust played out in the working experiences of the Indonesian care workers.

Distrust based on one's belonging to a perceivably non-Japanese category directly affected the experiences of a *Zainichi* Korean nurse aspiring to move her career beyond direct nursing tasks. I see the positioning of the EPA Indonesians as less suitable to care for the elderly because they were not Japanese as based on similar ideas—that is, of trust and reciprocity. What is important in intimate relationships, either among co-nationals or on an interpersonal level, is the implication of individuals in a relationship in which one is not only endowed with certain rights unavailable to others, but also presumed to have certain obligations towards the intimates. To quote Georg

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21 Certain additional conditions apply to these latter groups, such as the length and type of employment in the UK for the Turkish nationals. Internet URL: http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/nationality-rules.pdf.
22 UK nationality is defined as including British citizens, British subjects under Part IV of the British Nationality Act 1981 having the right of abode in the United Kingdom, and British Overseas Territories citizens. Internet URL: http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/nationality-rules.pdf.

Simmel (1950), 'trust is one of the most important synthetic forces within society' (1950:326). This importance resides in the need for reciprocity, which connects different social actors and institutions across time and space.

People are not always guided in their actions by calculated assumptions or trust in the compensation for their contributions to society; neither are they inclined to think of their own actions in terms of such an altruistic contribution. However, trust in reciprocal benefits underpins the majority, if not all, of the social relations and transactions in modern society, from relying on a doctor's diagnosis or the state paying out one's pension when the time arrives to the expectation that the meal served in a restaurant has not been poisoned. That the decisions made by the *Zainichi* nurse whose case was described earlier were not to be trusted was based on the perception of her as an outsider from the Japanese national community of reciprocal obligations, as was the case with the Indonesian EPA workers. The question arises of how trust, and therefore reciprocity, comes to be presumed of those considered to be co-nationals.

Georg Simmel writes that 'the person who knows completely need not trust; while the person who knows nothing can, on no rational grounds, afford even confidence' (Simmel 1950:318). Erik Ringmar (1998), in his discussion of the connection between nationalism and intimacy, presents both nationalism and democracy as built on the same premise of intimacy between members of a given population. He writes: 'if intimacy is the standard by which public life is to be measured, then intimacy is possible only between some. There can be no "we" among strangers since it is difficult to identify with people very different from ourselves' (Ringmar 1998:545). The ability to imagine others as sharing certain characteristics, such as beliefs, values, and culture, creates also, according to Benedict Anderson (1983), a sense of unity among people who might have never met. Such familiarity, or intimacy, is therefore presumed, or taken as inherent, among co-nationals and based on, as Ringmar (1998) notes, the imagination of the others as being similar to the imagining individual. The presumed knowledge underlying the sense of intimacy and trust is therefore based on the knowledge of the self.

Conditions of likeness

How, therefore, is this idea of likeness constructed in Japan? This section shows that not only perceptions of shared culture or values but also bodily appearances are crucial in this construction. Although not uniquely there, the similarity of co-nationals in Japan is inscribed in the conflation of the ideas about cultural affinity and shared ethnic origins. Japanese nationality law states that a person is of Japanese nationality if born to parents of whom at least one was a Japanese national at the time of the child's birth. This rule applies also to children born outside of the Japanese state borders, although an additional application needs to be filed by the parents for the child to be (semi-)automatically granted nationality. Provided that one fulfils certain conditions of residency and 'upright conduct', it is also possible to become a naturalised Japanese national. In such an event, one needs to relinquish any other nationality previously held. In practice, this last requirement is not strictly enforced and many 'naturalised' persons keep their original passports as well. Whether a person is popularly recognised as Japanese if born of parents of whom only one was Japanese, or if a person was 'naturalised' into a Japanese, is a different matter.

Civic inclusion in a nation does not necessarily convey the recognition of shared sociality and cultural engagement. Representation of national belonging in terms of descent, as codified in the Japanese nationality law, suggests the importance of the idiom of blood in establishing one's Japaneseness. The validity of relatedness through blood and its causative role in determining an individual's cultural or social familiarity is contained in the idea of race, which has been shown to converge with notions of ethnicity, culture, and nation in Japan (Lie 2001; *cf.* Yoshino 1992; Weiner 1997; Oguma 2002[1995]; Befu & McVeigh 2004:45).

Usually translated into Japanese as *jinshu*, race is closely intertwined with the ideas of a Japanese ethnos or ethnic group–ethnicity (*Nihon minzoku – minzoku-sei)*, Japanese nation–nationality (*Nihon kokumin – kokumin-sei)*, and Japanese culture (Nihon *bunka)* to the extent that the notions often are used interchangeably. Such nearly total conflation of the terms is epitomised in the

expression *Yamato minzoku*, usually translated as Japanese race, where *Yamato* refers to the ancient province associated with the origins of the Japanese nation and the unique, indomitable Japanese spirit (as in the expression *Yamoto damashi*, bearing nationalistic associations). Much like the German Volk, the Japanese *minzoku* is constituted not only through descent, but also encompasses language, history, and religion associated with ethnicity (Yoshino 1992:25; *cf.* Mandel 2008 for discussion of the German case). Full Japaneseness is therefore possible only when descent, culture, and nationality can be simultaneously attributed to a person. Although in view of an increasing number of foreigners settling in Japan, the need for dissociation of *nihon minzoku* (Japanese ethnic group) from *nihon kokumin* (Japanese nation) has already been argued (Yamawaki 2002), there remains a powerful association between descent, culture, and national belonging. The history of the representation and social and legal position of people of Japanese descent, the *Nikkeijin*, and of the permanent residents of predominantly Korean and Chinese origins in Japan illustrates how such conflation works to construct individuals and groups as either similar and therefore sharing in cultural commonalities, or different and unfamiliar.

Descent without culture: the Brazilian *Nikkeijin* and *kikokushijo*

In 1990 the Japanese government amended The Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, commonly known as the Immigration Act, with the intention of opening the Japanese labour market to a selected group of foreign workers. The Japanese economic boom of the late 1980s created a surplus of work opportunities which were not filled by the native workers. Prior to 1990 foreign workers were arriving from South Asian countries, such as Pakistan and Iran, with which Japan had signed a visa exemption agreement, Bangladesh, and from countries closer to Japan, such as China, Taiwan, and Thailand, some of them undocumented. After the visa agreement with Pakistan had been rescinded and the issuing of visas for nationals of other sending countries had been severely restricted in 1989, the 1990 amendment opened the Japanese door to workers able to replace the halted groups (Linger 2001).

According to the Immigration Act, any person of Japanese descent down to the third generation, *Nikkeijin*, could arrive in Japan and take up employment virtually without any restrictions. The legislation was primarily aimed at the largest population of Japanese living outside of Japan, in Brazil, whose first cohorts arrived there at the beginning of the twentieth century to supply Brazil's plantation labour force.

The effective abolition of labour migration of people not of Japanese descent and their substitution with overseas 'Japanese by birth', the *Nikkeijin*, reflected the preference for consanguineous people. The Chinese character *kei* in *Nikkeijin*, also used in the compound *kakei*, a lineage, or *kakeizu*, a family tree, conveys the idea of commonality of origin between the Brazilian Japanese and the Japanese from Japan who together come from the same Japanese family—evoked by the *nichi* (*ni*) character of the compound, symbolising Japan. It was expected that thanks to their Japanese origins and therefore presumed similarities, the *Nikkeijin* would easily assimilate into Japanese society. The Japanese essence endowed on the *Nikkeijin* by the blood of their ancestors was to pass on cultural competency as well.

However, much like in the case of Russian German *Aussiedler* who failed to 'integrate' into German society (Mandel 2008), the reality of the *Nikkeijin* acceptance did not fulfil expectations, either. Even if able to speak the Japanese language, especially among the first and second generations, or appearing Japanese, they were not perceived as such by the majority of Japanese born and bred in Japan. *Nikkeijin* stood out with their different clothing style, non-Japanese work ethic, different food, and alien forms of entertainment (Tsuda 2003a). Despite the common origins and, often, bodily similarity, they no longer were Japanese; absence from Japan had made them lose their Japaneseness, which was expressed through their comportment.

Nineteen years on since the introduction of the Immigration Act, the ultimate sign that *Nikkeijin* did not become members of the Japanese nation came with the dawn of the global economic crisis in 2008. With more and more factories and companies scaling down or going out of business, a growing number of people were made redundant. A significant proportion of these

newly unemployed were the *Nikkeijin*, the majority of whom occupied manual positions in the manufacturing industry. In March 2009 the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) issued a news release concerning the Japanese Brazilians who found themselves out of work. The release presented a scheme under which *Nikkeijin* persons could opt for funding to return to their motherland (from Jpn.: *bokoku*) together with their family. The only condition to be eligible for the scheme, apart from being a *Nikkeijin*, was to renounce the right to return to Japan on the basis of the 1990 Immigration Act until the employment situation in Japan improved. Not only the reference to the *Nikkeijin*'s other country as their motherland, a country of origin, but also the suggestion in the text that they might have lost their jobs due to the lack of familiarity with 'our country's' (from Jpn.: *wa ga kuni)* labour market (which, given that many of the Brazilian Japanese lived and worked in Japan for more than ten years, seemed to have little grounds) excluded the *Nikkeijin* from participation not only in the Japanese labour market, but also in the origins which were previously seen as shared, and therefore the implied Japaneseness allowing membership in the ethnically and culturally defined Japanese nation.[i]

A similar losing of Japaneseness by absence from Japan was implied for the children of Japanese expatriates, the so-called *kikokushijo*, who before their return to Japan took part of their education outside of the country. Until the 1980s they were considered to be problem children. They were thought to be too Westernised and therefore in need of reintegration into Japanese society. These children would suffer bullying at school, while their progress to higher education was impeded by structural obstacles. The *kikokushijo* were not considered to be full Japanese due to their long-term exposure to a foreign environment in their formative days (Goodman 1990). Therefore, one needed not only to be of Japanese descent, but it was also a prerequisite for one to live in Japan, in order to maintain Japaneseness.

Foreign by descent: the *Zainichi*

The immersion in and spatial proximity to Japanese society which the *Nikkeijin* and *kikokushijo* lacked were characteristic of a large proportion of the

nearly 400,000 *Zainichi* Korean residents in Japan (Japanese Ministry of Justice statistics for 2011).[23] After World War II, there were some two million Koreans settled in Japan. According to international law, as former colonial subjects they were Japanese nationals at the time. However, when in 1946 Japan was readying itself for general elections they were not given the right to participate. Such a distinction was made possible thanks to a family register in which Japanese subjects were assigned to one of two categories. A family could belong to the *naichi* (inner land) or *gaichi* (outer land, i.e., the Japanese colonies), which was equated with a divide between ethnic and non-ethnic Japanese, respectively (Kang 2003). In the following year an Alien Registration Ordinance imposed on the *gaichi* (i.e., non-ethnic Japanese) a requirement to carry identity cards at all times. Their situation changed even more drastically when, with the implementation of the 1952 San Francisco Peace Treaty ending American occupation, the Japanese authorities declared all former colonial subjects to be aliens. They were not given any official status; neither were they guaranteed re-entry permission if they decided to leave Japan temporarily (Morris-Suzuki 2006). Their *de facto* stateless status was not resolved until 1965, when Japan and South Korea signed a treaty regulating relations between the two countries. Under the terms of the agreement Japan offered the colonial-Koreans the more secure status of 'Treaty Permanent Residents'. It protected them from deportation and allowed for leaving and re-entering Japan without fear of not being accepted on their return. However, the terms of the treaty did not apply to those Koreans who identified themselves with North Korea or who chose to define themselves as nationals of Korea as a whole rather that just South Korea (*ibid*.).[24] From 1955 the *Zainichi* were required to renew their alien registration cards every three years and to submit their fingerprints on each occasion (Chapman 2008:73). This requirement was ultimately abolished in 1993.

The descendants of the disenfranchised former colonial subjects were

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23 This number excludes those who have taken Japanese nationality.
24 The vast majority of Koreans who came to Japan in the colonial period or immediately after the end of World War II came from a Korea that was not divided into two separate political entities. It was only after the Korean War (1950–1953) that they faced the need to specify their affiliation with one state or the other.

eventually granted a unique residence category of 'special permanent residents'. This status conveyed on them the right to continuous residence, and economic, social, and labour rights, but did not award them full political rights. Relatively recently, some local governments have decided to grant, if still limited and of a probationary nature, voting rights in local-level elections to their special permanent residents (Tegtmeyer Pak 2000). However, the *Zainichi* still do not have the right to vote in the general elections, their possibilities to achieve professional positions of power are limited, and they continue to face various other, non-systemic forms of discrimination. In the statistical records, unless they naturalise, they remain classified as *gaikokujin*, foreigners.

The Japanese term *gaikokujin* literally means 'a person from (or of) an external country', not of Japan. The compound is formed by a sequence of three Chinese characters which in their order of appearance mean 'external, outside', 'country', and 'person'. *Koku* and its Japanese reading *kuni* in wider usage may mean a country, region, province, or home town, home country, which, unless qualified, would usually refer to a place within Japan, or Japan itself. The initial, default, or 'normal' meaning is therefore Japan, or Japanese, and that which is not Japanese comes somehow marked by an additional description. *Kuni* can also be used as a reference to the state, or the state administration, the state decision-makers. Sometimes the term incorporates all these notions, as in the expression *wa ga kuni*, which should be understood as 'our [Japanese] country' in the broadest sense of the land, the people, and the ruling apparatus together forming one entity. What is from or of the outside of such *kuni – koku* is therefore excluded from all the spheres the term designates.

Although the special permanent resident status *de facto* recognised the particularity of the *Zainichi* position in Japan—that is, that they were unlike other foreigners since they were to remain in Japan permanently—they remained aliens of non-Japanese descent. The lack of common origins differentiated them from the Japanese despite the fact that, as in the majority of cases today, they were born and grew up in Japan, lived there their whole lives, spoke only Japanese as a native language, knew only Japanese culture, and were in Japan to stay. Sharing in all other qualities, but not in Japanese origin

by birth, they confused the categories of belonging to the Japanese nation, and as such, the *Zainichi* needed to be excluded from, or denied, Japaneseness. Already not of Japanese ethnicity (*minzoku*), excluded from civil participation, the *Zainichi* were therefore denied membership in the political-administrative category of the Japanese nation (*kokumin*) as well. The conflation of the idea of biological descent with that of individual cultural traits excluded the *Zainichi* from the shared recognition of belonging and the imagined commonality of culturally defined sociality.

Halves and doubles

Similarly, whether a person of Japanese nationality born of parents of whom only one was Japanese is popularly recognised as Japanese highlights the discursive interconnectedness of culture and descent as well. *Hāfu*, a Japanese pronunciation of the English word 'half' is used in reference to a child of 'mixed' parentage, suggesting that the person is somehow incomplete, only partially Japanese. The usual lack of an attribute qualifying what the other half is leaves that part void of any content, as if suggesting that it does not really matter what it is. What is seemingly the more important statement, one which indicates being only half Japanese, is already made and does not need further qualification. Another expression used to describe children of mixed parentage is *konketsu*, literally meaning mixed blood or mixed breed, indicating that the person is not purely Japanese, again based on the presumption that it is Japanese blood mixed with another kind of blood but omitting the specification of which. Such linguistic silencing of the non-Japanese essences in a person is also visible in the practical lack of a Japanese term equivalent to an English-language expression commonly used in the United Kingdom or the United

States, namely 'British or American of such-and-such (ethnic) origins'.[25] In Japan, naturalised persons, regardless of where they originally hailed from, are registered as Japanese without any information about their previous national affiliation. Their ethnic or national origins are formally erased, allowing Japan to represent the Japanese nation as composed only of Japanese (without multiple or ambiguous ethnicities) with the support of statistical data (see Wetherall 2008:266 for other ways of formal construction of what he calls 'a raceless nationality' in Japan). Hester (2008:145) notes, however, within the Korean circles in Japan, the propositions of a possible 'hyphenated' identity representing the *Zainichi* as Japanese of Korean origins—that is, *Kankoku-kei Nihonjin* or *Korian-kei Nihonjin*. Predominantly, however, when the mixing of blood is recognised on the linguistic level, such as in the case of the descendants of the Japanese migrants to South America who arrived in large numbers to Japan after 1990, the term *nikkeijin* suggests somebody of Japanese origin, not a Japanese of foreign origin. The partiality and mixing metaphors are used to differentiate individuals who do not conform to the standard ideal of a Japanese, which, along with full or pure Japanese descent, presupposes a range of characteristics and qualities as typical of any and all Japanese, but not of others. The extent of discursive familiarity and therefore predictability of social relations is therefore again predicated on the convergence of descent and a geographically bound Japanese culture.

However, this is not to say that such representations and convergences are static. In fact, it has already been argued and shown that ideological representations of nationhood have to be flexible in order to adjust to the changing realities not least brought about by globalising or internationalising

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25 I have never heard the term in use, but an Internet search for expressions *Amerika kei Nihonjin*, that is, 'Japanese of American (ethnic) origin', and *Burajiru kei Nihonjin*, 'Japanese of Brazilian (ethnic) origin' suggested that such expressions are being proposed as valid and may be coming into use. For example, an article, 'I am "Japanese of American Origins"' (from Jpn.: *Watashi wa Amerika kei Nihonjin)* by Shigeharu Higashi, published in 2010 on the website Discover Nikkei—Japanese Migrants and Their Descendants, proposes the term as more adequate than 'American of Japanese origins'. There was also a discussion on an Internet forum about the question 'Why do we not say: Japanese of ... origins?' (from Jpn.: *Naze ... kei Nihonjin tte iwanai no deshou ka? Kankoku kei Nihonjin toka Burajiru kei Nihonjin toka*). Internet URLs (last accessed 05.11.2010):
http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2010/10/5/watashi-ha-amerikakei-nihonjin/
http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q1335111028

processes (e.g., Ko 2009). Along with Japan's engagement with foreign countries and the growing importance of the English language, or bilingualism in general, the *hāfu*, thanks to their assumed linguistic abilities and despite their 'mixed' origins, have come to be represented in a more inclusive way. This shift has been marked by the appearance of a new term, namely *dāburu*, a Japanese-language rendition of the English world 'double' to signal the affinity of the 'mixed children' with the Japanese. Although it still essentialises the national or ethnic qualities and denies the individuals the possibility of self-definition, the new term signals an opening of the notion of Japaneseness to acquiring new definitions. Similarly, the *kikokushijo*, not least thanks to the actions of their influential parents (Goodman 1990), have come to represent a new ideal of the Japanese competent in—that is to say, familiar with—cultures other than Japanese in times of internationalisation (*kokusaika*).

As can be seen, the ideas of likeness delineating who can and cannot be trusted are based on a conflation of cultural and racial imaginings, often collapsing physical—that is, bodily—and cultural representations. The EPA Indonesians were seen as dissimilar to the Japanese on all accounts and therefore it was possible to infer their 'untrustworthiness' from this dissimilarity. What the preceding sections also suggest, however, is that despite the powerful notions of Japaneseness and their enactment through state-sponsored actions, such as the organisation of return for the *Nikkeijin*, there exists a potential for restructuring these seemingly monolithic ideas on the basis of non-primordial qualities. The likeness can be acknowledged despite the incompleteness of conditions for national belonging in a common sense, which in itself undergoes reinterpretation. Discourses suggesting similar processes in the context of the EPA acceptance are apparent in the discussion of the mass media coverage in Chapter Five. Here, however, I continue with the analysis of the discursive devices which allow for the imagining of a nation as a homogeneous community. In doing so, I also present the notions constructed by the EPA Indonesians which served them as analysing tools in their negotiation of everyday life in Japan.

Likeness and essentialisms

In order for the likeness to have any rhetorical force (Herzfeld 1997:56) in constructing the imagined national community which excludes the unfamiliar, it has to appear natural—that is, not constructed. Such a naturalising function is served by stereotyping and essentialist representations of nations. The discursive homogeneity of Japanese people, the relations they enter, the culture they share, and the environment they create and in which they live means that those who share in this homogeneity also possess knowledge, an almost metaphysical ability to assess and sometimes predict the lived reality. Sharing in the same Japaneseness means, for example, that it is possible for the Japanese to communicate beyond the means of words and 'read the subtleties' of one another's thoughts. There exists a common Japanese idea glossed as *ishin denshin*, literally a transmission, or communication from heart to heart, meaning tacit understanding, or telepathy, which was often uttered on the occasions of misunderstanding between the Japanese and the Indonesian workers. It was also inferred in the Indonesian Nurse and Caregiver Human Resources Management Manual, which was produced and distributed to the accepting institutions by the Japan International Corporation of Welfare Services (JICWELS), responsible for overseeing the implementation of the EPA acceptance. There, the readers were admonished that Indonesian workers did not have the custom of offering help beyond their own scope of duties to a colleague who might be in need of some support. The manual suggested, therefore, that when working alongside an Indonesian person a Japanese should not adopt the usual 'they should know even without me saying it' stance and directly ask for help. Takie Sugiyama Lebra (1976) refers to this style of communication as 'communication of unity' (1976:115).

On one occasion Iffah, an Indonesian woman whom I have already mentioned, had to summon the help of her former Japanese language teacher, Ms Ito, to persuade her employer to consider replacing her current tutor with someone more suitable. After a long discussion in which Ms Ito played a crucial role, Iffah's employer conceded to the change. He admitted that the most difficult thing to deal with in this situation would be *giri* (Jpn.:

obligation), because he had found the tutor through personal connections. He had relied on a favour of his father's friend, and now he found it problematic to dismiss the tutor without disrespecting the obligation such an arrangement incurred. Assuming that Iffah and I, who was present during the discussion as well, would not understand his situation, he turned to Ms Ito and summed up that 'unless you are a Japanese, you won't get it' (from Jpn.: *Nihonjin ja nai to wakaranai*). The privileging of the opinions expressed by a Japanese person over those of a non-Japanese, or assuming an inability to grasp the intricacies of the Japanese reality of life and/or interpersonal relations, was based on the idea that in order to achieve these goals one needed to be Japanese, and that the differences characteristic of foreigners would preclude them from doing so. Such perceptions were possible because of the essentialising ideas of Japanese homogeneity which not only imply cultural familiarity, but also presuppose tacit knowledge indispensable to interpret the Japanese social reality based on their similarities and available to any and all Japanese, but not to others.

There are objections to using stereotypical, essentialised categorisations as having an explanatory value in themselves. Such reservations are well represented by Rogers Brubaker in his paper *Ethnicity without Groups* (2002). He writes: 'ethnic common sense—the tendency to partition the social world into putatively deeply constituted, quasi-natural intrinsic kinds—is a key part of what we want to explain, not what we want to explain things *with*; it belongs to our [anthropologists'] empirical data, not to our analytical toolkit' (Brubaker 2002:165, emphasis in original). In a footnote, Brubaker adds, however, that 'to the extent that such intrinsic-kind categories are indeed constitutive of common-sense understandings of the social world, to the extent that such categories are used as a resource for participants, and are demonstrably deployed or oriented to by participants in interaction, they can also serve as a resource for analysts' (2002:165 footnote 4).

In this thesis I align myself with the latter contention and I look at stereotypical or essentialised notions as representations of how people imagine themselves and the world around them and which affect the way they act within it. I treat these common and shared understandings of what a given

culture represents as the basis for the so-called intuitive theories (Gil-White 2001; Gelman & Legare 2011), otherwise known as intuitive ontology (Boyer 1996) or folk theories (Gelman & Legare 2011). They allow people to predict with some degree of certainty what they can expect from encountered individuals on the basis of clues which help to associate them with a given culture. These theories 'are not scientific theories—they are not formal, explicit, precise, or experimentally tested. Intuitive theories are implicit and imprecise, but as with scientific theories, intuitive theories have broad implications: they organize experience, generate inferences, guide learning, and influence behaviour and social interactions. Most centrally, intuitive theories are causal and explanatory' (Gelman & Legare 2011:380; *cf.* Herzfeld 1997:26–32). Herzfeld goes as far as to say that 'social life consists of processes of reification and essentialism as well as challenges to these processes' (1997:26).

I equate essantialised representations with stereotypes, here drawing on Herzfeld's understanding of iconicity—that is, 'the way in which meaning is derived from resemblance' (1997:56; see Eco 1976 for a critique of the concept). Stereotypes are the expressions of such iconic connection between the representation and that which is represented. The possibility of such analogy is predicated upon essentialisation of the represented and on masking any internal difference. As Herzfeld argues, 'the rhetorical force of such iconic correspondences resides in their being perceived as somehow natural' (1997:68), where the stereotypical or essentialised representations gain efficacy through their strategic use (Spivak 1987) in support of the ideologies of likeness, notably among members of national groups (Herzfeld 1997 provides an elaborate explanation of the process of naturalisation of stereotypical representations).

The use of stereotypes, or essentialist imaginings of the self and the other, was, as I will show in the following three chapters, underlying the interactions between the Indonesian candidates and the Japanese. As Graburn and Ertl (2008:21) point out, Japanese are perfectly aware of the various differences within the category of 'Japanese', but 'it is ... in contrast to other nationalities

that Japan becomes an essential homogeneous category'. The same could be said about the Indonesian perceptions of self and their self-presentations in interactions with Japanese. Just as essential and homogeneous categorisation was applied to the self, so it was used to make sense of the experiences in Japan.

For example, my informants came to describe the differences in the ways they and the Japanese interacted with other people through a set of two exclusive metaphors: heart and head. *Hati* (from Ind.: heart; a seat of emotions; but also: liver) or Japanese *kokoro* (heart; spirit) was to guide the behaviour of an Indonesian person, while *kepala* (from Ind.: head) or Japanese *atama* (head; mind; brain; intellect) that of a Japanese. Sitting around a table in a family restaurant in Tokyo, four of the EPA Indonesians feverishly discussed questions which they found problematic during the Japanese Language Proficiency test they had just had a few hours earlier. Although all of them lived and worked in the Tokyo area they did not have many opportunities to meet as a group because their scheduled days off did not usually overlap. Soon the conversation moved on to job-related matters. That day it seemed like everyone felt a need to divulge what was weighing on their hearts. Although the conversation was dominated by Iffah, everyone else was admitting to having had the same kind of experiences and observations. Iffah presented a series of situations at work in which she was taken aback by the Japanese staff's attitudes towards the elderly residents and towards herself. She claimed that whenever she noticed any abnormal symptoms, like discolouration of skin, a rash, or a sore on an elderly resident's body, unusual weakness, and so on, she investigated the issues as far as she could and promptly reported any worrying issue to a nurse on duty or to a team leader. The Japanese members of staff, on the other hand, in her opinion, would ignore any changes in the residents' condition. They would also easily forget care instructions related to the residents' health condition, which could lead to, for example, making a resident who should not be walking by herself walk to a bathroom, an action which, in Iffah's narrative, resulted once in a resident complaining about pain in her legs. For Iffah it was an example of how the Japanese members of staff do not 'really care' for the

elderly. In addition, they were *tidak senang* (from Ind.: unhappy) seeing Iffah being more proactive in her duties. Daris added that *ada yang senang* (from Ind.: there are those who are happy), but admitted that he had been experiencing similar attitudes at work as well. Lanny nodded in agreement while listening to Iffah and Daris and finally asked whether the Japanese did not use their *perasaan* (from Ind.: feeling, compassion) in interactions with people. The question was directed to me (as a person thought of as being more familiar with 'things Japanese'), but as I shrugged my shoulders, Iffah went on to explain what she thought about Lanny's question. She presented yet another story.

On one occasion she took a laundry trolley-basket to the laundry room in the basement. She had managed to finish her duties quickly, so this time she went to the laundry room about 20 minutes earlier than usual before going to accompany the other carers in *mimamori* (Jpn.: overseeing patients' activities in the day room). The next day, her team leader called upon her and explained that the laundry trolley-basket should not be taken to the laundry room earlier than specified in the roster. She took notice of the remark. However, what she found unnerving was the fact that the woman from the laundry did not talk to her directly at the time when she brought the trolley-basket. She concluded that the difference between Indonesians and Japanese is that 'Indonesians think with their hearts, *hati*, and Japanese think with their heads, *kepala*'. The rest of the friends around the table agreed and expanded on Iffah's statement, saying that indeed Indonesians, if they had something to say to somebody, would do it there and then, face to face, while Japanese would avoid such direct engagement and instead resort to official structures to communicate any issues.

The two sets of stories seemingly referred to different aspects of Japanese behaviour as observed by my friends at work. One of them alluded to the Japanese lack of compassionate engagement (from Ind.: *perasaan*) in the care of the elderly and the other to the formalised attitude towards interpersonal interaction at work. Both of them, however, signified an absence of *hati* (from Ind.: heart), whether manifested in the lack of compassion for the elderly, or in the unwillingness to engage in conflict resolution in a person-to-person

manner. For the young EPA candidates, letting one's *hati / kokoro* be the principle guide for one's actions was the prerequisite of forming close and 'real' relationships with others. It enabled weaving a close-knit web of friendships where human emotions were given priority over *aturan*, or rules, making the world friendlier and easier to navigate. If there were only *aturan* and no *hati*, there would be no flexibility for individuals to negotiate the best options within the system (as in Japan). If it was the *hati* which prevailed, it would be possible to get to the heart of people's problems without being diverted away from them by the complexities of a rigidly applied system. This unwillingness, or inability, to directly engage with other people by Japanese was brought to my attention on many occasions outside of the work environment as well. The lack of flexibility of a saleswoman in a mobile phone shop where Lazim and Iffah wanted to buy a phone was framed in reference to the *atama*-driven, *aturan*-abiding, unsociable attitude of the Japanese. Incidents as small as people not using their bicycle bells when trying to take over a pedestrian on a pavement and waiting for the pedestrian to notice them coming from behind were also given as an example of Japanese people lacking the ability or willingness to communicate directly with others. It was also visible in the perceived lack of closeness (intimacy) between people pointed out by Irdina, who was amazed at the story of her Indonesian friend married to a Japanese man, according to whom many Japanese married couples had separate bedrooms. From interpersonal relations to the organisation of public transport, according to the *hati–kepala* opposition, the differences between Japan and Indonesia were glossed by the Indonesians in Japanese as a cultural difference (from Jpn.: *bunka no chigai*), an expression which the candidates widely adopted from the Japanese language. In such a social environment, difficult (from Ind.: *sulit*) and tiring (from Ind.: *capek*) were the omnipresent rules (from Ind.: *aturan*). The perception was that the *aturan*-restricted life was obliging the Japanese to use only the *atama*, the non-emotional, non-compassionate judgement, to direct them through various social situations, distancing them from other people.

Such blanket representations used to make sense of experiences in Japan

were deployed by the Indonesians despite their clear perception of differences among themselves. Quite contrary to the ideology of homogeneity nourished in Japan, Indonesia is often depicted as a cultural mosaic. Indonesia's official motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, or 'Unity in Diversity' is inscribed in old Javanese on the country's national emblem. Today's Indonesia is a composition of peoples professing a range of religions, from Islam to Hinduism to Catholicism to Protestantism to many forms of animism which often blend with other religions; speaking a variety of regional languages; and living scattered over more than 2,000 islands. Such imagining of Indonesia was indeed that of my informants as well. For example, they often playfully mocked each other's characteristics as Sundanese, Batak, or Javanese (see Kassim 1986 for the use of stereotypical images of Indonesian ethno-linguistic groups among Indonesian migrants in the squatter districts of Kuala Lumpur).

What this section brings to the discussion is the need for realisation that although the essentialised notions of self and other constitute a condition for establishing parallels between oneself and the groups with which one identifies, these notions coexist with more nuanced comprehension of individual existences and identifications. This is important to acknowledge since it allows one to imagine how the essentialised ideas can become complicated and revised, albeit not entirely discarded, as individuals forge more intimately interpersonal relationships, which are the main focus of the next chapter in particular.

Another point to be made about the preceding descriptions concerns the role of producing stereotyping representations, which play an important part in making sense of the surrounding world. When the candidates arrived in Japan, they felt they lacked what Giddens (1984) terms *knowledgeability*, what is needed to decipher and successfully reproduce social interactions and to predict the workings of the surrounding world. The minute habits of thinking, interacting, and socialising heretofore taken as a given proved to provide a misleading guide to life in Japan. The discomforts and frustrations which arose from this incompatibility of 'interactional styles' (Linger 2001:292–293) were dubbed by the Indonesians in terms of a couplet of oppositional and exclusive

metaphors of *head* and *heart*. Everyday experiences had to be made sense of in relation to that which was already familiar. This brings the discussion to the point where the notion of intimacy connects with the knowledge, ability, and comfort to navigate in a given social milieu. I introduce it here to suggest that the experiences of migration can be considered through minute actions, and reactions, which are not directly linked to one's national (or cultural) background, even if they ultimately stem from it.

A note on culture

In everyday interactions with other people, or in the ways we engage with animals, objects, and places, individuals are, as Anthony Giddens argues, 'knowledgeable *agents* who are capable of accounting for their action: they are neither "cultural dopes" nor mere "supports" of social relations, but are skillful actors who know a great deal about the world in which they act' (Thompson 1989:58, emphasis in original). Such knowledgeability (Giddens 1979, 1984), however bounded, of the social milieu allows people to predict and interpret with a great degree of accuracy their surroundings, an ability which consequently informs their own conduct and facilitates avoidance of undesirable situations (see Oliver & O'Reilly 2010 for an account of the sustained importance of readily intelligible behavioural clues for the organisation of one's social life amongst British lifestyle migrants in Spain). In this sense of a script informing action, culture, or Michael Herzfeld's (1997) more processual 'cultural engagement' (*ibid*.: 3), is the embodied knowledge obtained through repetition, which can be consciously or unconsciously applied and utilised in pursuing everyday life. It provides people with 'the continuity and reliability of familiar enactions [which] contribute to a sense of security "grounded in [the] experiences of predictable routines in time and space"' (Edensor 2002:88, quoting Silverstone 1994). These predictable routines are what Pierre Bourdieu (1977) theorises as *habitus* (*cf*. Elias 1978, 1982). This is how he understands the role habitus plays in the construction of a social world:

> One of the fundamental effects of the orchestration of habitus is the production of a commonsense world endowed with the *objectivity* secured by consensus on the meaning (sens) of practices and the world, in other words the harmonisation of agents' experiences and the continuous reinforcement that each of them receives from the expression, individual or collective (in festivals, for example), improvised or programmed (commonplaces, sayings), of similar or identical experiences. The homogeneity of habitus is what—within the limits of the group of agents possessing the schemes (of production and interpretation) implied in their production—causes practices and works to be immediately intelligible and foreseeable, and hence taken for granted. (Bourdieu 1977:80, emphasis in original)

Culture has proven to be 'one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language' (Williams 1976:76). The breadth and multiplicity of its meanings, as well as culture's relationship to the actions people undertake, have consistently rendered elusive any definite statement about its nature. Talking about the 'nature of culture' may be in itself deemed oxymoronic. However, rather than being concerned with culture as a 'problematic object of description and critique' (Clifford 1986:3), as it presents itself to its theorists, I want to take it to stand for that which is commonsense (Bourdieu 1977:80) or habitual in the 'performances of everyday life' (Edensor 2002:88), that which is imagined as a 'way of life' (Eagleton 2000:112) by people who live it. Culture will be, therefore, the 'commonsense world' in which people are able to apprehend and foresee its workings thanks to their familiarity with the given culture. Without entering the debate about the relationship between social structures or cultural determinacy and the agency of individuals within these structures (see Parsons 1951; Sahlins 2000), I want to concentrate here on the familiarity with a given culture-coded sociality and the knowledge this familiarity conveys.

One other important premise on which I base my deliberations here (and throughout the thesis), one already implicitly touched upon in the above presentation of *habitus*, is thinking of the body as 'both physical and cultural artifact' (Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1987). Although my intention here is not to

present a comprehensive definition of the body, I want to stress its prominence in human experience of the world and of other humans. Marcel Mauss (1973:75) writes of the body as 'man's first and most natural instrument'. The body as 'the locus of social practice' (Csordas 1993; *cf.* Bourdieu 1977, 1984) or, in other words, as a condition of experience which through somatic participation enters into an interactive relationship with the environment (Merleau-Ponty 1962), featured in the Indonesian care workers' experiences not only through their own physicality, but also through their care work, which is 'employment that takes the body as its immediate site of labour' (Wolkowitz 2006:147). Moreover, it is the embodied aspects of a given culture (Mauss 1973; Bourdieu 1977, 1984), what Norbert Elias presents as the result of a 'civilising process' (Elias 1978, 1982), which also underlies my linking of bodily and interpersonal intimacy to its cultural equivalent. In line with such an understanding of the body, it also has been presented as being in a part-to-whole relationship with the nation (Grabham 2009), where the nation is embedded on the body through a set of rhetorical techniques and practices which reiterate nationalism within communities (Grabham 2009; *cf.* Billing 1995). This embedding should not be confused with the conflation of cultural and racial imaginings as the basis for national belonging as presented earlier. While the latter is based on the assumption of primordial characteristics, the former stresses the production of certain bodily dispositions through practice.

Comfort of familiarity

At the beginning of my first research visit to one of the eldercare homes which accepted Indonesian workers, a manager of my three Indonesian informants-to-be marvelled about the courage of the young men who took up the challenge of living and working in a foreign country the language and customs of which they had little knowledge. She reminisced on her own younger years when she was deciding on her career direction, and claimed that she did not even consider going abroad. Even given an opportunity similar to the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) acceptance, she would most likely not have taken the risk of abandoning the familiar living environment (from Jpn.: *najimi*

aru seikatsu kankyō) because she was Japanese, who are of an 'insular country' (from Jpn.: *shimaguni*). On another occasion, Kenta, a young male colleague of Iffah, my Indonesian woman informant, could not imagine himself, as he put it, plunging (from Jpn.: *tobikomu*) into a foreign country like Iffah had, and living there for longer than a week of holidays or so. His reason was having been brought up in an 'insular country', where things Japanese were all one needed to know. He expected life overseas to feel uncomfortable (from Jpn.: *fuben*), with many bothersome aspects to it (from Jpn.: *mendōkusai*), and therefore tiring (from Jpn.: *tsukaresō*). This did not mean that he had no will or desire to experience non-Japanese cultures or to interact with non-Japanese people. Kenta would often quiz me about different aspects of life in Europe, his questions ranging from educational systems to the type of cars driven in the European streets. However interesting the details of life overseas (from Jpn.: *kaigai*) were, the perceived complications and resulting discomfort made leading life there appear to Kenta as unsuitable for him.

Although representing reflections on the possibility of migration rather than actual experiences, these two examples imply how Kenta and the manager imagined their relationship to foreign countries. Described in reference to the same Japanese expression, *shimaguni*, 'insular country', the reflections convey the idea of Japan as a country in isolation from others, which is then translated into the sensitivity of people living there. Although the phrase *shimaguni konjō*, 'insular country's guts, nature, or spirit', can be an expression of admiration for Japanese perseverance and cooperation in the face of various disasters (see Lie 2001), both natural and of human making, when it was used during my fieldwork with the 'guts' part dropped, it referred to a different inclination. In this incarnation it often conveyed a slightly regretful and perhaps fatalistic justification of the Japanese being 'what they were', their lack of knowledge, and the (expected) uneasiness of dealing with unfamiliar cultures.

The two accounts are not meant, however, to represent the Japanese as particularly indisposed to living in foreign countries or to interacting with people seen as coming from different cultural backgrounds. They are presented

here to highlight the expected lack of comfort of living in an unfamiliar environment, which may be equally applicable to other nationalities as well (see Oliver 2011 for perceptions of comfort in the context of British retirement migration to Southern Spain). For example, in their everyday lives, apart from problems adjusting to the unfamiliar living arrangements, weather, food, and lack of familiarity with the rules guiding public service provisions, the EPA Indonesians found somewhat disorienting the way socialisation in public spaces was organised in Japan. Boring (from Ind.: *bosan*) were the streets, with no *warungs* (often mobile street food stalls) inviting people to stop for a quick meal and to socialise in a direct manner. A group of five women employed by the same institution located in a rural area of the Kansai Region cited the lack of relationships with their neighbours extending beyond formal exchange of salutations in the street. They perceived the location in which they were accommodated as *desa* (Ind.: village, countryside), which was rather desolate (from Ind.: *sepih*), and expected that the few inhabitants would form closer relationships, as would have been the case in Indonesia. Instead, they rarely saw anyone interact in the streets. They, too, to their disappointment, did not manage to go beyond a morning greeting with their neighbours. Similar observation about the neighbourly bond, or the perceived lack thereof, was made by Lazim, a male Indonesian candidate, who, eight months after having moved into his flat in one of Tokyo's suburbs, contrasted his lack of local acquaintances with what he had imagined would be a natural course of things in Indonesia, were he to live in a *kecamatan* (Ind.: a sub-district administrative unit in Indonesia) for that long.

In Japan all socialising appeared to be happening inside, in places where most of my informants did not feel comfortable entering (apart from the occasional *matsuri*, local festival celebrations). *Izakayas*, a very common feature of Japanese city and town landscapes, were unknown to them. *Izakayas* are popular places for people to socialise while drinking alcohol and eating a variety of small dishes. They are different from bars, which usually serve only drinks and snacks, and from restaurants and eateries, where it is possible to order full meals and where the length of visit usually depends on the time

needed to consume the ordered food. In an *izakaya* one usually continues to order drinks and foods for the whole time spent there, which may last until the early morning hours. It was revealing that none of my informants knew what the word *izakaya* meant, let alone having been to one, although it is virtually impossible not to come across an *izakaya* in Japan. In cities, the majority of *izakayas* are located inside buildings, sometimes underground or on one of the upper storeys. It is usually impossible to see inside them from the street, like one may be able to do with a British pub. My Indonesian friends found it intimidating to enter such enclosed spaces without knowing what awaited on the other side of the door and/or *noren*, a short curtain usually bearing the shop's name and hanging at the entrance, obstructing the view of the inside even if the door itself is transparent. Daniel Touro Linger (2001) made similar observations during his work among Brazilian *Nikkeijin* factory workers in Toyota city. He writes, 'Japanese men often gather in closed settings, in small bars and clubs, behind opaque sliding doors. To a Brazilian such places seem uninviting, even forbidding' (*ibid.*: 87). Joy Hendry (1995), in her considerations of the intercultural varieties in 'the wrapping of space', notes that 'in the use of space, ... a community may be relatively open or closed to the exploration of outsiders' (*ibid.*:116). The EPA Indonesians, and presumably the *Nikkeijin*, used to more open public or communal spaces, found it difficult to navigate the unfamiliar Japanese surroundings.

When going out together, the young Indonesians would choose restaurants which were less separated from the outside thanks to their large, non-opaque windows rendering the inside less of a mystery and therefore making the moment of entering into the space less a matter of uncertainty and insecurity.[26] Initially, they ventured into *izakayas* and other invisible, 'wrapped' spaces only when accompanied by a Japanese person. Although in reference to bustling Japanese streets rather than inside socialising spaces, Linger (2001) observes that 'public space in Japan can be intensely private' (*ibid.*:88). He refers to 'the reticence that permits one to maintain a haven of desired solitude in packed

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26 Once such a place was found, they would return to the one which had reasonably priced food, had a menu with photographic representations of the dishes, and offered clear names of the dishes and a list of ingredients.

public places' (*ibid*.), which he claims to represent the sociality of Japanese street life. While such public privacy may have as well contributed to the Indonesians' feeling more daring to enter those more public closed spaces, a different kind of privacy of public space made it more challenging for them to enter the more private (more wrapped) public spaces. Some of the smallest *izakayas* in Japan would be as small as to accommodate only about five or so customers at one time. Often the customers would be known to the owner and to each other, so that a stranger wandering in would be entering upon an intimate assemblage. Perhaps this is why it is now becoming more common for the bigger *izakayas* to divide their space into small private cubicles where customers can experience greater intimacy uninterrupted by the arrival and gaze of strangers. Aware of their own double stranger-ness, by virtue of being foreigners readily at display through their bodily appearance and their illiteracy both in the general practices suited for the setting as well as in the practices of the intimate assemblage the Indonesians expected to come across were they to enter a space which they could not verify in advance, they were hesitant to put themselves in such an unfamiliar situation.

Sarah J. Mahler in her recent book *Culture as Comfort* (2012) argues that through socialisation we learn a certain cultural order in which we 'find comfort ... because, subconsciously, it makes most social interactions predictable' (*ibid*.:31). 'Learning culture', Mahler writes, 'is how repeated activities in everyday life—routines or, in anthropological terms, rituals— ... create *culturally specific* social contexts of predictability' (*ibid*.:22, emphasis in original). Although he does not explicitly link such predictability to comfort, Bourdieu, too, in explaining how cultural milieux offer a degree of certainty in social interactions, alludes to the preference for the known. He writes:

> the dispositions [which] durably inculcated by objective conditions (which science apprehends through statistical regularities as the probabilities objectively attached to a group or class) engender aspirations and practices objectively compatible with those objective requirements, the most improbable practices are excluded, either totally without examination, as

> *unthinkable,* or at the cost of the *double negation* which inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway refused and to love the inevitable. (Bourdieu 1977:77, emphases in original)

I read *love of the inevitable* as an expression of preference for and comfort felt in experiencing the familiar. Such comfortable familiarity may be experienced in a variety of contexts, from institutional work arrangements to the unwritten rules of life in a family home or a restaurant. In a national context, this sense of familiarity is achieved through the imagining of a nation as a community (Anderson 1983) of 'familiar faces' (Herzfeld 1997:5). This brings back the idea that 'the only people we really trust tend to be people who in one way or another are like ourselves' (Ringmar 1998:545) and suggests that familiarity, knowledgeability, predictability, trust, and comfort are closely connected and together allow for the intimacy of experience. That the EPA Indonesians did not feel comfortable about certain closed spaces, that they could not successfully engage in some interpersonal interactions, and that the areas where they lived felt awkward and unsociable were the result of their lack of familiarity and intimate knowledge of rules guiding actions within these contexts. Such lack of knowledge was presumed by Kenta and the manager whose reflections opened this section. These perceptions and experiences highlight the need to attend to not only national imaginings, but also to quotidian comforts and discomforts.

Embarrassment

Some such discomforts can result, however, not from exposure to the unfamiliar, but from an unwelcome disclosure, or attention to certain habituated—'inevitable' in Bourdieu's terms—actions by those who do not share in them. This is referred to by Michael Herzfeld (1997:3) as rueful '[self-]recognition of those aspects of cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality'. One of the characteristics ascribed to an *orang Indonesia* (Ind.: Indonesian person) by my Indonesian friends is closely

related to the *hati*-heart metaphor introduced earlier, the Indonesian ability to manipulate or avoid constricting regulations to one's advantage. It is a kind of social dexterity and readiness to 'work the system', or canniness, and was usually expressed through the phrase *panjang akal*, which can be translated as crafty, dexterous, canny, or intelligent. It refers to an ability to achieve aims through canny actions, often in avoidance of the rules, sometimes with the help of a favourably disposed official, or simply by taking advantage of other people's lack of awareness. *Panjang akal* was appreciated and often quite proudly brought up as a more humane mode of living, particularly in comparison to the apparent Japanese rule-abiding proclivity.

One of the negative manifestations of this Indonesian canniness was, according to my informants, a focus on individual gain. The widespread corruption characteristic of the world of Indonesian politics was given as one of the aspects of Indonesian reality attesting to this trait of *orang Indonesia*. While disapproving of bribery, those of my friends with whom I discussed the topic at greater length talked about it with the kind of resignation one has when talking about the weather turning bad. *Hiduplah* (Ind.: that's life), they would say. Daris told me how a person had to be informed about the 'price list' determining how large the bribe should be to get into which kind of profession.[27] Although otherwise acknowledging their embrace of the canny side of Indonesians, it caused obvious embarrassment to my Indonesian friends when my husband was involved in its practical implementation. During our trip to Odaiba (an area in Tokyo) with five of my informants, I told a story of my husband having been made to pay 50,000 Indonesian rupiah (Rp.) for a taxi ride no longer that one kilometer instead of the pre-agreed 15,000 Rp. when he

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27 For example, according to Daris, a person has to pay 50,000,000 Indonesian rupiah (Rp.) to become a policeman. Of course, it is possible to go to police school and make one's way up the career ladder, but it would be very hard for him or her to get any higher than patrol police on a motorbike. However, if one is prepared to pay 80,000,000 Rp., one can find oneself on the fast track to more comfortable and better paid positions, which make the initial investment worth the while. One of my friends told me once that some of the EPA Indonesians who came to Japan in the first batch had to pay 20,000,000 Rp. to be selected for the programme. Although I knew which group he was referring to, I could not confirm the information beyond all doubt. However, given the disproportionate number of candidates hailing from just one nursing school, when the selection process was meant to be anonymous, suggests that some illicit practices might have taken place.

was moving our luggage from one hotel to another in Jakarta.[28] The story triggered an apologetic narrative explaining how to prevent a similar situation from happening again, although my friends agreed that in Indonesia, one simply had to live with it. Although a part of what it means to be an Indonesian, the canniness was nevertheless something shameful when spilt out beyond the boundaries of the intimate 'rueful self-recognition' (Herzfeld 1995) as an Indonesian.

The original proponent of the concept, Michael Herzfeld (1997:6), writes, 'embarrassment, rueful self-recognition: these are the key makers of what cultural intimacy is about'. Although he acknowledges that 'nationalism and cultural intimacy are caught up in a mutual dependency' (1997:8), Herzfled explicitly does not limit his definition to intimacy among co-nationals (1997:174 note 2). The potential of embarrassment should the knowledge gained through intimacy be shared with a third party is what distinguishes intimate from other relationships, national communal imaginings being just one of these. In bodily care, the directness of physical contact can be a source of embarrassment, as the cared-for needs to grant access to the most private aspects of his or her being (Twigg 2000, 2001); in intimate emotional relationships, the knowledge gained through shared memories or through access to knowledge which otherwise would have remained confined to an individual is also one which can cause embarrassment if disclosed (Zelizer 2005). In all of these cases, embarrassment is a function of disclosure beyond the relations of a group considered intimate. As shown above, the Indonesians and the Japanese imagined each other as not intimate, at least in cultural or national terms. Despite this, the Indonesians were expected to provide bodily and interpersonally intimate care. Implicated in an intimate relationship, and yet unfamiliar, unpredictable, and not sharing in the same likeness, the Japanese and Indonesians were potential witnesses to each other's ruefully or not recognised qualities. This could have been on the personal or on the national level, where, for example, the Japanese breach of filial piety ideal was

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28 There is a possibility that my husband misunderstood the agreed amount since he did not speak Indonesian, but these are the amounts he told me about and which I used when relaying the story to my friends.

fully disclosed. Managing this field of uncertain trust and potential embarrassments is one of the themes pursued in this thesis. I expand Herzfeld's notion of cultural intimacy to also incorporate the comforts, predictability, and trust which come with mutually recognised familiarity. This, I believe, helps to account for how the perceived differences were experienced by the EPA Indonesians as well as by the Japanese on or with whom they worked in the eldercare homes.

Chapter conclusions

What this chapter has shown is that, by bringing together individuals who recognised themselves as and who were recognised as different from each other in terms of their cultural habits and loyalties, what was also brought together, alongside individuals, were the imaginations of different forms of sociality reified in the essentialising cultural representations of the self and the other. Not intimate with each other in cultural terms, the Indonesian care workers and the Japanese staff and elderly were put in a situation where they needed to achieve interpersonal intimacy in order to enter a relationship of care as intimate labour in which the 'carer and cared-for can connect and identify' (Milligan 2003:462). The Indonesians represented that which was unfamiliar and non-familial, but also unpredictable and not readily trusted. On a different level, as non-Japanese, the EPA workers were also excluded from what Bruce Kapferer (2012:158 [1988]) calls, in his work on Australian nationalism, the national 'mateship'—that is, the 'egalitarian principle of natural sociality and reciprocity between equals' which would implicate them in nation-specific intergenerational reciprocity. This chapter also has served to show the composite nature of intimacy, which, apart from familiarity, evokes trust and reciprocity, as well as comfort and predictability, allowing for a successful navigation in a given social setting and for informed negotiation of relationships. As I will show in the following chapters, the interplay and negotiation of these composite elements constituted the social setting of the accepting institutions which, as a result of the EPA programme, were transformed into sites of multicultural coexistence. With this in mind, the next

chapter focuses on the experiences of the Indonesian EPA caregiver candidates within the accepting institutions. It takes a close look at the practices of forging and breaking intimacies across a spectrum of relationships and situations.

Chapter Three

Working Intimacies

In many of the accepting institutions, the Indonesian workers who arrived under the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) programme were the first and only non-Japanese among the staff as well as among the elderly. Sometimes, in smaller towns, they acquired a presence akin to local celebrities whose faces, known from television screens or from newspaper pages, were recognisable in the streets and who were greeted by the local residents as 'our Indonesians'.

This chapter offers a glimpse into the day-to-day social interactions of the Indonesian care workers with their Japanese colleagues and the elderly for and about whom they cared together (Tronto 2001). Bearing in mind the expectations the candidates harboured about their employment in Japan as well as remembering under what conditions they arrived in the institutions, as discussed in Chapter One, I propose here that thanks to the particularities of the working environment, the tasks in which the Indonesians were involved, and the way the EPA acceptance programme scattered them in the eldercare homes, the candidates and their colleagues, as well as the elderly, were able to form meaningful, intimate interpersonal relationships. I start off situating the accepting sites against the background of other working environments where foreign workers in Japan have had a prominent presence; then I follow on to have a closer look at the discursive construction of an eldercare home. Finally, I devote the largest part of this chapter to considerations of how intimate interpersonal relationships were denied or precluded, on one hand, and what allowed for their emergence, on the other.

Non-Japanese workers in care sector and beyond

Care and nursing

At the time of the first EPA the vast majority of staff employed in the eldercare sector were Japanese. The situation was nothing like the contemporaneous state of affairs in institutional eldercare provision in the UK, for example, where, according to a 2009 report issued by the Oxford-based Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS), migrant workers, understood as those who were born abroad, accounted for around 18 per cent of all social care workers, with the proportion rising to more than half in London (Cangiano *et al.* 2009:1). Although the overall number of foreigners in Japan is calculated to constitute around 1.7 per cent of the population, about two million people, and can usually be accounted for in terms of their employment status, the number of foreign-born carers employed in eldercare institutions in Japan was more difficult to establish since there did not exist a visa category for this kind of work at the time. However, according to a survey conducted by Nissōnet, a temporary employment agency specialising in placing people in the care sector, among care institutions in the Tokyo Metropolitan Area and the three adjacent prefectures, Kanagawa, Saitama, and Chiba, nearly a quarter of institutions which returned responses to the survey[29] claimed that they at that time or had in the past employed non-Japanese (Nissōnet 2008). Although the exact number of these employees was not evident in the survey results, anecdotal evidence suggested that typically there were one or two such employees in an institution. It was also likely the case that, as shown in the COMPAS research, the capital city area was characterised by a higher number of foreign workers than other areas of the country, although no systematic data existed at the time to substantiate this assumption (Cangiano *et al.* 2009).

Among the carers were also a limited, but growing, number of foreign workers somewhat naturally streamed into the care profession. They were primarily Filipina women (Nissōnet 2008) who originally arrived to Japan as entertainers and who met their Japanese husbands-to-be in bars where they

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29 The survey was distributed to a total of 2,898 institutions, of which 427, or 14.7 per cent, returned the questionnaire.

worked (more about them below). Eventually they decided to move away from this profession, either as a result of a request from their husbands or because they felt they had reached an age when they should turn to a more 'respectable' occupation (Faier 2007, 2009). They were able to do so because holding the residency status of 'Japanese national's dependent' gave them freedom of employment in Japan. Having received the entry-level qualification of domestic helper level 2, the lowest and relatively easy to obtain care-related qualification in Japan, they took up employment in care facilities for the elderly.[30]

In a kindred sector of medical care, as of April 2008 there were only 120 non-Japanese doctors and nurses working in Japan (Japan Economic Research Institute's Report 2008:147). This datum was collected by Nimonjiya Osamu from the Asia Human Power Networks (commonly known as AHP),[31] which had been implementing a training programme for Vietnamese nurses in Japan. Since 1992, the Network had been running the scheme for Vietnamese nurses-to-be willing to undergo professional education and complete their work experience in Japan before undertaking employment in Vietnam. Under the AHP scheme high school graduates who successfully passed through a screening process of the Vietnamese Ministry of Health underwent a 17-month training programme in Japanese and other subjects, such as maths, chemistry, English, and composition writing. Having completed the training, the trainees went to Japan to sit the entry examination to Japanese nursing schools or universities on par with the Japanese candidates. Those who passed the examinations remained in Japan as foreign students for three or four years, depending on the type of educational institution they entered in Japan. Upon graduation, the Vietnamese trainees sat a regular Japanese national nurse examination, and if successful they were placed as nurses under the same working conditions as their Japanese counterparts in one of the cooperating Japanese hospitals for four years. In 2006 this period was extended to seven

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30 Domestic helper level two requires 132 hours of theoretical and practical training, no examination, and no minimum educational level.
31 Formerly known as Asia Human Power Network. The cooperative gained the status of a non-profit organisation (NPO) in early 2010 and changed its name to AHP Networks. The change in legal status was made in order to enable engagement of the NPO in the expected intake of the Vietnamese candidates under the Vietnam–Japan EPA.

years. After that time, the Vietnamese nurses had to return to Vietnam and, having their nursing qualifications recognised, take up employment as nurses.[32] Between 1992 and 2010, the organisation successfully trained 56 Vietnamese nurses out of a total of 174 candidates who passed the screening by the Ministry of Health and entered the first stage of the preparatory education in Vietnam. The 56 Vietnamese nurses who have been trained by the AHP Networks have therefore never been considered part of the potential future Japanese labour force.

Unfortunately, to my knowledge, there were no ethnographic accounts of the experiences of these groups at the time of writing this thesis. The information I collected through specialist articles, from the written materials produced by the AHP Networks, and through conversations with Mr Nimonjiya was very scarce, too, since these sources were focused primarily on the professional progress of the Vietnamese nurses. However, what information I collected suggested that the AHP nurses were able to form close relationships with some of their co-workers. On the other hand, however, I encountered accounts of the nurses finding it difficult to 'connect' with their Japanese colleagues despite their fluency in the Japanese language. I recall one of the nurses describing her co-workers as 'childish' (from Jpn.: *kodomoppoi*), which she felt precluded the development of any close relationships between them. This kind of 'mismatch' is something to which I return in discussing the relationships formed by the Indonesian workers as well. For the time being, however, I turn to other working places which have been a subject of more scholarly attention.

Type of work and physical proximity

The novelty of the Indonesian care workers was not only a function of the relatively small number of Indonesians already in Japan. As already noted in the introduction, there were over 35,000 Indonesians residing in Japan in 2007, including seamen and those with unregulated legal status in Japan (Okushima

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32 According to an AHP outline of the preparatory education offered to the Vietnamese candidates, *jizen kyōiku*. The document can be accessed at http://www.ahp-net.org/jizenkyouiku001.pdf.

2009). However, the type of work in which the majority of these Indonesians were involved in Japan contributed to their invisibility. Either technical trainees or seamen, working in factories, in the countryside, or on Japanese fishing or merchant vessels, they were rarely encountered in the cities (Okushima 2009:17). Moreover, in terms of relations with their co-workers or employers, there was not much of an exchange (from Jpn.: *koryū*) due to the insufficient level of Japanese language among the Indonesians, who would reside in Japan only for short periods and were not obliged or stimulated to learn it (Okushima 2009:19). One of the technical trainees I met through an Indonesian church in Tokyo told me how he barely met any Japanese at work, since all of his work team was made up of other trainees of various nationalities, and a Japanese team leader would come to their assembly line only to convey official information.

Unlike the technical trainees who were arriving to Japan to gain on-the-job training in Japanese industry under the already mentioned scheme run by the Japan International Training Cooperation Organisation (JITCO), the EPA Indonesians found themselves in far greater physical proximity to the Japanese due to the nature of their work. Since the 1950s large numbers of foreigners, about 80,000 in 2004, primarily from Asian countries such as China, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Malaysia, have been undergoing training in various branches of Japanese industry. Partly due to the nature of the environment in which they worked, the numbers in which they arrived, and the exclusionary practices of their employers and supervisors, these foreign trainees have had limited opportunities to interact with Japanese in the workplace.

A similar case regarding the spatial and relational divide in the workplace can be made for the many *Nikkeijin* who were primarily employed in Japanese industry as well. For example, Tsuda Takeyuki (2003a) describes the separateness of the Japanese and the Brazilian *Nikkeijin* workers in the factory where he conducted his field work. Similar observations of *Nikkeijin* and their relations with the local Japanese community were made by Daniela de Carvalho (2003). In contrast with these two groups, the technical trainees and

the *Nikkeijin*, the EPA Indonesians were placed in a sector where their roles as care workers made it impossible, or at least very difficult, to segregate the Indonesians from the Japanese members of staff and/or elderly. The Indonesians, and later Filipinos, entered a predominantly Japanese environment where no separate space or role was designed for them. Because they were in Japan to provide the 'interpersonal service' of care, there was no niche where the Indonesian candidates could be tacked away out of sight and contact with the Japanese, as has been the case with the technical trainees and *Nikkeijin*, who, operating assembly lines in automotive factories or fishing away from the Japanese shores, would often find themselves working in an entirely non-Japanese team and engaged in performing jobs shunned by Japanese workers.

In contrast to the *Nikkeijin* and technical trainees, the large numbers of Filipina women (around 80,000 in 2004[33]) who entered Japan on entertainer visas worked in close proximity to Japanese co-workers and in direct contact with customers. Originally employed as performers, dancers, and hostesses, and sometimes trafficked into prostitution, in recent years the Filipina women have been increasingly marrying Japanese men whom they met as customers. As noted earlier, research focused on this phenomenon stresses the ways in which cultural encounters effected by these unions shaped individual lives (e.g., Faier 2009). In a different setting, less sexualised and perhaps less readily open to abuse, the EPA candidates entered jobs which similarly situated them in direct proximity to their co-workers and the cared-for elderly, preparing therefore a stage for similar interpersonal encounters which were reportedly less common on factory shop floors. In this respect, both the Filipina entertainers and later wives and the EPA Indonesians were engaged in intimate labour in the sense laid out in the previous chapter, particularly in reference to the ideas of Zelizer (2005), Constable (2009), and Parreñas and Boris (2010), who argue for the commensurability of affection and monetary exchange. Although in the case of the EPA candidates the intimacy was based on a different kind of encounter, here, too, the guiding focus is the construction of meaningful relationships within the context of paid employment.

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33 The number has been decreasing since a stricter visa regime was introduced in 2005.

The above overview shows that although there might have been significant numbers of foreign workers in other workplaces and although a certain number of Indonesian workers were concentrated in some of them, these places offered limited possibilities of forging intimate relations with one's colleagues. On the other hand, workplaces with a greater potential for interpersonal interactions, such as hospitals or care institutions, had not seen a significant presence of non-Japanese at the time of this research. It is against this background that the sense of novelty of the EPA care workers is suggested. The accepting eldercare institutions are therefore considered as becoming new sites of cultural encounters where both cultural and interpersonal intimacies needed to be negotiated. The next section looks at how these sites were constructed in relation to the arrival of the Indonesian workers.

Cultural intimacy in eldercare

Unlike the by-then popularly spread ideas about the Filipina women working in bars as entertainers, common to the extent that one could choose to go to an exclusively Filipina bar (Faier 2009), and about the factory lines of the automotive industry operated by the Brazilian *Nikkeijin*, the occupation of care worker was not associated with foreigners/foreignness. If anything, I would be more inclined to describe the care homes I visited as falling under the rubric provided by Yongmei Wu in her ethnographic study in which she concedes that 'the main characteristic of Japanese institutional care for the elderly is its emphasis on Japanese traditions and cultural values' (Wu 2004:185). Wu's observations that 'food and annual events are provided in traditional ways; club and recreational activities focus on forms of traditional arts; there are traditional religious rituals for death; values such as endurance and cooperation are promoted to maintain harmonious human relationships; the norm of collectivism is promoted to form a familial atmosphere, and "dependence on indulgence" (*amae*) of the sick elderly is acceptable when providing care' (*ibid.*, emphasis in the original) would have to be mine as well.

The 'Japanese traditions and cultural values' observed in the care homes through mimicry recreated a simplified and essentialised image of the past and

present, but mostly inaccessible to the elderly, Japan. 'It is in this cultural environment that the residents can lead comfortable lives in the institution', claims Wu (2004:185), and indeed the elderly residents I talked to seemed to derive pleasure from these cultural details of their lives in the care homes, as if the small events of brewing green tea, or watching the *omikoshi* (a palanquin used to move a deity from the main shrine to a temporary one during a festival) procession performed by children from the local school in the care home's parking lot, were confirming their Japaneseness, the elderly's lasting belonging to Japanese society despite the isolation of their lives in the care home.

The represented as uniquely traditionally Japanese bathing method using a mini hot spring or *onsen*-like pool of hot water installed for the elderly to immerse in after having their bodies cleaned, the insistence of the elderly to use chopsticks instead of the cutlery set associated with more Western arrangements, or the stressing of the importance of time-keeping among the staff were particularly emphasised as traditionally Japanese and contrasted with what the Indonesian or, more generally, foreign ways were thought to be. The quality of care resided in the ability to maintain these minute Japanese ways of life.

Ostensibly, the quality of care was measured by its responsiveness and mouldability to the individual elderly's preferences. The care homes I visited advertised their services as personalised and crafted to provide 'comfort and peace of mind' to each resident individually. '*I ni semari, i ni soeru*' was a motto featured on the website of one of the homes, with an appended explanation that '[if you] recognise another person's desires that little sooner, [you can] meet their hopes/expectations'.[34] The pledge continued, 'in the environment where both the mind and the body can be at ease, we would like to provide every day life support, functional training, and health supervision in order that the [service] users can lead a life they wish for themselves and in accordance with their own ways'.[35] Another care home set as their objective a provision of service which would allow 'each and every [service] user to spend

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34 "意に迫り、意に添える 他者の思いに少しでも早く気付き、そして期待に応えられる".

their time to their liking, safely and enjoyably'.[36] While such declarations stressed the need for personalised care, both in its physical and mental aspects, the arrival of the Indonesian workers gave rise to concerns over the possibility of ensuring that the care provided would be *Japanese.* The commonly uttered triad of *kotoba, shūkan to bunka no chigai*, that is, the differences in the language, custom (or habit), and culture, accompanied concerns over the differences in the professional knowledge and skills of the foreign staff (see Friebe 2011 for similar considerations in a German context). This connection of personalised care with the need for preservation of a culturally Japanese environment suggested that certain individual preferences were seen as shaped by, or embodying, the cultural milieu of Japanese lives (*cf.* Bourdieu 1977).

Tasting culture

Some of the residents took delight in repeatedly introducing the Indonesian workers and me, both equally foreign figures, to these Japanese 'traditions and values', showing us how to properly roll an *oshibori*, a small dampened and heated towel used before and during meals to wipe one's hands, or how to tie the bow of an apron the 'proper Japanese way', or encouraging us definitely to try *kakigōri* (flavoured shaved ice eaten primarily in summer) during a summer festival, or *natsu matsuri*, organised by a care home, as something that we could have a chance to taste only in Japan. Another time, during *ocha kurabu* (Jpn.: tea club), an occasion when some of the residents would prepare green tea for others to enjoy together with Japanese sweets, a set akin to that used during traditional tea ceremonies, Amir, a young male Indonesian worker, was helping to distribute the treats to the residents. After everyone had been served, a member of staff suggested to the woman resident preparing the tea that she should make one for Amir as well so he could 'taste the Japanese culture' (from Jpn.: *Nihon no bunka o ajiwaeru*). On a different occasion, at Ramelan's ward,

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35 "心身ともに安心できる環境で、自分らしく、ご利用者様が望まれる生活を送る事ができるよう、生活支援・機能訓練・健康管理等のサービスを提供させていただきます".

36 "ご利用者様一人ひとりが安全で楽しく快適に過ごし、残存機能を維持できるようなサービスを目標としています".

a female resident astonished all members of staff with a morning greeting performed in English. When the ensuing conversation turned to the topic of *enka*, traditional-style Japanese ballad songs, often sung by the resident, she was instructed to 'teach the foreigner about things Japanese' (from Jpn.: *gaikoku no kata ni Nihon no koto o oshiete agete*). Manifestly, therefore, even the most mundane everyday activities and items in the eldercare homes were constructed as markedly Japanese, while the EPA Indonesians, who in contrast were not, needed to accustom themselves to and 'get used to Japan' (from Jpn.: *Nihon ni narete morau*) and its traditions or customs (from Jpn.: *Nihon no shūkan ni narete morau*).

Indonesian novelty and discomfort of the Japanese elderly

The presence of Indonesians in the position usually occupied solely by Japanese was a kind of anomaly. Despite the still rare exceptions of the Philippine or *Zainichi* Korean home helpers employed in the care homes, or the Vietnamese working as nurses, the prevalent image of care workers in Japan was fused with their Japaneseness. A typical care worker, or any other employee of the institution for that matter, was Japanese. The Indonesians were care workers, yet they were not Japanese. Their proximity to the Japanese bodies of the elderly and their status as colleagues in relation to the Japanese staff were against the 'normal', usual state of things. The Indonesian candidates disrupted the usual associations. As unfamiliar foreigners, they invaded the spaces (Puwar 2004) of care homes for the elderly where the relatively closed, small-scale societies of the elderly and the staff reproduced the dominant ideologies of Japaneseness, performing (more or less consciously) its uniqueness and homogeneity.

An elderly woman resident in her seventies interviewed by the *Asahi Newspaper* shared her opinion that '[t]hey [the EPA Indonesians] all look well after us. I don't feel strange (because they are Indonesians)' (*Asahi* 28.04.2009).[37] The woman's statement about the lack of any 'strange' feelings caused by the Indonesian presence in her care home may point to the

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37 "皆ちゃんとやってくれる。（インドネシア人という）違和感とはないです".

assumption or expectation of such feelings before the Indonesians' arrival.[38] It might have been a clarification in expectation of the interviewer's next question. In either case, the unusualness of the Indonesian figures was imagined to be 'strange' or incongruous in Japanese eldercare institutions. The reactions of the elderly when they first saw their new Indonesian carers in the institutions I visited, as conveyed to me by Japanese staff members, attested to this unusualness. The reactions, ranging from joyful anticipation of a chance to interact with somebody different to fearful at the sight of the unfamiliar appearance of the Indonesian candidates, the latter prevalent particularly among the elderly with progressed dementia, had their roots in the extraordinariness of that foreign element which disturbed the usual order of things. A non-Japanese care worker was a categorical confusion, matter out of place.

In one of my main research sites, the floor manager told me that there were several elderly who initially refused to be looked after by the Indonesians and that in response she had to organise the roster in such a way as to avoid assigning the Indonesian candidates to tasks around those several residents. With time, these residents changed their attitudes and were cared for by the Indonesians as well. In another institution, which I visited only for one day, I was told that there were indeed some residents who, seeing the Indonesian candidates for the first time, would call them *kuronbō* (a derogatory term for a dark skinned person); but they, too, all became used to them and there were no such problems any more (*cf.* Foner 1994:38).

I encountered a few such stories of discomfort or anxiety felt by the elderly during their early encounters with the Indonesian candidates, and all of these accounts were conveyed to me as matters of the past by the Japanese members of staff and by the Indonesians. For example, one of the elderly female residents suffering from dementia who lived in Iffah's institution used to react aggressively towards her, some days worse than others. However, by the time I started my visits they already had a friendly relationship which, according to

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38 Ōsaki (2008) translates *iwakan* as 'strangeness', while according to *The Progressive Japanese–English Dictionary*, *iwakan* means 'sense of incongruity', or 'feeling out of place'.

Iffah, began when the resident learnt her name after Iffah defended her from what she saw as abusive treatment from a Japanese member of staff. Defending the elderly resident gained Iffah the resident's trust, which seemingly overshadowed the former feelings of unfamiliarity and fear.

One morning, nearly a year after her assignment began, Iffah was leading a morning exercise session for the residents on her ward. Other members of staff dispersed themselves among the gathered elderly to assist those more fragile or confused. Shortly into the session one of the men, who had been looking curiously at Iffah, asked the worker assisting him who that person in the middle was. The worker replied, 'It's Iffah, she came from Indonesia'. 'Indonesia, *hee*?!' responded the elderly man, seemingly surprised and astonished at the information.[39] The elderly man, suffering from dementia, apparently did not remember his previous interactions with Iffah, who many times fed him during meals, and he was now reliving his initial surprise at seeing a face so ostensibly atypical to a Japanese. I never encountered or was made aware of a similar situation involving a Japanese carer. On the contrary, I was myself once shouted at by an elderly woman residing in one of my main research sites. It happened on the fourth day of my first visit, when I was passing her in a corridor. I noticed that she had been anxiously eyeing me from her seat in the day room, where she spent most of her time, while I was following Amir and talking to those elderly with whom he chatted the most as well. Seeing the woman coming from the opposite direction, I decided to smile and greet her to try to break the ice. In response she quite aggressively shouted, 'What are you looking at?!' and carried on, saying things which I was unable to understand. The information about the incident spread quickly in the institution, and during a lunch break a physiotherapist asked me whether I got scared today, referring, as it turned out, to my earlier encounter. When I replied that it was rather disconcerting, he suggested that I should not worry because this particular resident was always anxious on seeing a new person and her reaction was to be expected since I was a 'particularly unusual occurrence' (from Jpn.: *toku ni mezurashii sonzai*). It took me about a year's worth of visits to be accepted by

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39 *Hee* is a 'news-receipt token' in the Japanese language which is frequently used in response to deliveries of news (see Mori 2006).

this resident when she one day invited me to join her in folding the *oshibori* towels before dinner. Such reactions of the elderly as those towards Iffah and me just described should not be dismissed as coming from individuals who might have lost their decisional capacities and therefore be unable to express their stance on a given situation. As Mason (1995:82) admonishes after Schmidt (1975:546), 'even chronic confusion is not necessary a bar: the trick is not to accept the local assessment. ... Often persons who do not know where they are are perfectly clear about how they feel'. The elderly who could not otherwise express their opinions or preferences in relation to the presence of and/or being cared for by the Indonesian workers, or perhaps forgot that they should not be wondering anymore, let their surprise and sometimes anxiety be known in the ways and at the times suitable to their own feelings. Clearly, the presence of individuals with whom the elderly could not identify was a source of anxiety. This was true at least in reactions to the early encounters which probably most forcefully brought to light the apparent unfamiliarity and therefore unpredictability and suspended trust otherwise granted to the more familiar—that is, Japanese—strangers (see Simmel 1950; Ringmar 1998).

Dignity of the elderly

One of the ideas which persistently reappeared in the discussions surrounding the Indonesians' engagement in Japanese eldercare was the dignity of the elderly. One particular occasion on which I heard a definition of what specifically Japanese eldercare was meant to be about was during a meeting of the board members of one of the support organisations. At the end of the meeting a Japanese language teacher, in concluding an already fairly relaxed discussion about how the Indonesian candidates were doing at their institutions of appointment, said that in Japanese eldercare the most important thing was *songen*, dignity, or regard for the elderly. I do not think that she meant to imply that the Indonesian candidates would in some way lack the respect or the intention to sustain (or provide) dignified living conditions for the Japanese elderly for whom they were caring, particularly in the light of her oft expressed admiration for the Indonesian (cultural) aptness for care work. Instead, she

seemed to be pointing to the possibility that the cultural differences could lead to the environments in the care homes employing the Indonesian candidates losing some of their Japaneseness. In consequence, the Japanese elderly's comfort of living in accordance with their liking as Japanese persons might be compromised. This in turn could preclude the sustenance of regard for the elderly's preferences and therefore deny them the familiarity of an environment in which they could navigate in a dignified way without bumping into unknown elements with which they may not know how to deal. The personal preferences of the elderly were therefore connected to the cultural comforts of predictability (Mahler 2012).

Quite clearly, the eldercare homes were constructed as and considered inherently Japanese. In such an environment the Indonesian EPA care workers represented that which was not Japanese. Odd, surprising, interesting, or unknown, unwelcome, and threatening to the elderly, and 'illiterate' in Japanese culture and the everyday routines in the eyes of their co-workers, the candidates disrupted the fabric of social relations and imaginations within the institutions. Given their new and often sole presence as foreigners there, the Indonesians were acutely aware of their extraordinariness and scrutinised their own actions and positioning in relations with their co-workers. In certain contexts, such assumptions of difference precluded the formation of close relationship. This was the case when essentialising notions of the other, the common medium of making sense of the surrounding world, dominated mutual representations.

Divisive differences

Unappreciated

At the end of November 2009, during an event officially launching a regional branch of one of the support organisations directed at the EPA Indonesians and the accepting institutions (more or less ten months after the Indonesians took up their positions in the care homes), a group of care worker candidates were asked to reflect on their situation at work. Apart from voices of disenchantment with the very system of acceptance and the perceived low probability of

anyone passing the national examinations, many of the candidates voiced their disquiet with the attitudes towards them which they had observed among the Japanese members of staff. Some of the remarks referred to the unjust judgement which the Indonesians felt was made about them by their co-workers, supervisors, or employers. The fact that many institutions would not allow the Indonesians to perform all the tasks specified for the *kaigo staffu* (Jap.: care staff) was often interpreted asbeing thought of as *bodoh* (Ind.: stupid).

Resenting such perceptions and faced with the continuing confinement to clean-up rather than care activities, Amir also felt unappreciated as a human being. One evening on the way home, when commenting on his role in the ward, he stressed that '*orang mau dihargai*' (Ind.: a man, a person wants to be appreciated, valued), and he could not feel that in the institution where he worked. He came to Japan aware of the fact that he would not be working in his learnt profession (i.e., as a nurse), and did not expect, or plan for that matter, a fast-track or bright career in Japan's eldercare sector, either. He did, however, expect to be treated on equal terms with the other employees and was hoping for recognition as a reasoning adult (from Ind.: *orang dewasa yang bisa berpikir diri sendiri*, [*orang yang*] *punya otak sendiri*, lit. an adult person who can think for himself, a person who has his own brain/with a brain of his own) (see Onishi 2008 for similar narratives by Pakistani and Iranian workers in Japan). Instead, his skills and intellectual abilities were not recognised or even put to the test. He and his Indonesian friends felt depreciated and patronised, as if they were unable to deal not only with tasks at work but also in their private lives.

'A human being wants to feel that he means something' (from Ind.: *manusia mau rasa berarti*), added Ramelan on another occasion when we were discussing his feelings of being treated as if he were unneeded (from Ind.: *seperti tidak dibutuh*) at work and that he too wanted to be *dihargai* (Ind.: appreciated, valued). He felt that they were treated 'like children' (from Ind.: s*eperti anak-anak*) who were not allowed to leave the town without first notifying somebody from the institution about the destination and the

anticipated return time, and who could not be entrusted with responsible tasks at work and should follow the instructions of those who 'knew better'.

In one of the institutions I had been visiting in the course of my research, the Indonesian candidate was introduced to all the manual activities within the first two weeks of her arrival to the institution. She was soon performing her tasks confidently, and was occasionally asked to instruct new Japanese members of staff.[40] However, in two other institutions where I concentrated my ethnographic research, the candidates were confined to tasks such as setting up the tables for meals, preparing residents' toothbrushes for easy use after they had finished eating, wiping the tables, changing bedding, and so on—in short, they were not allowed to perform any duties involving direct (i.e., physical) care, or handling of the elderly. In one of the institutions, only nearly a year into their employment did my informants start being introduced to direct care tasks, and in a very sporadic manner at that. When faced with the adamant position of their superiors questioning their ability to provide adequate care, the Indonesians saw the limitations imposed on the range of activities they could perform as unjust and based on prejudiced perceptions of their abilities, which were simply '*tidak dipercaya*' (Ind.: not trusted in).

Distrust

One evening a few months into his employment, when discussing the day's events while cycling through the rice fields on the way home, Amir told me about his feelings of frustration over his inability to acquire an independent standing on his ward. He felt he was not performing at the top of his abilities because of the continuing lack of freedom to act and the pervasive feeling of unreliability. The restrictions and the practically constant supervision, Amir claimed, made him wary of doing anything according to his own judgement, lest it was to be deemed improper, and ultimately led him to avoid showing any initiative. This, in turn, contributed to his image as being unable to perform direct care tasks autonomously. Elsewhere, too, judging by my observations

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40 She was, however, excluded from writing reports and reading them out loud during staff meetings, for her Japanese language ability was still insufficient to perform such tasks.

during shorter visits, and based on the accounts of other candidates, the situation seemed to be similar. Wahyudin and Nakamura Hirohiko, a director of an accepting institution and a former chairman of the Japanese Council of Senior Citizens Welfare Service, also alluded to this during a press conference for The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan held on the 3rd of August 2010. During the conference Wahyudin, an EPA Indonesian care worker candidate employed in a care home belonging to the consortium run by Nakamura, expressed his confusion over the system which allowed any Japanese individual without qualifications to perform the exact same tasks as certified carers, but prevented foreigners from doing so even if they were in possession of a nursing qualification (with particular reference to the first batch of the EPA Indonesians who were my main informants). This was what puzzled my friends as well. Many of the Japanese employees who newly entered the institutions in which the Indonesian candidates worked neither had undergone education in care provision or any related area, nor possessed any relevant work experience, and yet they were allowed to perform bodily care tasks much sooner than the Indonesian candidates. This research was taking place in 2009 and the beginning of 2010, when the economic downturn pushed many people employed in the Japanese car industry out of jobs. A significant portion of these people turned to care work, as this sector had long been suffering from a labour shortage and apparently the job seemed fairly easy to learn. In two institutions which became my primary sites for research, there were several new employees who admitted to being assembly line operators turned care workers. Despite no previous encounters with care work, they were performing direct care tasks soon after their employment began, much to the amazement and disillusionment of my informants who were excluded from such tasks. One could view this preference to delegate care tasks to non- or less-experienced Japanese rather than to qualified non-Japanese as a demonstration of crediting with greater trust, or at least trusting sooner, a Japanese person than a non-Japanese one. Such, at least, was the interpretation of the situation by the Indonesian EPA workers.

Ramelan and Amir saw the situation as a kind of vicious cycle, as shown in Amir's explanation above. Not allowed to perform those caring duties which involved direct care of the elderly, they felt not really needed or appreciated in their institutions. It was the intimate person-to-person interactions with the elderly during direct care activities which gave my informants additional joy and satisfaction from their work, but this was also the area the Indonesians saw as most important in terms of the mental well-being of the elderly. Because the candidates remained under the supervision of Japanese members of staff, the Indonesians were not allowed to independently carry out the tasks they were assigned or to apply their own judgement and act upon it. As a result, even if they noticed that an elderly fell out of her bed and experienced faecal incontinence, as happened while Ramelan was changing bedding in the woman's room, they were not allowed (or trained) to help the resident autonomously. Instead, as Ramelan did, they had to interrupt their current activity and summon the help of other members of staff, who had to abandon their duties as well. Such a manner of dealing with 'emergencies' made the candidates feel valueless and uneasy when they had to interrupt other staff to help them deal with a situation they felt apt to resolve as well. It not only meant that the elderly in need of help had to wait longer, but it also perpetuated the image of the Indonesians as incapable of independent work.

Less human

Initially, the still imperfect Japanese language of the Indonesians made it a daunting exercise for both the Indonesians and the Japanese to achieve understanding on anything more profound than basic information which required little more than several set phrases to accomplish communication. A lack of commitment to engage with their Indonesian co-workers beyond the superficial and occasional probing into random areas of their lives was a common, albeit not surprising, attitude among the Japanese employees. At work, usually occupied with their duties, the co-workers had little time for extensive conversations. Sometimes this lack of verbal communication affected

the degree to which the Indonesian and Japanese workers were able or willing to perceive each other as comprehending individuals.

Consider the following situation. Mr Yamada, a team leader, had been told to instruct Jasir, a 23-year-old Indonesian man, how to transfer a bedridden elderly from his bed to a wheelchair and back. They practiced on one of the residents. Mr Yamada was mostly showing Jasir the whole process with the help of another member of staff. When Jasir's turn came, he picked up the legs of the elderly man, Mr Yamada picked up the upper body, and they transferred the man into the wheelchair. It went rather smoothly. Jasir started pulling down the jacket of the resident's pyjamas, and placed his hands in a safe position, as previously instructed by Mr Yamada. In this moment Mr Yamada made the following statement as if he were talking to himself: 'Clothes have to be put in order. Then, a cushion should be placed. There is a meaning to the cushion. But you, Jasir, have not grasped the cushion's meaning and so you don't know [what to do with it]' (from Jpn.: *Fuku o totonoeru. Sore kara kusshon o ateru. Kusshon ni imi ga aru. Jasir wa kusshon no imi ga ha'aku shite nai kara wakaranai*). Hearing this statement, Jasir, surprised and confused, looked up as Mr Yamada was placing the cushions around the resident's upper body. As I later found out, Jasir did not fully understand Mr Yamada's words, partly because he misheard the word *kusshon* (Jpn.: cushion) for a word which he had learnt earlier that day, *fushu* (Jpn.: swelling, oedema), and partly because he did not expect Mr Yamada to suddenly make a comment like this because he knew perfectly well what the cushions were for and simply could not imagine anyone suggesting it was difficult or impossible to comprehend the cushions' practical application. He was planning to put the cushions around the resident once he made sure that his arms were in a safe and comfortable position.

The Indonesians who arrived in Japan as care workers felt as if they were not seen as thinking or comprehending individuals on the basis that they could not communicate in the Japanese language. Sometimes, indeed, the (usually correct) perception of the linguistic insufficiency of the candidates seemed to have been extended in the minds, or at least the actions, of their co-workers to perceptions of the cognitive abilities of the Indonesians as limited. The

imperfect sentences, unusual pronunciation, and need to repeat the same information several times or to rephrase one's words distorted the usual communication practice, and there was still no guarantee that the intended message would come across. In the case of the Indonesian workers not fully competent in the Japanese language, the need to simplify the language used for communication might have brought about, even if unintentionally, the assumption that they were incapable of understanding what was being said, or that the simplicity of the language reflected the simplicity of the thoughts or minds behind it. A complaint to the same effect was made by non-native English speaking domestic workers in Toronto, Canada, researched by England and Stiell (1997). Such assignment of a 'master status' to one characteristic which is perceived as different is, according to Mary Douglas (1966), one of the ways in which people deal with differences.

Using one differentiating characteristic of the other as an emblematic feature—that is, as one which conveys the 'whole' truth about the person in question—serves to reduce cognitive ambiguity related to the possibility of similarity between the self and the other. Transposing one inability, in this case the linguistic incompetency, onto the perception of the totality of a person served to represent the entirety of the Indonesians as dissimilar, and therefore unknowable to the Japanese. Simultaneously, as Michael Herzfeld (1997:157) writes, 'the act of stereotyping is by definition reductive, and, as such, it always marks the absence of some presumably desirable property in its object. It is therefore a discursive weapon of power'. The above discussions on the lack of appreciation for their skills or indeed maturity to think for themselves, the presumed distrust, and the discursive dehumanisation of the Indonesian care workers show how difference was used to construct hierarchies and keep that which was distrusted at bay. Of course, safety considerations where behind some of the delays in introducing the Indonesian workers to direct care tasks. However, as shown above, the marginalisation was not confined to these. What I want to argue is that behind such an overarching denial of agency were what Herzfeld (1997:43) calls 'nationalistic feelings of distrust toward a foreign group'. The less powerful the other, the less he or she is able to disrupt the

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'natural' order of things. The assumption of incommensurable differences rested on a similar idea to that underlying the concerns over the preservation of a Japanese quality of eldercare—that is, that one cannot *learn* how to be or act as Japanese (*cf.* Chapter Two)—impeded, therefore, the potential for more nuanced representations of both the self and the other. Such acute division of representations made the Indonesian difference all the more unsettling for both the candidates and the Japanese in the institutions.

Embarrassments

Aware of their unusualness, my Indonesian informants felt uneasy about openly engaging in everyday practices which were common in Indonesia. For example, they were anxious not to eat with their hands in the presence of the Japanese and to avoid the public (Japanese) eye when performing daily prayers.

None of the Indonesians I met ate with their hands when at work. They all would prepare an Indonesian meal in the form of *bentō* (a set meal in a lunch box) to have during lunch break, which they usually spent at the institution. They always used chopsticks or cutlery, because it would have been *malu*, embarrassing (Ind.), to eat with their hands. At home, where, in their words, they finally felt *bebas* (Ind.: free, unfettered), each meal, as long as it was not a soup, would have been consumed with their hands. Although not ruefully so (Herzfeld 1997), but self-recognised as particular to an Indonesian person, eating with the hands also had connotations of being 'uncultured', as was once suggested by Iffah's employer during an outing in a restaurant. Seeing her cutting through a dish she had on her plate, the employer commented that it seemed to him that Indonesians could not really use a knife and fork, suggesting that this differentiated them from the Japanese, who, apart from using chopsticks, were well accustomed to using 'Western' cutlery as well. As if confirming the Indonesians' expectations about how awkward and unappreciated the practice of eating with hands would be for the Japanese, one day during lunch on Ramelan's ward there was a kerfuffle between two residents over the very issue. One of the female residents, whose mental

impairment which came with age left her more or less oblivious to the outside world, started eating her rice using her hand. She was seated at a table together with another elderly woman who, although already senile as well, was still able to communicate with other people, depending on the day. The latter noticed what the other woman was doing and first commented, as if to herself, that it was disgusting. Then she tapped an arm of the other woman, telling her to stop and use her spoon (the woman was unable to hold chopsticks anymore). When she received no reaction, she raised her voice, repeating her demand, and tried to grasp the hand with which the other woman was eating in order to stop her. At this point Ramelan, who was until now observing the situation together with other workers, came up to the table and suggested to the agitated woman that she change tables. She took her lunch tray and sat at a table in a far corner of the room together with three other elderly. She calmed down and began eating again, but every now and then she would turn around to look at the woman still eating with her hand and murmur to herself.

Eating with hands as distinctly non-Japanese was also a subject of a conversation Iffah, two of her colleagues, and I had during one lunch break. Iffah brought some rice and cooked chicken with her. Amidst the comments on who prepared what for today's lunch, she mentioned that if she were at home she would be eating hers with a hand, not like she was doing at the time, with a spoon. Kenta, Iffah's male colleague, responded with the interjection 'interesting' (from Jpn.: *omoshiroi*), and asked if everyone in Indonesia did the same. Iffah explained that yes, but only the right hand should be used, because the left hand is used 'in a toilet'. She then told everyone that I would use my hand, too, when I ate at her house. After an exchange explaining that it is not a custom in Poland, where I was from, but that I did use my hand when eating Indonesian food, our joint story was met with interested acknowledgement expressed by the *hee* token already explained above. At this moment, however, Kenta looked down at his own hands and, surprised at his realisation, said that actually he just ate an *onigiri* (a rice ball) with his hands too. We finished our conversation enumerating other examples like sushi, and in particular *temaki zushi* (a cone-shaped sushi wrapped in a flat sheet of dried pressed seaweed),

which are eaten with one's fingers or hands. This latter episode hints at how more intimate relationships could serve mutual learning and formation of nuanced understandings, in this case through discovering similarities where the more stereotypical view produced difference. Nevertheless, the fact that the Indonesians continued to refrain from eating with their hands in the institutions suggested that the uneasy feeling of going against the grain of the dominant practices and expectations persisted on a more general level.

On another occasion, Amir admitted to praying in a narrow diaper storage room because the common room, where he would usually perform his afternoon prayer, was occupied by a group of staff having a meeting. Despite the carers' station (a designated area where some smaller equipment, the residents' files, and some of their belongings were stored, fitted with a table, chairs, and a small resting area for the staff) being far more spacious and seemingly more suitable for the purpose, he decided to pray in the storage room because it would have been *malu* (Ind.: embarrassing) to do it where everyone could see him. It was the feeling of an acute difference breaking with the practices commonly accepted in the care home to the extent that they became normalising (Puwar 2004) which made Amir uneasy about praying where not only his co-workers but also the residents could easily see him.

Another afternoon, towards the end of a study break to which Amir, Jasir, and Ramelan were entitled every day after lunch, their floor manager walked in on the three of them while they were praying. The floor manager was planning a meeting with her deputies in the room, which served multiple functions as a lunch room, common room, and meeting room. When she opened the sliding door leading on to the elevated tatami floor of the room, she saw the three Indonesians prostrating in their prayers. She quickly apologised and closed the door. From behind the closed door she informed the three men that she needed the room for a meeting when they were finished. Amir, Jasir, and Ramelan exchanged glimpses, somewhat amazed by the reaction of the floor manager, and vacated the room. Until then, the floor manager and her deputies waited outside. When an occasion arose for me to ask about this situation a few days later, the floor manager explained that she was startled by what she saw, not

having seen any of the three young men praying before, although she knew about the practice. Not wanting to disturb, but also not knowing what the appropriate behaviour should be, the overall situation felt uneasy, baffling, even embarrassing (from Jpn.: *konwaku shita*). In this situation, the floor manager found herself at loss to deal with the unfamiliar environment of the break room temporarily transformed into a culturally non-intimate space by the Indonesians' prayers. The uneasiness, or discomfort, to which the floor manager admitted suggests the potential of quotidian actions to diversify spaces otherwise perceived as homogeneous.

Both the construction of the eldercare homes as culturally Japanese spaces and the resultant emphasis of the Indonesians' unfamiliarity with and within the environment so construed operated on common-sense conceptions of what 'Japaneseness' and 'Indonesianness' were. These notions found their instantiations in such everyday practices as eating or praying. Although these common representations locked the Indonesians into the less potent category of those who needed guidance or had to be excluded from full participation, and although they urged the candidates to weigh their self-presentation in order to underemphasise their own difference, there was a potential resting in the everyday practices to cut through these representations. The remaining part of this chapter focuses on this potential. I show how certain practices and statuses functioned as social adhesive, but also how certain constellations of them could fail to fulfil this function.

Towards interpersonal intimacy

Alliances with the elderly

A part of the carer job which, in the institutions I visited, was the most tricky to carry out was to verbally engage with the elderly, as, unlike for the manual tasks, there was no scheduled time for it. The conversations needed to take place in between or during other, bodily caring activities. When the work tempo was fast, the Indonesian candidates did not have the time to pause and concentrate on the conversation, which was necessary, especially in the early period of their employment, and very often they could not count on a Japanese

colleague to step in and 'do the talking' for them. A carer was expected to be on the lookout for the elderly's wishes and requests and attend to them within reason and the care home regulations. Some such requests, however deeply felt and however a carer might wish to fulfil them, could not be met. It was often the case that the elderly who were suffering from dementia would want to return home, one which they remembered from their past, but which might not exist any more. Sometimes believing that a husband, a wife, or their children were waiting for them to come back home, the elderly would anxiously try to open any door leading to the outside world. Being unable to leave the ward, they would become even more distressed, and it was the role of the carers to ease the elderly's emotions. Without a certain level of language proficiency soothing their anxiety was nearly impossible. The Japanese carers, provided there was time for such an engagement, would usually strike up a conversation with the anxious person about their family and, to an extent, would enter the fantasy world of the past, playing along while still trying to find a reason acceptable to the elderly for why they would not be able to go back home just yet. Such conversations would either finally drift away in a completely different direction, with the elderly seemingly forgetting about their desire to return home, or end with the elderly having been persuaded to wait until after supper, for example, by which time they were most likely to forget about the whole issue. To be able to engage in a conversation and to calm down the elderly in this way, the Indonesian candidates had to display more than just a basic grasp of the Japanese language. Initially Iffah, who worked on a ward where there were the greatest number of elderly with dementia of all the wards I visited, either avoided engaging with an elderly person wishing to return home, or utilised rudimentary phrases, such as a simple *dekimasen* (Jpn.: you cannot, it is not allowed), or *ato de* (Jpn.: later), and so on, which did not attend to the feelings of the elderly. She felt frustrated at not being able to perform what she knew was her duty, but also because she felt for the elderly separated from their families whom they missed and she could do nothing to comfort them.

On the other hand, however, the lack of fluency in the Japanese language meant that the Indonesian candidates would listen carefully to any word uttered by the elderly and ask them to repeat or to rephrase until they were able to understand what was being said to them. When speaking, the Indonesians would not only speak much slower than their Japanese colleagues, but they would also use the polite forms which they were taught during the introductory language course, and which they were admonished to use when talking to the elderly. In the Japanese language the same information can be conveyed in various styles depending on the relative positions of the people involved in the exchange. Depending on whether one's interlocutor is of a lower, equal, or higher standing, or whether he or she belongs or does not belong to the same group or category as the speaker, or whether the person spoken about belongs to the group of the speaker or to that of the addressee, the styles used in a conversation alternate. The Indonesian candidates were taught only the forms which could be used to converse politely with people who do not belong to one's group—who, for example, would be their seniors at work even if of the same age, or of a higher standing, such as teachers or indeed the elderly to whom linguistic respect was due not least because of their age. In the institutions I visited, however, the Japanese members of staff when addressing the elderly, especially those with whom communication was difficult due to the elderly's hearing problems or psychological conditions, would use expressions and forms usually deployed in conversations with individuals of lower or equal standing. The Indonesian candidates, using only honorific expressions and displaying more attention to the words of the residents, were often praised for their politeness and attentiveness. Their inability to fluently speak the Japanese language was turned to their advantage and secured them the sympathy of the elderly residents. Although not the case for all the Indonesian caregiver candidates, those of them who were confined to a limited range of duties could also afford to spend more time chatting with the elderly, further enhancing their relationships. In this way, the relative marginalisation of the Indonesians in terms of their involvement in performing the full range of tasks expected of the staff turned out to be supportive of their getting to know individual elderly.

Moreover, these conversations provided the Indonesians with opportunities to practice their Japanese language skills in a more relaxed manner than when they were involved in caring practices.

Noticeably, the relative position of dependence on the Japanese members of staff and the occasional inability to communicate their thoughts effectively created a sense of a bond between the Indonesian carers and the elderly who were aware of their own situation. For different reasons, both the elderly and the Indonesian candidates needed to be looked after. To an extent, the limited linguistic abilities of the Indonesians were not unlike the impairments of some of the elderly. Being unable to understand the spoken language was not much different from not actually hearing what was being said, being unable to read Japanese was very much like not seeing the text, and lacking words and grammatical structures was not a far cry from being unable to articulate words due to paralysis after a stroke. Hence, in a sense, the Indonesians and the elderly occupied a similar position within the care institutions, where they were dependent on the Japanese members of staff for instructions and explanations, and where they were not always acknowledged as fully comprehending adults. As if in recognition of such sharing in the position of the 'weak' within the institutions, some of the elderly would give the candidates understanding looks and smiles when the latter were in trouble with the Japanese members of staff. Just as the Indonesians were there to provide care for the elderly, so also the elderly looked after the young candidates, supporting them through showing that they were on the same side and making sure to cheerfully accost them whenever the Indonesians were passing by.

Lazim and Amir had particularly cordial relationships with some of the elderly on their wards. This may have been due to the fact that in comparison with other wards I visited, on Lazim's and on Amir's there were a larger number of still lucid elderly. On Lazim's ward it became his daily routine to dispense an after-meal cigarette and light it for Ms Arai, a long-standing resident known for speaking her mind and her strong personality. The elderly woman would not engage in a conversation with any other member of staff, but Lazim and she would often communicate through gestures across the dining

room where the woman spent a large part of the day. Ms Arai would tell me that there was nothing she wanted to talk about or to hear from the others, and often commented on their rigid, martinet-like demeanour. Ms Arai also seemed more approachable to another young staff member who had just joined the ward team and was still receiving instructions from others. On Amir's ward, Mr Sawada was the one who became a friend of the young foreign carer. Although Mr Sawada was a well-regarded man known in the entire institution for his readiness to engage with others (despite the fact that he was hard of hearing and had difficulty speaking after a stroke), it was with Amir that he would jokingly plot how to get a sip of whiskey; he would invite him to his room, showing different objects he had stashed there over the years (a small collection of DVDs with Japanese film and television series classics, old coins and bills, books, and so on), and they would often communicate through an exchange of looks only. It was also Mr Sawada who was the most knowledgeable about Amir's private life. On the day when an interview with Amir, accompanied by a photograph of him, was published in the local newspaper, Mr Sawada rolled in his wheelchair to every nurse station on each ward and when the staff or other residents leaned over the newspaper to see the article, he would point to the photograph, say Amir's name, and smile proudly, showing his thumbs up. It was 'his Amir' in the newspaper. Sadly, both Ms Arai and Mr Sawada have passed away since then. Ms Arai passed away during my last visit to the care home, after a few weeks of illness. Although I did not take many notes on that day, I recall remembering Ms Arai with Lazim during our lunch break, her engaging personality and the feeling of attachment Lazim gained thanks to interactions with her. The news of Mr Sawada's death reached me through Amir when I was already back in London. In an e-mail he rhetorically asked, 'Why is it that the people you like the most die soonest' (from Ind.: *kenapa orang yang paling disukai cepat meninggal*).

I want to suggest here that such special relationships were possible precisely because the Indonesian candidates were an unusual appearance in the institutions. If on occasion leading to negative and fearful reactions from some of the elderly, being extraordinary also meant being easily recognisable and

interesting. Importantly, because under the provisions of the EPA programme only up to five candidates could be placed in any institution during one intake, the candidates often found themselves the sole Indonesians, and usually the sole non-Japanese, working on a given ward. Such singularity guaranteed attention would be focused on the one person who had a kind of monopoly on interesting unusualness. Only 'seeded' in the institutions in small numbers, the candidates' presence was also less overwhelming and less threatening to suddenly drastically change the social landscape of the care homes. Such a situation is unlike what Watson and Maxwell (1977) observed in an American Jewish nursing home for the elderly, where the predominantly Afro-American members of staff appeared to be kept at a (social) distance by the white Jewish elderly residents, who were sometimes overtly racist. Although the different social awareness of the late 1970s in the United States might be behind such differences of attitudes, similar observations were made more recently by researchers from the already mentioned Oxford-based COMPAS. In their report, the authors note that in the care homes for the elderly in the United Kingdom and in other care-providing institutions they reference, where many a care worker was a foreigner or a member of an ethnic minority, there was a noticeable incidence of verbal, often racist abuse by white elderly residents, and a persistent preference for white care providers (Cangiano *et al.* 2009). In contrast to these findings, in the case of the EPA Indonesians, their novelty and limited numbers turned the otherwise disadvantageous position into a factor conducive of more welcoming acceptance. I suggest that such 'seeding' also supported the development of intimate interpersonal relationships with the Japanese colleagues, a subject to which I now turn.

Relations with Japanese colleagues

Intimacy of body work

In the first year of their employment in Japan, most of the Indonesian EPA candidates had limited Japanese language skills. This was, at least, the case with my informants. Their relations with the Japanese co-workers and the elderly proved, however, that communication could be achieved despite the

language barrier. Much information, attitudes, and even a sense of humour could be conveyed despite the shortage of words. The Indonesian and Japanese workers could connect through shared practices at work. It was in particular the unpleasant side of care work, coming with the handling of the 'decaying, leaking bodies' (Huang *et al.* 2012) of the elderly, dealing with human waste and naked bodies, which served as an arena for forging alliances. Julia Twigg (2000b) describes various coping techniques deployed by care workers in order to '[get] over the more difficult or embarrassing aspects of silence' (2000:401) when attending to the more intimate needs of the elderly. Here I concentrate on the care workers' sharing in and coping with the embarrassment of attending together to such intimate needs. Witnessing and working within embarrassing situations, or indeed embarrassing body parts and bodily substances, can be in itself a source of embarrassment if done together. Cleaning genitalia was one such practice. When Amir was instructed in the ways of cleaning male genitalia as practiced on his ward, it was by his female supervisor, who was, like Amir, in her mid-twenties. After a few minutes of silence after the two of them disappeared behind a curtain closed around the bed of a male resident being washed, I heard Amir comment that the resident's penis was just like his (i.e., circumcised, although Amir did not use the word, but, as he later told me, pointed to the removed foreskin instead). Amir's supervisor laughed in a manner which sounded somewhat embarrassed, and surprised, but picked up the subject and asked Amir what the word for 'penis' was in Indonesian and why he would be circumcised. I could not hear the details of the rest of the conversation which ensued, but a friendly chat continued until Amir and his supervisor opened the curtain and left the room. On the way back home that day, Amir brought up the subject of his exchange with the female superior and said that although she was shy, *malu*, at the beginning, she then started asking questions, although she kept using the Indonesian term for penis rather than the Japanese. As abrupt as Amir's initial comment might seem, in the situation it served to naturalise, or make appear as common, what was an unusual setting for an interaction between two young people. It made the situation and the body parts which were usually embarrassing if displayed and witnessed into a

possible topic of friendly conversation. Amir underwent further similar instructional sessions with the same supervisor, who oversaw him in his first attempts at changing diapers and toilet help, and supported him in transporting the elderly between their wheelchairs and beds. The two developed a system of gestures and a quasi-language composed of some Japanese and some Indonesian words, which they used to communicate during work.

Twigg (2000b) also notes that young care workers concentrats on the sexual areas in reflecting on their experiences of contact with the nakedness of elderly bodies. For Iffah this was one of the more problematic areas as well. One day when I was following her from room to room during her diaper-changing shift, she sighed that she had not even seen her boyfriend's penis yet, but had seen so many of old men. She then added that the same was true of the two new young female employees. As she told me, closing a curtain around the bed of the next elderly, they talked about it the other day during a short break in a staff room. Somehow the topic arose when they were exchanging their impressions of work in eldercare, which was for Iffah's new colleagues a fairly recent and new experience. They found this upsetting commonality, which not only 'broke the ice' between them but also made it possible for them to discuss the otherwise difficult to express details of the tasks required of them as care workers and feelings related to these tasks. Geraldine Lee-Treweek (1997) also talks about the female nursing auxiliaries' difficulty in conveying information about the actual content of their work in an eldercare home in the UK. One of Lee-Treweek's informants did not clarify to her husband what she was doing at work and let him believe that she '[sat] there and [talked] to them [patients]', while she found it possible to talk about it with her co-workers (*ibid.*:52–53). Sharing in such intimate experiences meant that it was possible to talk about the otherwise silenced aspects of the care work experience. It was only after I had assisted Iffah with changing the diaper of one of the bedridden male residents who started having a bowel movement just as Iffah was cleaning him that she started discussing with me her experiences of dealing with faeces. On this particular occasion, after several minutes of trying to cope with the situation on her own, Iffah called for help from one of the male staff who was

not in the circle of her 'favourite' colleagues (he was known for playing *pachinko*, an activity Iffah perceived as immoral), but who just happened to be passing by the room where we were. He helped Iffah contain the resident's faeces and, once this was done, supported her by saying that such things happen and she should not hesitate to summon help next time. After Iffah finished her shift, she commented extensively on how composed and supportive the colleague was. He did not become Iffah's close friend, but from that day on whenever she described her work mates and his name came up, she would qualify his description with a mention of how ready to help he was.

This clearly shows that such situations and the tactics used to overcome their awkwardness served as bonding experiences for the care workers despite their perceived cultural distance. 'Direct physical contact, access to nakedness and the sharing of bodily processes are all powerful mediators of intimacy, containing a capacity to create closeness and dissolve boundaries between people', writes Twigg (2000b:402–403) about the relationship between the carer and the cared-for, noting that such intimacy in the context of care work is not necessarily welcome and may in fact 'disrupt friendship'. I want to argue here that shared participation in such boundary-dissolving practices affected the boundaries between the carers as well. There was a clear difference between being there and knowing of it, the former becoming the basis for development of close relationships. Apart from sharing in embarrassing situations, other commonly shared experiences were those of back pain due to the strenuousness of lifting the elderly bodies, exhaustion of attending to the elderly in a hot bathroom, chapped skin on hands from using detergents, and so on. Such non-linguistic activities or states contributed to the development of closer relationships between the Indonesians and their Japanese colleagues. These somatic experiences served as markers of solidarity in the same plight of working with one's body to care for others and obfuscated the generalised differentiating discourses.

Bodies in sport, bodies at work

Another example of bodily practices serving as a means of communication which conveyed some information about who the Indonesians (and the Japanese) were was performance in sport. When Amir and Jasir[41] joined their institution's volleyball team, their relations with those co-workers who were on the team as well became more personal and the camaraderie of the volleyball pitch spilled into the workplace. Initially, the invitation to join the team was made to the Indonesians since it was a care home team, not a private undertaking. There was no requirement for them to be previously intimate with the co-workers to take part. When Amir in particular turned out to be an asset to the futsal (football played indoors on a smaller than outdoor pitch) team and a committed goal keeper, he sealed his position as a valued companion as well. This is not to say that he was welcome only on the pitch. Rather, his performance on the futsal field reflected on him as a person, enmeshed him in relationships with the other players, and hence provided ground for further mutual explorations, even if linguistic communication remained as challenging as before. In contrast, during a *sōbetsukai* (farewell party) for a member of staff leaving the care home to give birth to her first child, organised in a local *izakaya* restaurant, Amir and Jasir sat at one end of a long table, where, even if remaining attentive and trying to understand the ongoing conversation, they mostly stayed quiet, only sporadically exchanging a few words between themselves, or answering questions about whether they liked the food. They remained outside of the main conversations.[42] On a futsal pitch or volleyball field, on the other hand, they were able to fully join in and communication and bonding happened despite the scarcity of words. Such physical activities in which the Indonesians engaged outside of work conveyed meaning despite their non-verbal content. Roberson (1998), in his study of work relationships in a small Japanese factory, indeed emphasises the need to distinguish between 'work-related associations' and 'work-established friendships' (*ibid.*:157). He

41 Ramelan, the third candidate working in the same institution, was in hospital at the time, and even after returning to work, he was advised not to participate in any strenuous sport activities for his health's sake.

42 I could not participate in this outing, as I was scheduled to be in a different institution at the time, but I saw a 10-minute-long video recording, and later talked about it with Amir and Jasir.

suggests that in order to fully account for the relations salient in a workplace it is necessary to look not only at the formal divisions of individuals according to their role allocation within the workplace, but also at the formation of relationships, sometimes cutting across the formal affiliations, which form more intimate groups of *nakama*, based on a 'common interest or some other relationship' (Atsumi 1979, cited in Roberson 1998:157). The *nakama* indicates 'contextually defined reference groups essentially (but not exclusively) composed of non-kin-related in-group members' who are usually 'involved in some mutual activity' (Roberson 1998:155; *cf.* Atsumi 1979, 1989 for a critique of the term as analytically useful). Foner (1994:125), for example, notes that purchasing Avon products from a member of staff cemented social relationships within the care home where she conducted her research. In a similar fashion, Amir and Jasir managed to forge close interpersonal relationships through their involvement in futsal and volleyball teams.

Social status connection

On a different level, Kenta, a young male colleague of Iffah, suggested an affinity between him and Iffah on the basis of them both being care workers in a broader socio-economic context. That evening he took Iffah and me for a ride to a near-by creek to watch fireflies. The conversation arrived at our respective decisions of what to do in life. Kenta considered himself a bit of a rebel against the prevailing conception of what was a desirable job in Japan. He came to be a care worker after several years as a manager in a successful company. He grew tired of the cold corporate environment and, thinking of his ageing father, turned to care work and remained proud of his new profession despite his former corporate friends' ridicule and his ultimate alienation from them. He definitely looked like he was enjoying his job when I saw him in the institution, and when during the ride he described himself and Iffah as both having a 'tough, of socially low status, but honourable job' (from Jpn.: *kitsukute, shakaiteki chii hikui shigoto da ga, rippana shigoto da*), Iffah was quick to pick up on it, too. She agreed wholeheartedly and explained that she

thought of what she was doing now in similar terms, although she found the job very hard to adjust to, both physically and mentally. The conversation continued along the same lines, with Kenta and Iffah exchanging thoughts on different ways of dealing with the unpleasantries of their work and why they should carry on doing it.

Kaigo's, or care work's, provenance, in what was traditionally assumed to be an unpaid responsibility of women who in their reproductive role within a family possessed a 'natural' ability to attend to other humans' needs, feeds into the representation of care as not requiring professional (i.e., obtained through systematic training or schooling) skills. That possessing a formal qualification is not a requirement for working in care provision in Japan (something already discussed in the first chapter) adds to this image of *kaigo* as unskilled and excludes *kaigo* workers from a category of 'knowledge workers' (Nishikawa & Tanaka 2007). Also, in the case of eldercare, as Lise Widding Isaksen (2005) argues, it is its association with disgust, disease, and decay of the body which continues to classify the care work as devalued and undesirable (*cf.* Lawton 1998). Combined with the stigma attached to eldercare as 'dirty work' (Hughes 1962; *cf.* Anderson 2000) through its dealing with the unbounded, disintegrating bodies of the elderly, and death, the perceptions of care work as unskilled place it on the socioeconomic margins of Japanese society. As illustrated by Kenta's story, it is particularly alienating for men who are valued against the still relevant ideal (or folk model) of a Japanese man as a white-collar company employee, a salaryman, which, as Roberson (1998) suggests, 'may perhaps be seen to constitute a hegemonic cultural symbol of masculinity [in Japan]' (*ibid.*:6; *cf.* Dahle 2005). Working in an eldercare home, not only was Kenta performing a 'female-coded' (Dhale 2005) role and 'dirty' work, which was stigmatised in itself, but as a non-white-collar employee and therefore non-representative of the ideal of a uniformly middle-class Japanese society (see Lie 2001) he was also aware of his undesirable and somehow stigmatised lower-class status which he experienced in his alienation from his previous colleagues. Iffah, too, experienced what Takeyuki Tsuda (2003a) describes of the Brazilian *Nikkeijin* factory workers performing unskilled jobs

in Japan: 'shame and damaged pride' after being middle-class white-collar workers in Brazil (*ibid.*:172). As already noted, educated and used to high-middle-class life, complete with live-in domestic workers, ashamed and afraid of her father's (himself a hospital director) reaction, Iffah did not tell him what exactly she was doing in Japan for several months. Similarly, unused to the tasks involved in eldercare provision, sometimes she found it difficult to justify to herself the kind of work in which she was engaged in Japan. She told me how she cried at work, asking herself what she was doing there (in Japan), when, one day, already tired towards the end of her shift, she still needed to change the diapers of every elderly on the ward and right on that day nearly all of them were soiled with faeces.

The mutual assurances of worthiness and ethicality (Fox 1999) of care work expressed by Iffah and Kenta during our drive to the firefly creek were what Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) call 'ennobling ideologies' through which the 'dirty workers ... are more likely to embrace the work role' (*ibid.*:428). They served as a means to rationalise and add positive value to what the two realised was perceived as low-status and undignified work. In particular, for Iffah, it was also a way to deal with the psychological burden which the nature of eldercare carried with it and with which she still needed to come to terms (see Bolton 2005; Stacey 2005; Kreiner *et al*. 2006; *cf*. Jervis 2001 for an account of workers who were unable to rationalise away the stigma of care work). Importantly, what this shared realisation achieved was recognition of a correspondence between Iffah's and Kenta's position and experiences which allowed them to imagine each other as somehow similar (see Foner 1994:123 for an account of the bonding force of class belonging between nursing aids in a New York eldercare institution).

Up to this point, I have showed how involvement in the bodily practices of care provision as well as those associated with after-hours socialisation constituted grounds for construction of intimate relationships between Indonesian and Japanese co-workers. While remaining within the same area of investigation, the following section considers the role of alcohol drinking. Here

the situation was complicated by the divergence of dominant meanings associated with alcohol in Japan and Indonesia.

Sociality of alcohol

Issho ni osake ga nomeru to ii naa (Jap.: it's good to be able to have a drink together, isn't it?), commented one of the former Japanese language teachers, Ms Ito, while visiting Irdina at her home, as she was making herself comfortable in a corner between a bed and a small *kotatsu*.[43] The idea of not being able to share a drink with the Indonesian candidates in an informal setting seemed to be 'unnatural' or at least uncomfortable to some of the Japanese with whom they worked, either as colleagues in the care homes or as teachers turned friends. As Stephen R. Smith (1988) remarks in his work on alcohol drinking in Japan, 'a man who does not drink does not partake equally in the rituals of drinking. Equally important, he does not share in the emotional warmth and camaraderie that goes with drinking and therefore inhibits others who do drink' (*ibid.*:150, quoted in Roberson 1998:163). The comment made by Ms Ito referred to the visits which she regularly paid to other Indonesian candidates, either at their homes or when she would invite them out for a meal. In the majority of cases, no alcohol was consumed, neither suggested to go with the meals nor as a drink over which to exchange mutual stories about what had happened in the lives of the candidates and Ms Ito between the visits. During Iffah's birthday dinner, which, organised and sponsored by her employer, was a small outing of five people—the employer, his deputy, Ms Ito, Iffah, and me, just finishing a period of participant observation at Iffah's employment institution—everyone but Iffah ordered beer with his or her meal. Although otherwise an undisputed practice, this time the ordering of beer was preceded by a discussion of whether we should do it because Iffah was with us and she was not intending to drink anything alcoholic. Ms Ito's and my ordering of beer was particularly noted by Iffah, who asked if we would not get dizzy (from Ind.: *pusing*). Although an informal gathering, it felt as if a degree of formality or seriousness remained because not everyone at the table joined

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43 A table with a heater attached underneath its top.

in what was for the employer, his deputy, Ms Ito, and me a token of a separation between the formal, professional relationship we had and the more personal, informal conversations on which we were about to embark. That becoming more relaxed was associated with drinking alcohol was hinted at by an exclamation made by another person involved in the language training of the Indonesians. On our way back from a visit to a care home when the candidates were getting on a bus to take us back to the language centre, one of the teachers commented with appreciation on the cheerful behaviour of one of the EPA candidates with these words: *sake nashi de hai ni naru*, or '[he] gets high without alcohol'. The comment implied that being cheerful without alcohol was somewhat 'unnatural' and that such unrestrained chirpiness belonged to a drinking situation rather than to what was essentially a working setting.

Therefore, since drinking alcohol was associated with relaxation and unrestrained socialisation, abstaining from it (or the expectation that they would abstain), seemed to be an important drawback for the Indonesians in their ability to form closer relations with their Japanese colleagues, and indeed it often figured in conversations about socialising. At the institution where Amir, Jasir, and Ramelan were employed, the majority of their Japanese colleagues were of a similar age to the three candidates. There was also a good mixture of men and women on each ward, although the formal affiliations did not seem to play an important role in the way the interpersonal relationships formed; as I already mentioned, the volleyball and futsal teams cut across the institutional divisions. When taking turns eating lunch, everyone would gather in a small room of about 16 square meters, sit around a low table, and talk about anything that seemed interesting on the day. These conversations would often revolve around how everyone spent their days off work. Some of the Japanese employees were socialising outside of work and these events, usually involving going out for drinks and/or to karaoke bars, were discussed as well. With surprising regularity, when talking about such outings in the presence of either of the Indonesian men, someone would ask them, as if to confirm once again, whether it was true that they did not drink alcohol. These questions were

rather rhetorical in nature and seemed to serve as a justification for not involving the Indonesian colleagues in the more private activities associated with drinking alcohol of some of the Japanese workers. For the length of my research, none of the three men, despite participating in various other activities, such as the sports games, joined a private social outing with his Japanese colleagues. Roberson (1998) also provides an example of a young female Japanese factory worker who was excluded from joining in *nakama* events because she chose not to drink alcohol based on her Christian faith (*ibid.*:164). Such exclusion of Amir, Jasir, and Ramelan from events involving alcohol consumption affected the extent to which on a personal level the Indonesian and Japanese co-workers were able to engage in what Harumi Befu (1971:164–165) refers to as 'emotional interpenetration' allowed for by the drinking of alcohol together.

Further proving this point was the situation of Irdina. She was one of those of my Muslim informants who decided to drink alcohol openly in Japan. Before coming to Japan she had worked as a nurse for 12 years, and had a family of her own. She considered her arrival in Japan the beginning of a much longer phase in the life of her and her family, who she planned to bring to Japan once she had obtained the required certification.[44] Therefore, it was important for her to attend to her social life in ways which would secure future inclusion. Irdina decided to adapt to the behaviour which was par for the course in Japan. She argued that when in Japan she should behave as Japanese in order to create better relationships, and that her God would understand it. She also found it enjoyable to be able to socialise freely with her Japanese colleagues without being perceived as the odd one out in the group and seemed to have successfully achieved her goal. Irdina made it clear to her colleagues that she would join in, and soon she openly shared drinks with her Japanese colleagues during outings and karaoke evenings and began to form closer relationships with several individuals who would join her in other, less group-oriented activities, such as shopping on their days off.

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44 Her plans were openly supported by the chief executive of the social welfare service corporation where Irdina was employed, who reportedly promised that he would also employ Irdina's husband were he and the children to join Irdina in Japan.

However, this success came at a price for Irdina. She felt compelled to conceal this part of her life in Japan from her family. With all the confidence in her right to self-determination and willingness to adjust, Irdina could not share all of her ideas and experiences, particularly with her husband in Indonesia. She did try once to tell the story of a night spent in a karaoke bar with some of her Japanese colleagues, but her husband was angered by her 'inappropriate conduct', as if she had already *lupa agama*, forgotten [her] religion. This disapproval referred not only to her drinking alcohol, but also to her visiting the karaoke bar, which in Indonesia bore connotations of immodest conduct at best. Since then, Irdina kept this part of her social life in Japan secret from her husband. The negative perceptions associated with drinking, or getting drunk (but one seemed to imply the other), which were behind Irdina's husband's reaction to her conduct in Japan did not present the drinking Japanese in a positive light, either. When we were talking about Japanese members of staff in their institution, Amir, Ramelan, and Jasir would comment on who was and who was not *orang baik* (Ind.: a good person), often referring to those stories they heard and could understand during lunch time when the Japanese workers sometimes exchanged impressions of their nights out. In the course of this research, my friends often mentioned with disapproval how being *mabuk* (Ind.: drunk) took away one's ability to reason. These statements were, I was told, based on observations of other people either in Indonesia or in Japan. When mentioned in relation to the observations from Indonesia, alcohol consumption was directly linked to the individual's poor economic performance. His (as the narratives referred solely to men) economic failure was explained by a lack of virtues needed to achieve success, and drinking alcohol was proof of such a character flaw. Alcohol consumption was therefore not only a means of excluding the Indonesians from the socialising circles of the Japanese staff, but the exclusion had the potential to work the other way round as well. Indeed, the knowledge of the assumption on the Japanese side that, as Indonesians, the candidates would not be drinking alcohol was sometimes used by the latter to decline social invitations from individuals with whom they did not feel like socialising.

Despite the disapproving narratives about individuals drinking alcohol produced by the candidates, even those of my friends who were most vocal in their criticisms would try alcohol at least once while in Japan. In several instances, the first encounters and explorations took place while in the language training centre. Still, even those who decided to have a beer when meeting with other fellow EPA Indonesians after the language training was over would not always admit to it in front of their Japanese colleagues or employers. They were not sure if the Japanese would form a negative opinion about them if they found out about their 'untypical' for Muslim Indonesians practice. They also did not always want the Japanese co-workers to know about their drinking, in order to be able to decline any unwelcome invitations.

Joy Hendry (1994:184) notes that 'consumption of alcoholic beverages in Japan is for the most part quite an acceptable pastime'. Indeed, apart from those already mentioned above, several anthropologists also have noted the close link between alcohol consumption and sociality in Japan (e.g., Embree 1939; Befu 1974; Bestor 1989, 2004:301; Edwards 1989; Allison 1994; Roberts 1994:106–107; Moeran 1998, 2005; Borovoy 2005; *cf.* Ando & Hasegawa 1970; Douglas 2002; Oliver 2008:91). When I spent my first year as a foreign student in Japan in the early 2000s, I came across many a poster hanging on the university corridor walls campaigning against *aruhara*, a popular name given to 'alcohol harassment' (from Jpn.: *arukōru harasumento*) and publicised alongside *sekuhara,* or sexual harassment. *Aruhara* was particularly affecting first year students who, having joined one of the popular interest circles or sport clubs (part and parcel of Japanese university life akin to the perhaps more widely known fraternities and sororities of North American universities), were often forced to drink large amounts of alcohol, sometimes in a quick succession of *ikki nomi* (Jpn.: drinking in one breath, in one go), to establish themselves socially within the new *nakama* group of a circle or a

club.[45] The more prowess one had in drinking, the more easily one could be accepted as a socially desired member. Unfortunately, some such attempts had tragic consequences, with students dying of alcohol poisoning.

Where drinking alcohol was so closely related to socialising, it had to feature in one way or another in the Indonesians' experiences in Japan and in their relationships with their Japanese co-workers. By choosing not to drink, or not to share drinks with their Japanese co-workers, the Indonesian candidates attended to a certain image of how an Indonesian Muslim person should, or would, behave. Those of the candidates who felt that drinking or not was not a matter of choice for them could find themselves on the social margins of the accepting institutions (*cf.* Onishi 2008). On the other hand, however, they were able to manipulate the extent to which they partook in the emotional interpenetration of drinking alcohol and were therefore better positioned to decide which relationships they wanted to foster and which to forego. Apart from whether drinking alcohol was a matter of choice, there were also other factors which affected the degree to which this particular form of interpersonal engagement would result in building more intimate relationships. This had to do with the more objective characteristics of the staff.

Impeding demographics

Roberson (1998) argues that in the factory where he located his research the *nakama* groups based on involvement in a shared activity, while shaped by individuals' age, life stage, and marital status, formed on the basis of individual personalities (*cf.* Roberts 1994). In the case of the EPA Indonesians, a degree of their social engagement with the Japanese members of staff was linked to age and life stage, too, but it was also affected by gender and the educational levels of the co-workers. For example, Lazim, 25-year-old candidate, was working as a sole male among 15 females aged 40 years and older. He was at the time a

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45 The difference between a circle and a club at the Shizuoka University I attended lay in the source of funding for the activities. While the circles relied solely on contributions from members, clubs received subsidies from the university and would represent a given university in tournaments if their activities involved an element of competition. The greater formality of the clubs meant also that there was a stronger emphasis on the *jōge kankei* (lit.: relations between the above and the below), that is, relations between members of different seniority in terms of belonging to the club.

bachelor, and did not have children either. During lunch breaks he would go back home because he did not want to eat in the break room, as his co-workers often used it as a changing room, which made him feel uncomfortable. Before *mōshiokuri* (Jpn.: reporting on the situation to the next shift), when all members of staff on duty gathered around a table in the nursing station, there usually ensued a discussion on a range of free topics. Issues discussed were the children of the women, their school stories, preparing *bentō* (lunch boxes), sometimes husbands, shopping, and so on. These were subjects difficult for Lazim to engage, so he usually just sat there trying to smile when appropriate. There was a male Japanese part-time worker coming to work on Lazim's ward twice a week. When their shifts overlapped, these were the good days at work for Lazim. They talked a lot; they joked around. Lazim would say to me, passing by me in a corridor, that *otoko ga iru to tanoshii desu* (Jpn.: when there is a man around it is fun; it is nice to have a guy around). In contrast, in the institutions where Iffah and Idrina were employed, the gender and age of staff were more varied, which made it easier for the two women to identify with those colleagues who were of similar age. As shown earlier in Iffah's case, such identification, combined with the bodily aspects of their work, supported the formation of meaningful interpersonal relationships. By far the most outgoing of my informants, she was quick to suggest joint shopping excursions to her young female colleagues, and when one of them was scheduled to work an early morning shift, Iffah offered to let her stay at her apartment overnight since she lived only several metres away from the care home. The colleague accepted the invitation, and for the next couple of months this became their routine, until the roster was changed.

Another factor was the difference in educational levels. The EPA Indonesians who arrived as the first batch in 2008 held higher education degrees, while the majority of the Japanese care workers with whom they worked were educated to a high school level with a supplement of a care-specific vocational education (usually one or two years). Given the extent to which my Indonesian friends could communicate in Japanese, it was more an assumption than an actually felt incongruity that the educational difference

precluded some of the Indonesians from forming closer relations with their Japanese colleagues. However, it was Amir who once pointed it out to me. He still had difficulties trying to follow the conversations of his colleagues, but from what he could gather, he told me once on our way back home, he did not find many of these conversations interesting. He then added that he recently found out that people working as care staff in Japan were not really educated, and maybe that was the reason for his lack of interest.

Privileged alienation

Finally, one other aspect which influenced the Indonesian workers' relations with their Japanese colleagues was the former's relationship with the employers. I focus on this issue in more detail in the following chapter. Despite the fact that the Indonesians were able to forge intimate interpersonal relationships with individuals from among the Japanese staff members, the special treatment they received from their employers was nevertheless distancing.

Iffah did not enjoy living in the flat arranged for her by the accepting institution. Although size-wise it offered a comfortable living space, it was a small and deprived of sunlight 1DK *apāto* (one-room apartment with a combined dining and kitchen area) in an old building. As with most housing of this type one could hear one's one's neighbours through the thin walls, and during the winter months the cold and dampness were hard to ignore. Wanting to move to a warmer and brighter place, Iffah had been collecting information about rental prices and the procedures for renting a place in the area adjacent to her workplace. One day after work, three of us, Iffah, her female colleague who had joined the institution only a few weeks earlier, and I, went to have a look at the colleague's flat. The walk took us about 20 minutes, most of which was filled by a conversation on the cost of living in the area and the need for keeping a balance between the price of rent and the commuting time. Iffah's current flat was situated directly opposite the institution in which she worked, which meant that it took her literally a minute to walk to work. The colleague asked Iffah how much rent she was paying at the moment and the amount of

her monthly bills. Instead of giving a direct answer, Iffah began to muddy the picture and avoid answering. She was paying half of her rent and none of her bills, as these were covered by the institution. Although she knew the total amount due from her each month and could have given it as the answer, she did not know how much the bills were and she knew that the low number she would have to cite as her payment would lead to further questions as to why she was paying below the usual amount expected for the area and the type of accommodation. Making up a total number would have meant lying to a person whom she had started considering a friend. Instead, she preferred to say that she was not sure since the amount differed each month and the rent went out of her account automatically. This was a lie as well, but one which was partially based on Iffah's real lack of knowledge about what her bills added up to, and one which did not disclose the favouritism offered to her by the common employer. The colleague expressed surprise at Iffah's lack of knowledge about her own living costs, especially given Iffah's usual scrupulosity about money, but she gave up further questioning, apparently sensing Iffah's apprehensiveness.

The financial provisions offered to (some of) the Indonesian carers were a welcome gesture, easing their efforts to save and remit as much as possible. As they grew closer to their Japanese colleagues, they began to share sometimes very intimate information about each other. However, receiving special treatment from their common employers remained something which created a distance between them, something they could not share. They had to manage the double allegiance: to their employers with whom they shared in secrets, and to their Japanese colleagues whom they began treating as friends. The inability to combine the two stemmed both from the clear admonition by the employers not to give details of their financial dealings to anyone from the staff, as well as from the uneasy sense of the unfairness of the differentiation between themselves and their Japanese colleagues. Although privileged in some respects, my informants who were receiving the additional favours from their employers felt themselves set apart from the rest of the staff by the very privileges they were offered.

At the same time, the limited capability of the Indonesian candidates to engage in the full range of the care worker tasks and to perform them with at least a similar result to that achieved by the Japanese workers was a bone of contention. The lack of full command of the Japanese language limited the Indonesian candidates in various administrative tasks which were a part of their duties as well. The system varied slightly in each care home, but in general each member of staff was responsible for reporting on the condition of the elderly assigned to him or her. In order to assure that the information reached every member of staff on any shift, the information had to be reported in writing by the end of a shift. The staff of the incoming shift would read out loud what was reported about each elderly during a meeting before dispersing to their respective tasks. The ability of the Indonesian candidates to fully participate in the process was thrice limited. Firstly, they were still unable to write by hand in Japanese. Even Lazim, who was by far the most literate in *kanji* (Chinese characters, one of the three writing systems used in Japan) among my main informants, was unable to hand write the reports quickly and accurately enough to allow for an unobstructed work flow. Neither were the Indonesians able to read what had been written by the previous shift's staff. Finally, they all had problems understanding what was read out loud as well.

Their co-workers, as well as individual observers who had been following the EPA acceptance in the media, found it questionable that the Indonesians, whose ability to work in a similar manner to Japanese workers was limited, should receive the same amount of pay as the Japanese workers. This was one of the conditions specified in the EPA programme, which stated that the EPA candidates would receive pay equal to that provided to the Japanese employees. Aware of the statutory level of remuneration offered to the Indonesians, some of their colleagues were dismayed at the idea that despite being able to perform only a part of the usual care worker duties, the Indonesians were receiving the same amount of money, a situation which in their eyes amounted to preferential, if not unfair, treatment. This was particularly visible in the care home where the three male candidates were not only confined to general house-keeping activities rather than personal care of the elderly, but, in

addition to the 2-hour-long language classes with a teacher each Thursday, were also granted a 2-hour-long break every afternoon designated for self-study. All this was included within their working time and paid accordingly. On the several occasions when I managed to have conversations with the more favourably disposed Japanese colleagues of my Indonesian friends, I was told about two general approaches towards such an organisation of the Indonesian training in the institution. Some co-workers saw the situation of the candidates as very demanding and expressed admiration for their efforts and bravery to take up the challenge of working and studying in a foreign country. These individuals perceived the studying time as work. But the same situation was interpreted in a less accommodating manner by others. Because the stated goal of the language training was to prepare the Indonesian candidates for the national examination, the time during working hours which the Indonesians spent studying was seen as privileging the candidates because if Japanese workers wished to prepare themselves towards the same examination, they had to do it outside of working hours, were not paid for it, and sometimes had to take a temporary leave of work if they could not manage their responsibilities otherwise. Combined with the perception that the three candidates did not contribute much to the work of the team, the dispensation from being on the floor did not go down well with this part of the staff. I know about these attitudes from my conversations with the more positively inclined staff who were willing to talk to me, but I was unable to investigate the origins of such attitudes any further. Those who resented the treatment the Indonesians received were less likely to engage with the candidates on a personal basis, and they also seemed to avoid closer encounters with me, perhaps due to my association with the Indonesians.

That the extent to which the Indonesian candidates were able to relate to their co-workers was influenced by such characteristics as age, gender, or educational level suggests that success in establishing a close interpersonal relationship was not necessarily an issue of cultural representations and perceived incompatibilities. Similarly, the alienation experienced by some of the candidates was a function of perceived financial unfairness rather than

prejudiced ideas held about Indonesians. Combined with the earlier observations about the impact of bodily engagement in certain practices, the sociality of alcohol, the recognition of shared socio-economic status of care work, and the recognition of shared positioning within the institutional hierarchy, these suggestions point away from perceiving the accepting institutions solely as sites of cultural negotiations. Instead, they foreground the different areas of human engagements and orientations which readily provide grounds for recognising commonalities through which to 'open up' an individual for interpretations beyond reductive stereotyping (Herzfeld 1997).

Familiar safety net of fellow Indonesian candidates

This opening up could be successful on one day and a failure on another. When the latter was the case—that is, when the simplifying essentialisations dominated the candidates' experiences in ways described above—they relied on a safety net of friends from the language training centre, introduced in Chapter One. Photographs from the time spent in training decorated the rooms of the candidates long after they had been dispatched to their respective institutions, and the stories of the good times spent with friends from the centre and memories of rooms, karaoke sessions, and teachers often reappeared in conversations, all suggesting a lasting attachment among the candidates. Not surprisingly, the news of a 3-day follow-up training course organised by their home language centre a little over a year after the candidates' first day at work spread quickly among my informants as a *reunion*.

The friend group formed during the language training supported those candidates who had failed in establishing satisfying personal relationships with their colleagues, or anyone who simply had a bad day at work. Even after a tiring shift, all of my informants would without fail sit on the floor in front of their laptops rested on low tables or put directly on the floor, and would log into an instant messaging application. Almost always they would simultaneously talk on their mobile phones to some other friend who perhaps did not have an Internet connection yet, or simply preferred to use the phone at this particular moment. If the candidates shared a flat, it was unusual for them

to have only one-to-one conversations, or electronic chats, unless with a partner or family members. Everyone present would at some stage be talking to the person or persons on the other end of the connection, or would at least shout something over the shoulder of the person currently holding the handset if the conversation was held over the phone. On several occasions I was pulled into this seemingly chaotic exchange of information, finding myself talking to a complete stranger, who might remember me from my visits to the language centre or might have been made aware of my existence by a short introduction by one of my friends.

Those evening conversations revolved around individual experiences at work and featured accounts of the candidates' encounters with their Japanese colleagues and the elderly residents after whom they looked. Whenever somebody had a story to tell, either about some frictions with their colleagues at work or, quite the opposite, about a pleasant surprise, it would be conveyed almost instantly to a large number of candidates. But even the most distressing stories, such as when one of the candidates was found responsible for an elderly patient falling out of her bed without anyone from the staff noticing it, were quickly transformed into humorous exchanges filled with light-hearted sarcasm making the candidates themselves the butt of the ridicule. The basis for the ridicule was the extraordinary situation in which they found themselves, one where they had to live and work among people whose language and culture they barely understood.

Apart from the everyday experiences, the candidates exchanged more practical information about the amount of money they were receiving, the number of days off to which each of them was entitled, the extent of financial support granted by their respective bosses, and so on. Sometimes the conversations did not go beyond the exchange of information about each other's dinner menu, or simple friendly banter. Whatever the content, sitting in a room where sometimes three laptops and three mobile phones where simultaneously in use, it was hard not to imagine a net, or a web, of invisible threads running across the sky over the Japanese Archipelago (and beyond), forming multiple intersections and headed for the points marked by the

presence of the Indonesian care worker candidates. When the need for intimate social interactions was not satisfied in their dealings with the Japanese, this web provided a virtual space where the candidates could retreat and offset the deficiency. Admittedly, these interactions were particularly intense during the first few months from the beginning of employment, after which period my informants began to visit each other and establish new friendships with other Indonesians living in their area, not only fellow EPA candidates, and with the Japanese. Nevertheless, the core of the friendship networks seemed to remain unchanged and the regular exchanges continued throughout the time I spent with my informants.

This enduring connectedness between the candidates suggested that they needed these contacts as a respite from the still volatile social relationships within the institutions. Being able to converse in their native language about shared experiences, memories, and often simply food or television programmes which the Indonesians knew their friends would appreciate offered a familiar environment enjoyed for the comfort of speaking in Indonesian (or in one of the local languages) as much as for the predictable 'interactional style' (Linger 2001). Just as the candidates would feel *bebas*, free, at home to eat with their hands, so did they revert to the comfort of interactions with known Indonesians to offset any troubling experiences at work. As will become clearer in the following chapter, this group of friends acted also as a conveyor of information used to negotiate the candidates' financial conditions at work.

Chapter conclusions

As I hope has become apparent throughout the chapter, the Indonesian workers were bodies out of place (Puwar 2004) in Japanese eldercare institutions. They were an anomaly both in terms of their novelty as foreign care workers and in terms of being non-Japanese 'elements' in the care homes imagined and constructed as Japanese spaces. Encounters with and displays of difference, an index of unfamiliarity, such as the Muslim prayers or simply a recognisably non-Japanese physiognomy, served as reminders of different cultural intimacies in which the Japanese and the Indonesians partook. The differences, sometimes

a source of embarrassment and therefore to be hidden, at other times provoked conversations. Bonding through intimate practices or through a particular positioning within the hierarchy of institutions and distancing through the unfamiliar were happening within the confines of the same space and within the same social relations. Therefore, the feelings of relatedness and solidarity, curiosity and compassion, existed alongside the discomforts, embarrassments, and distrust of the unknown. Although discussed here as separate issues, it is important to remember that in everyday life all the alliances and divisions described above mixed into one multifaceted sociality. Essentialising disabling views and practices, and negative mutual valuations at a general level, coexisted with development of closer interpersonal bonds and individual-specific knowledge.

The fact that the EPA Indonesians entered the accepting institutions in small groups, and sometimes alone, meant that their entrance into the Japanese care spaces did not appear to threaten the latter's Japaneseness to the extent which most likely would have been the case with large numbers of foreigners simultaneously entering the eldercare homes. It also meant that the candidates were unable to retreat to the comfort of their own, Indonesian circles at work and were therefore more inclined to seek relationships among their Japanese co-workers. Such a situation was directly linked to the way the acceptance was organised and therefore further suggests the role of broader political–economic factors in shaping the migratory experience, understood as both the experiences of the migrant workers and those who were their 'hosts'. This is, of course, not to say that the relationships formed solely because of lack of other alternatives. Rather, I want to suggest in this chapter that the 'seeding' of the Indonesians in the eldercare institutions across Japan provided an environment more conducive to the development of intimate interpersonal relationships between the Japanese and the Indonesians (see Burgess 2004). This was a situation unlike the ones observed by Roth (2002), Tsuda (2003a), Linger (2003), or de Carvalho (2003). Takeyuki Tsuda (2003a) notes, in fact, that in smaller factories where there were fewer *Nikkeijin* workers, the relationships between the Japanese and the *Nikkeijin* were more intimate, too.

The essentialising ideas of differences between the Japanese and the Indonesians did not cease to affect their mutual interactions. However, cultural representations and reifications co-existed with personal knowledge of individuals and the two were not exclusive. The cultural was paralleled, if not overridden, by other, intimately informed and shaped identifications and ascriptions. The cultural was also a resource into which to tap when convenient or necessary. This shows how perceived cultural differences can be negotiated through a prism of intimacies built on other, non-culture specific engagements. Some of these themes reappear in the following chapter, which turns to the relationships between the Indonesian candidates and their employers. The difference is in the focus on the function an (asexual) intimate relationship may serve in the context of employee-employer relations.

Chapter Four

Intimate Management

In preparation for the arrival of the Indonesian candidates in 2008, an organisation auxiliary to the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, the Japan International Corporation of Welfare Services (JICWELS), responsible for overseeing the implementation of the foreign workers' acceptance under the Japan–Indonesia Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), prepared a manual distributed to the prospective accepting institutions. This 68-page-long A4-size booklet, alongside factual information on Indonesian geography, economy, labour market organisation, and so on, contained descriptions of the 'Indonesian character' and specific Indonesian traits together with instructions on how to interpret and respond to them. A similar management manual was issued on the occasion of the later acceptance of workers form the Philippines as well.

In the preface to the Indonesian Nurse and Caregiver Human Resources Management Manual (henceforth Acceptance Manual), after a short introduction reiterating the basic facts about the EPA programme and a reminder that the Indonesian workers would be practising in the accepting institutions under the same financial conditions as their Japanese counterparts, the authors laid out the intended aim of the manual:

> on the occasion of employing people who grew up within an Indonesian culture and who have lived taking for granted an outlook different to that of the Japan[ese], it is conceivable that one will feel various differences such as in the manner of working between the Japanese members of staff and the Indonesian nurse and caregiver candidates. In this situation relying solely on the usual employment supervision and guidance management methods used with the Japanese will not allow for a successful preservation of the motivation of the Indonesians who came to Japan with ambitions.

Moreover, [such usual methods] will unavoidably bring about a situation in which [the Indonesian candidates] will not be able to present/utilise their full potential despite having excellent dispositions.

Therefore, believing it necessary for the hospitals and the care facilities to familiarise themselves with the state of affairs [from Jpn.: *kokujō*)] in Indonesia, with the living circumstances there, the Indonesian worker mentality [from Jpn.: *hataraku Indonesiajin no kishitsu*] and values [from Jpn.: *kachikan*] in order to manage Indonesian nurse and caregiver candidates and later nurses and caregivers appropriately, here at JICWELS we arrived at a decision to issue the present manual.

(JICWELS 2008)[ii]

So far this thesis has proposed that the type of work in which the Indonesian workers engaged in Japan, the setting of eldercare homes, and the small numbers in which the candidates were dispatched to their accepting institutions all combined to facilitate the Indonesians' direct engagement both with their co-workers and with the elderly residents. This proximity provided a stage on which to bypass cultural constructions and gain more intimate knowledge of the other. It has also been shown that as a function of Indonesia and Japan's international engagements, the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), on which the Indonesians' acceptance was based, was implicated in both constructing the workers' expectations about their 'Japanese experience' and frustrating those expectations, in terms of financial as well as professional gains. It has also been shown how the provisions of the EPA acceptance programme positioned the candidates as neither explicitly permanent nor temporary arrivals. In addition, Chapter Two provided some examples of the difficulties the Indonesian candidates had in adjusting to everyday life in Japan, where not only socialising spaces and interpersonal relations but also eating habits and customs were unfamiliar and taxing to negotiate. All these observations feature in this chapter as well, and are presented as having jointly contributed to the development of extra-professional relationships between the Indonesian candidates and their employers which aided the influence they had on each other. What becomes visible through this relationship is how intimate interpersonal relationships can serve to stabilise professional relationships in a

situation where the usual means of knowledge and professional control are not accessible.

Making the acceptance work

The second chapter of the Acceptance Manual cited above, 'Characteristics of Indonesian workers working in Indonesia', is based on a questionnaire survey and interviews with Japanese who were deployed to Japanese companies based in Indonesia and who assumed supervisory positions over Indonesian employees. The information presented there ranges from the Indonesian working time regulations, system of financial bonuses, and social insurance system to the provisions required from employers guaranteeing workers the possibility of maintaining the conduct prescribed by their professed religion and the customary practices commonly encountered at work. In the latter section, the authors of the manual point out that Indonesian workers, 'just like Japanese', tended to abide by the rules at work, but unlike Japanese did not keep to the time. They were also more likely than Japanese to, for example, make private use of company computers. Importantly, throughout the Manual the highlighted differences are followed by advice to the Japanese employers and co-workers to understand and embrace the different needs and conduct of the Indonesian workers, either by providing them with a designated space for prayers, or by not treating their lateness as a sign of personal negligence but rather as a culturally informed action (and therefore somehow out of control of the Indonesians). Only in a section on forbidden food items, after a reiteration that depending on the person, some may not consider it a sin if they consume, for example, pork without their knowledge, the suggestion is that sometimes it may be 'advisable, wise' (from Jpn.: *kanmei*) not to disclose the ingredients of a dish offered to an Indonesian (JICWELS 2008:49).

Organised under the auspices of a governmental scheme arising from an international agreement, the EPA acceptance was a closely monitored one. Not only did the Acceptance Manual offer guidelines, but their implementation was subject to occasional checks. JICWELS itself set up a system of rotational yearly assessment visits. During these visits the candidates and their

supervisors were interviewed separately on the working and training conditions and progress, which was also measured by a specially devised test. Moreover, JICWELS provided a telephone help-line which the candidates could call with any issues concerning their working conditions and daily lives alike. The extent to which JICWELS had power to intervene were there to be any serious violations of the acceptance agreement was openly debated by the candidates and the employers equally. For example, one of my informants was disappointed with JICWELS's powerlessness when its officials failed to persuade the candidate's employer to move him to better housing. On the other hand, however, when candidates in another institution informed JICWELS that the wage they were receiving was lower than that shown on a contract, JICWELS's intervention was successful. However, the possibility of intervention added to the air of public scrutiny of the practical implementation of the acceptance. In fact, when Iffah, a female candidate, offered to cover the cost of her Japanese language tutor, her employer rejected the idea on the grounds that unless he or the institution paid for the language training, it would not be acknowledged as complying with the acceptance regulations.

Beside JICWELS's supervision, the plight of the Indonesian candidates was also of interest for many a Japanese researcher and various support organisations. The candidates I was visiting on a rotational basis often had another researcher lined up to conduct an interview, or had just talked to someone else a week before my visit. When, during a language lesson, Amir, Jasir, and Ramelan were informed by the institution's secretary that the following week there would a person coming from a nearby university to interview them, the teacher also present in the room at the time commented that the three men were *ninki mono*, popular persons. Similarly, the numerous support organisations aiming to assist either the Indonesians, the accepting institutions, or both in any problems arising from the scheme frequently sent questionnaires and leaflets with their contact details. The volume of such mail made the employers I knew from my circulatory visits stop opening the envelopes they suspected might contain yet another survey. Alongside this academic interest, the mass media also showed sustained interest in the

experiences of the Indonesians, something with which I deal in the next chapter. Such external interest not only put the candidates under a spotlight to the extent that they felt as if they were deprived of privacy (from Ind.: *tidak ada pribadi*), but exposed the accepting institutions to a similarly controlling popular gaze as well. For example, a manager of Irdina and Omar, working in an institution in Hokuriku, told me a story about how during a visit by a crew from Japan's biggest public broadcasting corporation, the journalists expressed their surprise to see 'only three' text books provided by the institution for the Indonesian candidates. In the manager's opinion, equipping the candidates with studying materials free of charge was already more than they, as an accepting institution, were obliged to do and a matter of good will, but it clearly did not appear to be a satisfactory commitment to the journalists.

Such means as the guidelines of the Acceptance Manual, the exposure of the practical implementation of the programme to scrutiny by JICWELS, the mass media, researchers, and support organisations, conferred the responsibility for the success of the candidates, and therefore the programme as a whole, onto the accepting institutions. The very structure of the acceptance, which presupposed governmental involvement in the training only up to the point when the candidates graduated from the 6-month language training, suggested such ceding. Indeed, Iffah's employer once commented that the accepting institutions were like volunteers working on an implementation of a state policy. He referred not only to the responsibility placed on the accepting institutions, but also to the lack of financial and structural support to train the candidates, something I highlighted in the first chapter. Such delegation of responsibility inherent in the implementation of the EPA acceptance, which was sometimes suggested to be a result of the seemingly haphazard preparation of the scheme discussed earlier, therefore had a direct influence on the organisation of the Indonesians' lives at work and beyond. The following sections present the ways in which this responsibility was translated into the candidates' experiences and how it ultimately shaped their relationships with their employers. Before entering the institutions, however, it is worth looking

at the possible ways in which the institutions could have been perceived as having failed in their task to train and retain the Indonesian candidates.

Breaking the contract

Although none of the employers I talked to saw it as a real potentiality, it was relatively easy for the EPA candidates to terminate their training midterm and return to Indonesia. The conditions laid out in the contract signed between the employers and the candidates specified that the Indonesians could terminate their training should there be any 'unavoidable reasons' (from Jpn.: *yamu o enai jiyū ga aru toki*) (JICWELS 2009:5) to do so. The same applied to the employers. At the same time, the contract between JICWELS and the accepting institutions made it a requirement (among others) that the institutions would provide the necessary facilities (JICWELS 2009:57–58) to ensure that the Indonesian candidates acquired the national qualifications. Should the institution be deemed to not be fulfilling this or other obligations, the contract could be voided. Although the candidates were not explicitly made aware of the clause, they knew more or less what the institutions should be providing. Moreover, thanks to the fact that they got to know each other well during the preparatory language training, the Indonesians exchanged information on the conditions at work on a daily basis and were therefore aware of the differences between the conditions of employment and degree of support in preparation for the national examination offered by their respective institutions. Much resented by the accepting institutions, the exchange of such information between the Indonesians allowed the latter to argue for changes to the conditions they were receiving if these compared unfavourably with those of their EPA friends.

Apart from the issue of whether Japanese tuition was organised and/or paid for by the institution, other aspects of the Indonesians' lives were also argued in terms of training. For example, living in an old-style wooden building which did not provide much insulation in winter was presented as not conducive of studying at home because it was too cold. Also, working five days a week was argued not to leave enough time and strength for studying. In the institutions I visited, the employers were making efforts, if to various degrees, to create

suitable studying conditions for the Indonesians. Seemingly, however, this was not the case everywhere. Only a few months into the employment the first Indonesian nurse candidate returned to Indonesia. The official explanation published by the national newspapers maintained that the decision was due to the poor health of the candidate caused by the cold climate of the northern parts of Japan where she was dispatched. The information circulating between the Indonesian candidates, however, claimed that it was because the person was dissatisfied with the conditions she was offered at work. In the following months, when several other candidates also left Japan, the newspaper articles explained that it was due to a disappointment with the difference between the reality of the training and what they expected based on the information received during recruitment. According to my informal conversation with a JICWELS employee, in at least one of these cases, the cost of a return ticket to Indonesia was covered by the institution originally hosting the returning candidate, even though it was not obligatory for them to do so under the provisions of their contract with JICWELS if the contract was breached by the candidate. This meant that the accepting institution either made a generous gesture or was judged as not providing satisfactory facilities for the candidate to train towards the national examination. Such voluntary returns of the candidates showed how the Indonesians, although bound by a contract, could in fact relatively easily decide to abandon the EPA scheme, leaving the institutions with an investment offering no prospect of return.

One more qualification must be in place before moving on. It needs to be remembered that not all accepting institutions were as engaged in the private affairs of the Indonesian candidates, or indeed in their training required by the EPA scheme, as I describe here. Perhaps the institutions whose candidates decided to return to Indonesia were such places. Some of the candidates I encountered in various locations in Japan, but with whom I only had sporadic contact, also mentioned that no provisions whatsoever were made for them in order to, for example, be able to work and study at the same time. One such candidate, whom I met in Osaka, complained that he was simply expected to work and any attempts he made to try and arrange language tuition for himself

failed, because any arrangement he suggested would mean that he would need to sacrifice a few hours of his working time. Living in a rural area, he did not have many options to choose from in terms of Japanese courses. Hence, after his institution declined his consecutive suggestions, he focused on self-study, but remained disgruntled by the approach of his employer, who, in the candidate's eyes, did not fulfil his part of the deal which the candidate assumed they had. He was also covering all his living expenses on his own, and did not relate to me any situations in which his employer offered any kind of financial or practical support in the ways I describe below. My account here is, therefore, an example of how the relationships between the Indonesians and the employers developed under particular conditions. This does not, however, render the observations invalid, since the goal of this research was never to describe the entirety of the Indonesian experiences in Japan, but rather to see what these particular experiences can tell us about possible ways of negotiating multicultural coexistence in a Japanese eldercare institution.

'Indonesian-friendly' workplace

In the spirit of the Acceptance Manual, the institutions made various facilitating adaptations to the working environment of the EPA candidates. One of the measures taken to assure that the candidates arrived into as friendly an environment as possible was to address and mitigate some of the foreseeable challenges. For example, some of the managers sent out a letter to the families of the elderly residents informing them of the institution's participation in the EPA programme. Although the elderly themselves seemed to have less room for expressing their opinions on the prospect of being looked after by Indonesian workers, which was in many cases due to their already limited cognitive abilities, since they were ultimately clients of the care homes, the employers felt it was only fair that their families be consulted on, or at least informed about, the planned acceptance of foreign workers. This in itself suggested that an unexpected arrival of Indonesian candidates could have become an object of contention and needed to be dealt with through some special measures. The deputy floor manager and a training section supervisor

of one care home which informed the families in advance told me that she was glad that the reaction was positive, that the families were supportive of the institution's decision and even replied with encouraging messages. As an institution, they would have found themselves in an awkward position should the reaction have been negative, she added. Here and in other care homes, the staff were also informed about the forthcoming scheme, and some of the institutions organised induction meetings into what to expect from working alongside Indonesians. When I took part in one such meeting organised by a hospital about to accept two Indonesian nurses from the second batch in 2010, the information offered to the gathered employees very much reflected that contained in the Acceptance Manual. In addition, the meeting organisers suggested their audience imagine trying to write or read upside down and remember the uncomfortable, unnatural feeling. This, they suggested, would be how the Indonesian nurse candidates would feel working in a Japanese hospital. It was therefore important to make sure that this discomfort was mitigated as much as possible while the Indonesians accustomed themselves to the new working culture. Moreover, the organisers stressed that the Japanese should be on the lookout for any misunderstandings which might arise not only from the linguistic side of the communication but also from different customs of thinking about things in Indonesia. The audience was, therefore, advised to also try and find out the motives behind any action which they might find dubious, before judging the Indonesians as behaving in an inappropriate manner. Such informative and pre-emptive actions as the ones described here clearly indicate the extent to which the Indonesian candidates were constructed as unfamiliar beings who required special attention in order to mitigate any potential discordant encounters upsetting either the candidates or the Japanese accepting them in their midst.

When the EPA candidates finally arrived at the care homes, they received an official welcome with the staff and the elderly residents gathered outside of the institutions with bouquets of flowers. Amidst applause, the Indonesians received formal welcome notes, sometimes contracts, and neatly folded working uniforms, handed to them by the managers of the institutions. In the

care home where Iffah came to work, in the hallway of the main entrance hung side by side a Japanese and an Indonesian flag. They remained there throughout my field work. In a different institution, a manager of my three male informants, Amir, Jasir, and Ramelan, told me once about her strategy when, after a few months into the Indonesians' on-the-job training, she noticed that most of her Japanese staff were not communicating sufficiently with the Indonesian candidates. She sent out e-mails to all the Japanese staff to remind them to use easier language and speak more slowly when talking to the Indonesians. This communication was to remain secret from the Indonesians themselves so as not to make them feel uneasy and patronised. Through such actions the accepting institutions aimed to prepare the social environment for the arrival of the Indonesian workers, one which would make them feel comfortable and welcome. Alongside such social engineering, more practical adjustments were made as well.

The supportive adaptations were visible in such details as additional labels with transcriptions of Japanese names of facility rooms put on almost every door. It also seemed to be a common practice among the accepting institutions to make sure that their staff canteen, if there was one, served at least one pork-free meal each day. I have heard stories both from the Indonesian candidates and from their Japanese supervisors about institutional canteens completely withdrawing pork from their menu options, but I have never managed to confirm such statements. In a sense, whether it was a fact or not did not matter immensely after all. What mattered was the imagination of the length to which the accepting institutions could go, albeit noted as its extreme, to provide hospitable living and working conditions for their Indonesian workers. Through such means, the accepting institutions, imagined as representing an environment alien to the arriving candidates, attempted to become more familiar and welcoming.

Accommodating Islam

One of the greater concerns about accepting the Indonesian workers was caused by their religious (read: Muslim) observances and how the Japanese

working environment could and should accommodate them. These concerns were pertinent to most of the accepting institutions since the majority of the EPA candidates were indeed Muslim. For the majority of Japanese, conceiving of themselves as without a religion 'in particular' (usually expressed as *toku ni nai*, none in particular, rather then *mushinkyō*, without religion), foreigners devoted to a single religion were already different in this very respect, but foreigners professing Islam were even a greater rarity and an unknown. In its first chapter, the Acceptance Manual provides basic factual information on Indonesia. Attracting attention is the ordering of the presented information. Interestingly, the reader learns first geographical, then historical information, directly followed by an introduction of the religions practised in Indonesia. Areas such as the political and administrative organisation of the Indonesian state, the Indonesian languages, and the educational system come only after the section devoted to religion. While it may be reading too much into the design of the Manual, with the descriptions of religions tacked between geography and history, on the one side, and economy, politics, and administration, on the other, the place of religion within the Indonesian reality appears to take on a more objectified existence, one which can be verified and measured in the same ways as the physical area of the state or its main export destinations and equally tangible in its presence.

In the section on the religions itself, where one finds a table comparing the three major world religions practised in Indonesia, namely Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam (Bali Hinduism is mentioned later in the chapter), arranged in this very order (JICWELS 2008:3), the Manual concentrates at the greatest length on Islam. Organised in bullet-points, the table introduces *al Qu'ran*, the Six Pillars of Islam, the Five Islamic Practices, the main Islamic celebrations, and the taboo items—that is, 'pork, dogs and alcoholic beverages' (2008:5). Bali Hinduism is briefly outlined following the more detailed description of Islamic precepts and practices. While justifiable that the religion whose officially registered professors amounted to just over 86 per cent of the Indonesian population should be allocated the most space, or that the specificities of Bali Hinduism, despite its numerical minority within the

Indonesian population, should be briefly compared against the, perhaps better known, Indian version, the decision not to include in the manual any mention of the doctrinal or practical details of Christianity or Buddhism as practiced in Indonesia can also be read as dictated by an assumption (well-grounded) that these two religions were less alien to the Japanese working in the accepting institutions and therefore did not call for an explanation. The overwhelming stress on Islam as one of the Indonesians' most prominent unfamiliarities was later resented by those of my informants who identified themselves as Christians (three Batak women and one Indonesian–Chinese man). Often being assumed to be Muslim was somewhat annoying (from Jpn.: *ira ira*), not because they found the misconception offensive in any way, but because they felt deprived of a piece of their self-representation and did not feel comfortable being assigned characteristics with which they did not identify. To an extent, they were surprised by the naivety of the Japanese who were readily making the ill-informed generalisations. All in all, Islam presented itself as unknown and unfamiliar to the Japanese.

Made aware of the precepts of Islam, the accepting institutions tried to accommodate the candidates' needs. As mentioned above, canteen menus were revised, special breaks were assigned for prayers, and all of my main Muslim informants who did not live close enough to use lunch breaks to pray at home had a designated prayer space within the institution. Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting, was one of the Indonesian Muslim traditions which worried their employers. The concern was that because the fasting period coincided with a very hot season in Japan (in 2009 its beginning was set at the 21st of August), the Indonesians would become physically too feeble to perform their assigned tasks without sufficient intake of nutrients, and water in particular, and might collapse. Of particular concern was the Indonesians' participation in bathing the elderly—a duty which required spending prolonged time in a hot, steamy bathroom, and was often considered the most physically demanding area of the care work in the institutions. Some of the supervisors of the Indonesian candidates decided to exempt them from partaking in bathing duties altogether, in order to ease the expected hardship which the Indonesians would

be going through during Ramadan. In other institutions the rota during Ramadan was organised in such a way that the Indonesians were assigned only early morning or night shifts. Such working hours minimised the time the Indonesians had to spend at work between sunrise and sunset. There were Indonesian candidates who were required to work as usual as well, but it needs to be remembered that during this first Ramadan the Indonesians celebrated while working in Japan, many of them were still assigned only assistant duties, limited to helping during meals, changing sheets, and keeping the common areas tidy—duties which were not too demanding physically.

What perhaps evoked the most emotion among the Indonesians was the issue of acquiring permission to return to Indonesia to celebrate Lebaran (festivities marking the end of Ramadan) or Christmas together with their families in Indonesia. This was an area where the expectations of the Indonesians and the common working practice in the institutions conflicted. It was a common practice in the Japanese eldercare institutions to refrain from requesting prolonged holiday leave. It was presumed and seen as appropriate and fair towards the employer and one's co-workers to abide by this unwritten rule, since one's long absence from work would increase the burden on the rest of the staff, and hence it would have been inconsiderate of others to holiday for longer than a few days. Often struggling with a shortage of staff, the institutions were usually opposed to their employees taking prolonged holidays even if they were formally entitled to do so. Simultaneously, the employees aware of the situation would not consider it feasible, if appropriate at all, to receive or demand a week or so off work. The Indonesians on their part were expecting to be able to visit Indonesia at least once every year or two, and did not share the Japanese perspective on absence from work. To make the trip to Indonesia worthwhile, my informants calculated, they would need more or less ten days off work—a length exceeding the usual leave duration in the institutions. The first significant confrontational moment came with the end of Ramadan 2009 when many of the EPA candidates wanted to return to Indonesia to celebrate the week-long festivities of Lebaran. Although in 2009 Lebaran, which began on the 20th of September, overlapped with a 'long

weekend' in Japan (between the 19th and the 23rd of September) when many Japanese chose to take time off as well, my informants were eventually allowed to go away for eight days (meaning six days off work) and the timing was set in the four concerned institutions to enable the candidates to travel together.

Adapting to the Islamic practices within the institutions was, therefore, one way to ensure that the Indonesian candidates could maintain this part of their lifestyle while working in Japan. However, it needs to be remembered that despite such spatial and temporal arrangements, accommodating different-to-Japanese conduct did not always go together with personal readiness for encounters with the unfamiliar practices, as I showed in the previous chapter. The next section turns to further arrangements aimed at facilitating the Indonesian candidates' adaptation to life and work in Japan.

Supporting the Indonesians' well-being

Although this chapter is mainly concerned with the situation within the accepting institutions, it is worth mentioning the kind of provisions which were offered to the Indonesians from other sources as well. These provisions are relevant here to the extent that they were also aimed at preparing a comfortable living and working environment for the candidates, and that in many cases access to these provisions was regulated by the accepting institutions.

The hardship of care work, the physical and psychological strain of working and living in a foreign country, and often the isolation from one's friends in Japan and family in Indonesia were well appreciated and discussed aspects of the Indonesian candidates' lives in Japan. Examples of how some of the candidates found it difficult to adjust to life and work in Japan abound. Irdina, for example, developed a skin condition which resulted in a near constant appearance of boils on her face. A doctor told her that this was stress related. When I went to visit her for a few days towards the end of my stay in Japan, she told me that she would cry almost every evening, feeling lonely at her flat, which she did not like too much, and because she was missing her children. Such images circulated among the grassroots support organisations which formed on the occasion of the EPA acceptance. The following description

reflects actions taken by Garuda Supporters, one such group.

Garuda Supporters worked towards helping both the accepted Indonesian candidates and the accepting institutions in dealing with any problems they might face. Once the activity of the group had brought its members into closer contact with at least some of the EPA candidates, they began to have a clearer picture of what kind of issues the Indonesians were facing in their day-to-day lives as well as what the problems were in terms of their training aimed at passing the national professional examinations. It soon became apparent to the members of the group that the main means of communication among the Indonesian candidates and between them and their relatives in Indonesia (or in other countries) were mobile phones and Internet-based communication channels, such as VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) programmes, or chatting tools. The support organisation saw a need to secure access to these methods of maintaining contact, particularly for those candidates dispatched to remote areas, or those who ended up working as the sole Indonesian in their accepting institution, to support their mental well-being. They launched an initiative to provide the EPA Indonesians with laptops and mobile phones free of charge. The project was not carried out only because the founder of the group received information that similar plans of providing the EPA Indonesians with free laptops were being pursued by the Nursing Division of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) and the *Kenkō – Ikigai* Development Foundation.[46]

The latter was an organisation selected by the MHLW's Division for the Promotion of Social Welfare (from Jpn.: *Shakai Fukushi Suishin Jigyō*) to implement a programme aiming to support the EPA Indonesian carer candidates in passing the national professional examination. Both units, as a part of the Ministry or through the funding received, used public resources to finance the provision of laptops. The devices were not presented to the Indonesians as planned by Garuda Supporters; rather, they were lent to them

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46 According to an interview with the Foundation's chief executive, they distributed personal computers to around 60 per cent of the accepting care institutions. However, as a result of cuts which the Foundation faced after the budget/spending review in early 2010, they were unable to continue the initiative (TV Tokyo, 4 February 2010, Internet URL: http://www.tv-tokyo.co.jp/wbs/highlight/o1_243.html).

for the purpose of access to the Internet-based Japanese language and *kaigo* (Jpn.: care) course organised by JICWELS. The cost of the lease was covered by JICWELS, and the language tuition was provided to the candidates free of charge.

The initiative to distribute mobile phones taken up by Garuda Supporters was primarily aimed at the second batch of the EPA Indonesians since the vast majority of those who had arrived in Japan in 2008 were already in possession of phones by the time the idea was born and the preparation for its implementation was under way. The plans were officially presented during a meeting organised at the beginning of January 2010 by Garuda Supporters. The mobile phones were presented as an important means to maintain the mental health of the candidates who, as Indonesians, were believed to be very sociable and not take well to being isolated from their friends. By the end of my field work the initiative was not fully under way yet, but the very proposal to provide the Indonesians with free mobile phones could be seen as an attempt to create as convenient as possible an environment for the Indonesian candidates to live and train in Japan.[47] Similarly, even if in the end the laptops were not distributed by Garuda Supporters, the idea was there.

As exemplified by the actions undertaken by Garuda Supporters, the concern about the quality of the EPA candidates' experiences in Japan was not only related to their passing the national examination, although that featured prominently in the discussions over the acceptance. The Supporters, as well as the plethora of other similar groups, were also concerned that the Indonesians would not appreciate their experience of Japan for other, more everyday-life oriented reasons. Efforts were therefore made by these organisations to attend to the various needs the candidates might have. They also, for example, organised home-stay visits, invitations for home meals, and other social

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47 The company which volunteered to prepare the offer and facilitate its implementation suggested an iPhone as the handset to be distributed to the Indonesians. The reason for the choice was twofold. Firstly, at the time, it was the mobile network popular among the EPA candidates which had the monopoly for merchandising the iPhone in Japan. Secondly, the initiative was pursued about the time when the new version of the handset was introduced to the Japanese market, causing the older version to drop in value and popularity, making the company more willing to give it away in anticipation of income coming from the usage of the network by the new customers.

gatherings for the Indonesians. The actions were based on the premise that if unsatisfied with the conditions of life, the candidates might come to the conclusion that it was not after all a good choice to come to Japan. In such a situation the acceptance would fail, exposing Japan's unreadiness for accepting foreign workers, something to which I will return in the next chapter. Therefore, the various provisions, from offering informational meetings to the staff members and discussing the acceptance of Indonesian candidates with the families of the elderly residents to the introduction of pork-free meals in institutional canteens, granting an extended holiday leave to return to Indonesia, and the provision of free laptops and mobile phones, were aimed at preservation of what was referred to as the candidates' 'mental health' (from Jpn.: *mentaru herusu*). In a similar vein, the employers and supervisors were engaged in the private lives of the Indonesians through everyday informal practices.

Employers' personal engagement

How to spend money

Although it should not obscure the variety of other motivations, such as enjoying Japan as a country otherwise hard to go to, as explained in Chapter Two, to be sure, the prospect of earning substantially more in Japan than in Indonesia was a very important factor in my informants' decisions to choose this particular country as their migration destination. The decision to relocate to Japan to work was often a family endeavour rather than one of the individuals. Soon after the first remittances were sent to Indonesia, the news of new acquisitions travelled in the opposite direction. Lanny had a look at her sister's new TV set during a family conversation over Skype, and Ramelan began discussing with his mother where to buy more space for their future, larger family shop. When with my husband I visited Iffah's family house in September 2009, she took us for a drive in a new 4x4 car to which she contributed with her remittances.

The possibility of earning substantial amounts of money had an additional meaning to those for whom employment in Japan was their first job after

graduation. Not only did they gain independence from their families by physically moving outside of their parental or familial control, but also, now that they were financially self-sufficient, it was they who were able to bring money into their families, not just spend it. A young male candidate sent to the north of Japan started supporting his two younger cousins as they moved on to university, Iffah started planning a present for her parents which was to send them together on *hajji* to Mecca, and Amir, one of my male informants in his mid-twenties, preoccupied with planning the house he was going to build for himself and his newly wed wife, would spend many evenings flipping through glossy catalogues, asking me every now and then what I thought about a particular window shape or sofa colour.

The ability to generate wealth made the second year of the candidates' employment in Japan a year of weddings. I was closely following the marriage negotiations of two of my informants who happened to be a couple, so their resultant wedding plans were not a surprise. But when I learnt that two other of my male informants had set dates for their weddings as well, and that there were more such people in the larger group of the first batch of candidates, I questioned the proliferation. I was told that now they, and the young men in particular, were *berani* and *mampu* to get married. In Indonesian *berani* means to be brave or daring, also manly; *mampu* means 'being able to'. These qualities were ascribed to them because they had shown that they were capable of accumulating enough wealth to form a new family, and, not least of all, to pay for the wedding.

Remitting money back to Indonesia meant, however, that the candidates had to limit their private expenditures while in Japan. In the first months, from the moment they started working, saving seemed relatively easy and was done without much ado. In fact, my informants seemed to genuinely enjoy putting away the money, seeing the amount grow and calculating how much Indonesian rupiah the savings in yen would be once converted. The amount of money they were earning was known to their families in Indonesia, who could plan ways of spending it, and not only for the weddings. My informants would also inform their families in advance of any expected bonuses and their timing

so that the families could plan as well, while some of the investments, like the new car bought by Iffah's family and the new shop space envisaged by Ramelan's family, were planned joint ventures.

During the first few months of their employment my friends would often mention that they were bored, not knowing how to spend their time off work. A lack of familiarity with places to go and things to do was one of the reasons, but the perceived lack of things to do was also linked to the limited financial resources they had due to the remittances and the constant awareness that they should put aside whatever they did not have to spend on necessities. When gradually the Indonesians 'discovered' ways of finding entertainment in Japan, the amount of money they needed for themselves increased. For example, Jasir had been interested in photography. Initially, the camera he bought compromised the optimal quality of the photographs for the lower price of the camera. A few months later, however, he acquired equipment of a very high standard, which came at an equally high price. He and several other Indonesian EPA candidates who lived in the same area formed an informal photography group and they would go out, sometimes together, for a shooting session, and later post their works on Facebook together with the information explaining under what conditions and at what settings a given picture was taken. Besides using the time in Japan to develop hobbies, apparently used to a more glamorous life-style in Indonesia, the young men and women enjoyed fashionable clothes and accessories. A new pair of shoes, a handbag, or a pair of trousers were the more visible items testifying to the extra cash the Indonesians would spend on themselves.

The Indonesian friend of mine who was supporting his cousins through university would keep the amount of money sent even and reliable. Similarly, Irdina, a mother of two, maintained an unchanged flow of remittances for her family. However, after a few months of diligent saving and close cooperation in financial matters with their families, those of my friends who were funding luxury items for their families and who did not yet have families of their own to support began to conceal a part of their earnings. Iffah, Lanny, and Jasir decided on different occasions not to tell about bonuses they had received, or to

declare to their families an amount lower than that which had actually entered their accounts. As Iffah told me, she wanted to enjoy her time in Japan and sending all the financial surplus to Indonesia significantly limited her options.

It was, therefore, an important part of the Indonesians' 'Japanese experience' to not only be able to remit money back to Indonesia for their families to use, but also to be able to enjoy their stay in Japan. In time, these two goals came to be at odds with each other, as the young candidates learnt where and how to spend time (and money) in Japan. Unsurprisingly, then, financial dealings were a prominent aspect of the relationships between the Indonesian candidates and the employers.

Cooperative remittances

Although due to the hastened nature of the EPA recruitment in Indonesia, as shown in Chapter One, many of my informants had a relatively wealthy background and came to be referred to in Japan as Indonesian 'elite', in their relations with employers, they positioned themselves as in need of money. Particularly dear to Iffah and two young men, Lazim and Jasir, all in their early to mid-twenties, the phrase *kanemochi dakara* (from Jpn.: because [you are] rich) served as a discursive means to this end. It was uttered whenever their employers offered them a gift of substantial monetary value, or money itself.

The image of the Indonesians as arriving from a 'poorer' country played a role in such positioning. My informants who chose Japan, attracted by (among other considerations) wages which dwarfed the pay they had been receiving or could expect to receive in Indonesia, knew about such ideas and indeed shared them. Therefore, despite their own situation in Indonesia, which was anything but living in poverty, and having sufficient means to live in Japan, they readily accepted any additional financial relief, particularly when they needed to decrease the amount of money sent home due to the increase in their own expenses in Japan. Not without meaning here was also the awareness that this Japanese sojourn was likely to be temporary, whether the Indonesians planned it this way or not. It added to the idea that the gains needed to be maximised now, while the opportunity lasted, because after their return to Indonesia they

would have to rely on only a fraction of what they were earning in Japan. Therefore, although sometimes it seemed that the remittances remained an unspoken topic between the employers and the Indonesian workers, it was often a matter discussed in the open and accounted for as one of the expenses which the Indonesians needed to shoulder. In knowledge of this obligation, the employers took a sympathetic stance and through various allowances participated in the Indonesians' efforts to accumulate enough capital to subsidise their family life in Indonesia.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, some of the institutions covered parts, and sometimes all, of the candidates' living expenses, such as utility bills or rent. This was a part of making the Indonesians' lives in Japan more agreeable. I also pointed out how, upon their arrival at the accepting institutions, many of the candidates were disappointed not only with the content of their work in Japan but with the financial conditions offered as well. Indeed, aware of such disillusioned expectations and the perceived and observed difficulties the Indonesian candidates had with adjusting to living in Japan, the commentators of the acceptance programme often refereed to the need to 'preserve the motivation' of the candidates in such phrases as *mochibēshon no iji*, or, when referring to the feared 'decline in motivation', or *mochibēshon no teika*. One of the ways to achieve this was to meet, or at least make up for, the candidates' unfulfilled financial expectations.

The employers would, therefore, try to minimise the financial burden carried by the Indonesians. This could take a variety of forms, from unofficial monetary gifts to cover the costs of leisure travel, or the provision of furniture, to financial assistance towards rent and facilities, or financial contribution towards expenses incurred in relation to language or professional training. As a result, the amount of money at the disposal of the Indonesians was sometimes greater than that of the Japanese staff working in the same position who did not receive such 'favours' from their employers. During a meeting organised by a group supporting Filipinos in Japan who gathered to discuss their future activities in relation to the acceptance of the Filipino candidates under the EPA programme, a freelance journalist specialising in health- and care-sector

subjects noted that from her own investigation into the Indonesian EPA acceptance the financial and material conditions of life offered to the Indonesians under the programme were often better than those of today's Japanese young people who 'cannot even think' of having 100,000 yen (around £800) at their disposal each month. She also jokingly added that having seen the very agreeable (from Jpn.: *sugoi kaiteki*) conditions in which the candidates she had met lived, given the level of pay and financial subsidies towards rent many of them received from their employers, she would not mind 'swapping roles' (from Jpn.: *sekigaeru)* and becoming an Indonesian for a while. The conditions of life enjoyed by the EPA Indonesians she had met and/or interviewed seemed to her to surpass the life standards she, as a professional in her late thirties with several years of experience, was able to afford.

It was also not unusual for the Indonesians to be given sweets or Indonesian spices, to be taken for fully-funded trips, for example to Tokyo Disney Land, or to be invited out to dinner by their employers. Although it is a common practice in Japan, just as in other countries, to organise social gatherings for the employees of the same organisation during which individuals can mingle on an interpersonal basis with people in different positions within the organisation's structure, these gatherings are usually organised for everyone in the company. In the case of the Indonesian workers, they were treated individually and often in secret from the Japanese members of staff. As Lanny's employer once told her, offering her a pair of tickets to FujiQ Highland, an amusement park in Yamanashi Prefecture near Mt. Fuji, such personalised provisions were made in hope that the candidates *rifuresshu shitara mata ganbareru*—that is, that they would be able to do their best at work if they had an occasion to 'refresh' every now and then. That the candidates did not have to pay for such refreshing activities further added to the deal.

Favours and cooperation

In time, the employers' personal engagement with the Indonesian candidates led to the formation of extra-professional, close relationships between the two parties. For example, after having a minor accident on a bicycle, Iffah felt

comfortable enough to approach her employer to help repair the bike, which he did. In different institutions, a male candidate made it a routine to go shopping with his floor manager, and Lanny's team leader accompanied her to church. On some occasions, favours received by the Indonesian candidates from their employers were of a bigger scale. This was, for example, the case when Iffah's employer borrowed a minivan belonging to the care home he ran in order to collect several household items for the EPA candidates employed in his institution. This happened towards the end of my field work when I was clearing the flat I had been renting. A few months in advance, Iffah, one of my main informants, had inquired about what I was going to do with some of the items I had in the flat, including the carpet, chairs, a mini-sofa, and a television set. I agreed to cede to her some of the things, but given that she lived about two hours' train ride away from me and it would have been a very complicated if not impossible undertaking to transport the larger pieces of furniture, in particular on a train, I suggested that she could possibly rent a car for one day and take all the things she wanted 'in one go'. She was thinking of abandoning the whole idea because of the difficulty of using the train and the expected cost of hiring a car. However, a day before I was planning to get rid off of all the items, either by having them taken by my local pawnshop owner or by arranging a collection by the local council, she called me to say that her employer would come with her the next day to collect the items. The next day they arrived in the business van accompanied by the employer's wife, Iffah's then-fiancé, Lazim, and the two new EPA candidates employed by the institution during the second round of the acceptance programme. The employer helped to carry the heavy items and loaded them into the back of the van. They explained that they would also take some of the things to furnish Lazim's flat, as the employer had agreed to make the errand to his place as well.

Yet another instance of the cooperation between Iffah and her employer based on their informal relationship was during the acceptance of the second batch of foreign care worker candidates. The employer was considering whether to bring in Filipino EPA candidates who were to arrive a year after the

first Indonesian group, but was not sure about it because, as he explained, he would have to start investigating the *kunigara*, or national character, of this country as well. He had done it on the occasion of acceptance from Indonesia and hence was more compelled to 'stick' with people from the same country, with whom he had become more familiar by then. However, he worried that if Iffah did not get along with the new Indonesian candidates, it would have a negative effect on the quality of their work and the general atmosphere in the institution. Unsure what to do, the employer consulted Iffah for her preferences. She was not enthusiastic about a Filipino person joining her at work, but would welcome an Indonesian. As it happened, two of her friends from nursing school in Indonesia were applying for the EPA programme at the time, and Iffah suggested that they could come to work in the same institution as she. Ultimately, the employer conceded to the suggestion. Although the recruitment process was meant to be anonymous, with names of the candidates concealed under reference numbers, Iffah obtained the numbers from her friends and passed them on to her employer, who selected them as his choice of candidates. A few months later the friends indeed arrived to Japan and soon started their appointment at the institution together with Iffah. After their arrival, aware that the three women wanted to move together to a bigger flat, the employer made arrangements for them to move into his brother's house, situated next door to his own. In this way the employer had a degree of warranty of the quality of the new candidates through their association with Iffah, whom he had already got to know. Moreover, through accepting Iffah's friends, the employer also attended to her satisfaction and hoped to guarantee the three women would become engaged workers.

The above examples illustrate that the employers were not only concerned with adapting the working environment so that the Indonesian candidates found it as easy to navigate as possible, but also actively and personally engaged in providing comfort, respite, company, and financial support to the Indonesian workers. Such attending to 'mental health' of the workers, sometimes through material means, was to keep them able to *ganbaru*, do their best at work. Such association between the general well-being of workers with their performance

at work has become by now common knowledge in almost any sector. However, it remains of particular significance in jobs like care giving, where an important proportion of the required skills is constituted by the workers' mental ability and willingness to engage emotionally (see Constable 2009) in their tasks. For example, Arlie Russell Hochschild shows in her book *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* how flight attendants were less willing to perform friendliness when they found their working conditions unsatisfactory (2012[1983]). The primacy of individual ability and willingness to apply 'soft skills' is also stressed by Rhacel Salazar Parreñas and Eileen Boris, who, in their *Intimate Labors*, contend that 'emotional labour relies on the manipulation of one's emotions' (2010:6). This is not to say that the relationships between the Indonesian candidates and their employers were a calculated and conscious exchange of favours. They rather emerged as a result of the employers' efforts to ease their Indonesian charges into the life and work in Japan. Concomitant to the growing interpersonal intimacy and the accumulation of shared experiences was the feeling of obligation, particularly on the side of the Indonesians, to reciprocate the favours and help they had received from the employers.

Feeling the obligation

The EPA Indonesians often described their relations with the employers in familial terms, representing the employers as their Japanese fathers (as the employers were predominantly men) or grandfathers. In an institution where the employer was only a few years older than the Indonesian candidate, the relations were still very close and the candidate herself described him as like her *oniisan*, or elder brother. Such representations suggested that indeed the role the employers took in their relationships with the young Indonesians was that of an intimate figure, but one who had the power to instruct and to require obedience. On our trip to Osaka, two female candidates who were placed in the same institution, run by a married couple, told me that their employers were strict (from Jpn.: *kibishii*) when it came to work and, for example, required them to eat their lunch together with the elderly despite the women's

objections. They added, however, that it was a strictness of grandparents who expected rules to be followed when necessary but who, outside of the professional relation, would indulge them with an odd invitation to a dinner or a trip.

Having received various forms of help and material support, the Indonesians were compelled to reciprocate through good performance at work, taking into consideration not only the list of duties received upon arrival to the institutions, but also how what they did would be perceived by their employers. In Lanny's words, she did not want to feel *malu*, ashamed, were she to be seen by her manager as not doing her best, either in studying the language or on the institution's floor. Such considerations were visible in the candidates' compliance with the arrangements made for them either at work or in matters not directly related to their employment. For example, Lanny wanted to take two days off to visit her Indonesian friends in a different city, but decided against the trip because she did not want to trouble (from Ind.: *merepotkan*) her employer, who she knew would have been involved in the approval of the roster change. Iffah was once asked to take an additional early morning shift on a weekend she was meant to have off. She agreed, because she 'had received plenty of help' (from Ind.: *sudah banyak bantuan yang saya terima*) and saw agreeing to the shift as returning a favour. When Daris, a male candidate, wanted to move flats, he knew his potential move would have to be arranged with the accepting institution since the rental contract was made under the institution's name. Ultimately, he refrained from even attempting to discuss his concerns, because he felt under obligation to accept what had been given to him. Were he to act otherwise, he feared being judged as ungrateful, or as *orang yang tidak tahu berterima kasih* (lit. Ind.: a person who does not know how to accept love). On another occasion, Lanny was not allowed by her team leader to host a boyfriend intending to visit her from Indonesia. The arguments against his visit were twofold. On the one hand, her manager expressed concern for the boyfriend's safety when left alone at the candidate's flat, with the fears being along the lines of 'What if he gets electrocuted, or what if there is a gas explosion—who is going to be responsible for that?' (as related to me

by Lanny). On the other hand, the manager openly admitted that she was apprehensive of the idea because she saw the visit as potentially leading to the candidate becoming pregnant. To a certain extent the fears of the team leader were comprehensible by Lanny herself, but nevertheless she felt that neither she nor her boyfriend were being treated seriously and found it difficult to accept that the team leader's opposition could effectively lead to the cancellation of the boyfriend's visit. Nevertheless, Lanny felt that she needed to obtain the permission of her manager, and having failed in doing so, she cancelled the visit plans.

Therefore, apart from being a function of offering a comfortable Japanese experience to the Indonesians, and keeping them 'refreshed' so that they could perform well in their duties as care workers, the provisions extending the relationships to a private domain also made it possible for the employers, I suggest, to affect the actions of the candidates at work as well as outside of it. This possibility was important to the extent that, at least initially, the employers did not know much about their Indonesian charges for whom they were made, and felt, responsible. For example, Diah's employer expressed his concern over whom she was meeting after work; two women from the second batch were reprimanded for going to a near-by town on their own since, as they relayed their manager's words, it could have been dangerous; and Amir, Lazim, and Ramelan always had to let their supervisors know if they were planning to travel to a different town.

Moreover, although not stressed in the above examples, to a degree, such extensive and private interactions, which ultimately led to the Indonesians' personalised view of their employment and allowed the employers to monitor the candidates actions, were also a means of overcoming the uncertainty stemming from the lack of knowledge about who the Indonesian employees would turn out to be. This was particularly important given the way the recruitment for the EPA scheme was organised.

Impersonal recruitment process

The recruitment process for the EPA acceptance was based on automated matching wherein the institutions were asked to select their preferred candidates from a list compiled by Japan International Corporation of Welfare Services (JICWELS), the already mentioned organisation overseeing the acceptance process. Simultaneously, the candidates were choosing from a parallel list of accepting institutions. When the two choices overlapped, the matching was done and the candidates were assigned and sent to the institutions. If the matching was not achieved in the first round, the process was repeated up to three times until the preferences of the institutions and the candidates coincided. Throughout the process the parties—that is, the candidates and their prospective employers—did not have the opportunity of direct contact. Unless the employers sent representatives to participate in the interviews held in Indonesia by JICWELS, they were unable to meet any of the Indonesian candidates prior to signing contracts. Even if institutional representatives did participate in the interviews, there was still no guarantee that the individuals to whom they talked would actually be those who arrived to work in their institutions. The language issue aside, neither did the future trainee have a chance to directly enquire about the details of his or her prospective workplace.

Being unable to meet their future Indonesian employees before deciding whom to offer a position in their institutions exacerbated the anxiety of the Japanese employers. Perhaps knowing more about the candidates would not have changed much in terms of the preparations and the choice of the candidates, but the employers to whom I talked were clear about their uneasy feeling when deciding on who to employ and train based solely on the candidates' educational history, which was provided to them by JICWELS. Not only was the cultural environment from which the candidates were coming alien to the employers-to-be, but the individuals remained so, too. *Kore dake ja, nani mo wakaranai* (Jpn.: from this only you can learn nothing), said a deputy manager of one of the accepting institutions after explaining to me that

all the information they received about the candidates was their educational history and name.

When I asked the employers in person or through a questionnaire what their concerns were prior to the candidates' arrival, the majority responded that it was not knowing what kind of person was going to arrive (from Jpn.: *donna hito na no ka mattaku sōzō dekinakute shinpai datta*), especially given that they 'have not met an Indonesian person before and they did not know, realise what they were like' (from Jpn.: *Indoneshia no hito ni wa sore made atta koto naku, jikkan ga wakanakatta*). Such lack of knowledge was also behind the decision of Iffah's employer to choose Indonesian candidates over Philippine ones, and to arrange for Iffah's friends to arrive rather than completely unrelated strangers.

Therefore, while the various provisions and activities described above made the life of the Indonesians in Japan easier through bringing the employers and the candidates together, they also allowed them to get to know each other as individuals rather than nationally and culturally defined others. While the particularly cordial and ultimately preferential treatment the Indonesian EPA candidates received from their employers was indicative of the latter's attempts to fulfil their role within the EPA acceptance as the sites where the success of the programme was measured, it was also a means of achieving familiarity with each other. Moreover, by implicating the Indonesians in a web of intimate reciprocal relations, the employers had a degree of control over the candidates. I will return to this last function in the closing section of this chapter. Before doing so, however, I present a kind of counter-case to those presented above, which, I believe, highlights the employers' expectations of particular conduct from the Indonesian candidates in return for the favours they received.

Reciprocity breakdown and *amae*

The expectation that the EPA Indonesians would remain committed to their training and to performing their assigned tasks in a manner desired and accepted by the employers and floor supervisors was made particularly visible when this expectation was not met. In such situations the actions of the

Indonesians were framed in terms of the idea of *amae*, a concept often represented as 'a culturally valued traditional relationship pattern' (Steinhoff 1992 quoted in Sugiyama-Lebra 1992:207) in Japan, which, variously translated into English, represents a standardised relation between individuals akin to that between a mother and a child.

Originally analysed and described by Japanese psychologist Doi Takeo (1971), *amae* gained some attention from Japanese scholars (or scholars of Japan more broadly) as one of the main tropes useful in describing social relations in Japan. Because the concept may refer to a spectrum of interpersonal relations and behaviours, it has proved not to lend itself easily to translation into other languages. In fact, this absence of words of equivalent meaning in other languages was also one of the arguments Doi used to present the relationship described as *amae* as uniquely Japanese. Presented as such since the first publication of Doi's book and its English translation in 1973, the *amae* concept has been subjected to criticism for its use as an accessory to formulating the theories commonly known as *Nihonjinron*—that is, discourses of Japanese(ness)—which in a pseudo-scholarly manner argue Japanese uniqueness (*cf.* Introduction). Although my aim here is not to provide an in-depth analysis of *amae*, nor to discuss its validity as an analytical concept, I briefly present its different interpretations as laid out by other scholars. Against this background information I then discuss the instances in which the term was used in relation to the situation of and the actions undertaken by the EPA Indonesians.

Concept of amae

Kazuko Y. Behrens (2004), reviewing the existing literature, sums up the definitions and presents *amae* as 'a phenomenon with multiple aspects or meanings, including (a) one's desire to be intimately close to another person or to be basked in the warmth of the other [e.g., Doi, 1973]; (b) to act playfully, like a baby [e.g., Taketomo, 1986]; (c) to be lenient toward one another or have an indulgent relationship [e.g., Lebra, 1976]; (d) to importune somebody [e.g., Okonogi, 1992]; and (e) to presume upon another person's goodwill or to take

advantage of them [e.g., Mitchell, 1976]' (Behrens 2004:2). *Amae* therefore can be enacted between individuals in either an intimate or non-intimate relationship (*ibid*.). For Behrens it 'often involves the desire to be accepted for asking for something that one is perfectly capable of doing oneself. Therefore dependency on others (for something one is incapable of doing) […] does not constitute *amae*' (*ibid*.). However, we can talk about *amae* not only when a person is expecting someone else to take on a task which normally he or she should be performing. It is also possible, as Behrens indicates (2004:19), for *amae* to be enacted when somebody makes an unreasonable demand and expects it to be fulfilled. In this incarnation, the *amae* comes close to what Lewis and Ozaki (2009) term the negative aspect of *amae*.

In their paper comparing *amae* to the Midland English dialect word *mardy*, Lewis and Ozaki (2009) come to the conclusion that although both words refer to the same 'human need to be indulged, loved, or looked after … the experience of *amae* involves a greater sense of entitlement and anticipation of a positive response' (*ibid*.). Importantly, the authors discuss the neglected, what they term 'negative' aspect of *amae*, which, combined with the greater permissiveness of *amae* behaviour in Japan, is said to contribute 'to the potential for selfishness or manipulativeness' (Lewis & Ozaki 2009:932). Doi himself is quoted as pointing out 'that Japanese people "may even try to manipulate ... others upon whom they depend, so as to turn their dependency into virtual control of others"' (Doi 1966:339 in Lewis & Ozaki 2009:918). The 'assertive or demanding aspect to the *amaeru* stance' (*ibid*.)[48] is also discussed by Kumagai (1981; *cf*. Kumagai & Kumagai 1986), who, unlike Doi, focuses on the behaviour within social interaction where the self-centredness of this feelingbecomes manifest. Further revisiting works on the negative aspect of *amae*, Lewis and Ozaki (2009:918) enumerate: 'Morsbach and Tyler (1986) pointed out that phrases like "take advantage of" and "spoilt" are sometimes used in translations. Taketomo (1986) highlighted the inappropriateness of *amae* behaviour outside of an *amae-no* (pertaining to *amae*) interaction, and

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48 *Amae* is a noun describing the relationship, *amaeru* is a verb referring to the expectation of the relationship's recipient to be indulged, and *amayakasu* is a verb denoting the actions taken by the person who indulges.

Yamaguchi (2002) identified "more than one type of *amae*: the desirable and undesirable kind" (p. 10), the latter being more manipulative (Yamaguchi & Ariizumi, 2006)'.

What all the above definitions of *amae* have in common is the expectation of receiving a favour, either by almost subconscious reliance on another person's benevolent attitude, or by a more calculated manipulation. Lebra's (1976) definition points to the reciprocity of an *amae* relationship, but the prevailing understanding is that of *amae* 'as the presumption or expectation in others for indulgence and acceptance even when the request is inappropriate' (Behrens 2009). It was in the latter sense that *amae* was invoked by the Japanese commenting on the attitudes of some of the EPA Indonesians.

Unreturned favours

Lazim, as he himself often would point out, was lucky or fortunate (from Ind.: *beruntung*) to be placed in an institution where the working conditions were very good. At the time of this research he would work only three or four days a week, 16 days in total per month, while receiving pay higher than some of his EPA Indonesian friends whose working week was five days long. His employer and other staff overseeing his training were committed to providing him with the best possible environment to study and train at work. The institution arranged for a qualified Japanese language teacher to run classes each Wednesday. Unlike many other EPA Indonesians, Lazim did not have to pay the tuition costs, as the institution covered these as well. On a weekly basis, he was assigned a couple of elderly for whom he was to be responsible, and each day he was accompanied by a more experienced member of staff to instruct him in those tasks with which he was not sufficiently familiar yet. Moreover, his *kakarichō* (Jpn.: chief clerk, here: floor manager), a senior nurse responsible for overseeing work on the ward, alongside performing all other tasks with other members of staff, every day would also find time to check Lazim's homework with him. Despite the limited working time expected from Lazim and the efforts by the staff members to teach him various tasks, he failed to become an independent worker.

One day, towards the end of his first late shift (from Jpn.: *osoban*), Lazim was instructed in how to conduct those activities in which he had not been involved previously. These required putting some of the residents to bed for the night and/or checking that they were safely positioned with a nurse call button within their reach. Lazim was called by Ms Nakauchi, his supervisor for the day, to follow her from room to room so he could learn as she was attending to each individual, explaining what she was doing and why, particularly during the procedure of transferring the residents from their wheelchairs to beds. Lazim stood obediently and observed Ms Nakauchi, helping her from time to time, but only when prompted. Other Indonesians I observed at work always carried a small notebook in their pocket to note any new words or details of any new procedures in which they were instructed. In fact, all of the new Japanese employees I met did so as well. Lazim, however, never seemed to make any memo of what he was being taught. After Ms Nakauchi finished attending to the last resident, she turned to Lazim and said, *nōto o motte inai to ikanai* ('You should be carrying a notebook with you'), and Lazim answered, *sō desu ne* ('Yes, indeed'). When we returned to the nurse station, I asked Lazim whether he remembered all the details, to which he explained that later he would draw pictures at home. I could not verify his words, but a few days later when Lazim was engaged in transferring the elderly from their wheelchairs to beds he did not seem to remember much of what had been shown to him on the evening of his first late shift.

Then, one morning some time after the situation described above, when I arrived early to the institution, I ran into Lazim's manager, Mr Kawamura, in the main hall. He wanted to know my opinion on Lazim's demeanour at work. I replied that it seemed like he was coping. But Mr Kawamura was concerned with his attitude and learning progress. He said he liked people like Lazim, who were rather quiet and *hikaeme*, or somewhat reserved, low-key, but he would prefer Lazim to be more proactive at work (from Jpn.: *sekkyokuteki*). At the moment, Mr Kawamura thought that Lazim was not learning much because of his passive approach. He finally asked me to tactfully allude to, or to touch on, the subject (from Jpn.: *furete kureru*) with Lazim. This was the manager's

signal that he was not satisfied with Lazim and an attempt at using our informal relationship to affect Lazim's performance at work. In response to this request, when later that day I ate lunch with Lazim, I tried to draw his attention to how it seemed to be the practice on his ward that everyone was always on the lookout for things to do. He agreed, but his actions did not change. Three days later, to my question of whether they were planning to put Lazim on the night shift, the *kakarichō* replied that in her opinion Lazim was not ready yet, simply because he would not take up any action of his own accord, and at night, when there were only two members of staff on the ward, independence and readiness to act were crucial. Others, the *kakarichō* compared, looked out for things that needed to be done (and there was always something which needed doing; for example, cutting the nails of some residents, cleaning a shaver, and so on) whenever they had a moment to spare. Lazim was not like that. She added that she would understand if he was saving energy in order to be able to study at home after work, but judging by Lazim's linguistic abilities and his grasp of the duties assigned to the staff on a given shift (he received a detailed schedule with a list of tasks for each shift), she did not believe this was the case (from Jpn.: *sōzō dekimasen*). On the same day, when Ms Nakauchi, who had previously instructed Lazim in transferring the elderly from wheelchairs to beds, suggested that he should transfer one of the men to his bed after lunch, Lazim smiled and said that he could not do it. Ms Nakauchi did not seem surprised by his answer, and in a tone suggesting exasperation she looked at Lazim and said that he was being spoiled (from Jpn.: *amayakasarete iru*), although Lazim did not seem to understand Ms Nakauchi's message.

In a different care home, where Omar, a male Indonesian EPA candidate, was training, the perception that he was expecting too much while not making any effort was laid out by a manager of the accepting unit during an interview I held together with Ms Ito, a Japanese language teacher who came to know Omar during the preparatory language training. Ms Sakai, the manager of the accepting unit, recalled the time when it came to light that Omar was about to become the father of a child conceived with another EPA candidate during the preparatory language training. When the child was born it was the members of

Omar's employing corporation who accompanied the young parents and the child to Tokyo and assisted them in accomplishing all the necessary formalities. Despite receiving such exceptional provisions, requiring extra time and money, Omar, in Ms Sakai's opinion, 'did not appreciate the fact that he was inconveniencing' the institution (from Jpn.: *meiwaku o kakete iru kankaku ga nai*). Moreover, she could not see him put any effort into learning the language (from Jpn.: *benkyō shitagaranai*), while expecting the institution to subsidise the study materials, arguing that he could not afford the price at the same time as he bought a new iPhone. Omar's apparent lack of willingness to devote his time after work to self-study towards the national examination was another thing Ms Sakai would like to see change (from Jpn.: *yasumi no jikan o tsukatte benkyō shite hoshii*) since all Japanese staff who were preparing for the examination would do it in their free time, not expecting the employing institution to provide the time and/or materials. Ms Sakai further remembered the 100,000-yen loan granted to Omar on his arrival to the institution when it emerged that he did not have any savings after the 6-month language training period during which he was paid 37,000 yen (around £300) worth of pocket money per month (JICWELS 2008).[49] With the accommodation, canteen meals, tuition fees, and learning materials fully covered by the prospective accepting institutions, the amount could be seen as generous. For now, Ms Sakai added, Omar was being indulged (from Jpn.: *amaetari sareru*), but this was to change in the future. As a sign of this changed attitude Ms Sakai said that, having learnt from the experiences with the Indonesian candidate, the care home decided not to collect the Filipino candidates from the language training centre at the end of their training in order not to 'spoil' them (from Jap.: *amaeru*) as had happened with the Indonesian already in the institution who 'takes for granted what is [in fact] special treatment' (from Jpn.: *tokubetsu atsukai sarete atarimae to omotte iru*).

Such reliance on someone else's benevolent attitude even if the request is inappropriate (Behrens 2004) within a working or professional relationship has

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49 Omar was not exceptional. It would not be an exaggeration to state that the majority of the Indonesians had spent and/or sent as remittances all the money they had been receiving during the language training. All of my informants certainly did.

been described in Japan in terms of an *oyabun-kobun* (parent-status – child-status) relationship. Understood in terms of ritual kinship (Ishino 1953) *oyabun-kobun* relationships, 'unlike kinship in the West, which is "confined to the domestic corner of social life" (Sahlins 1976:6), … refer to a total relationship. They order the activities between *oyabun* and *kobun* in the corporate context, in their emotional, personal life, and so on. An *oyabun* is symbolically defined as the superior of the *kobun* in the company, a person from whom the latter would seek advice in personal and emotional matters, a friend for whom the *kobun* would have affection and a person from whom the *kobun* would expect preferential treatment' (Wong 2009:115). However, 'these ritual kin ties, it should be noted, are not established with everyone … because the establishment of an *oyabun-kobun* relationship means that ... the *kobun* and others in the ritual kin group expect such special considerations as getting extra pocket money, extra food and clothing allowance, occasional gifts, care in time of illness, extra time off from work, and sometimes special parties. … The ritual child, in turn, [is] expected to help the *oyabun* in whatever way he [can]' (Ishino 1953:702–704). If we were to consider the EPA Indonesians' and their employers' relationships in such terms, it would point us to the inherent reciprocity of such a 'total relationship'. Although neither Ishino nor Lebra (1976), who also writes on the subject, makes a direct link between the *oyabun-kobun* relationship and the Japanese concept of *on*, Lebra's (1976) definition of the latter suggests it as a useful tool for reading the relationship. Lebra defines *on* as 'a relational concept combining a benefit or benevolence given with a debt or obligation thus incurred' (1976:91). However, as she further explains, 'the moral significance of gratitude … lies not so much in an external demonstration as in Ego's awareness of being in debt' (*ibid.*:92). This is because, after all, reciprocity's 'significance lies in the creation or maintenance of a social relationship' and its 'effectiveness is derived from the partner's memories' (*ibid.*:101). This is not to say that the 'donor' does not expect to be repaid, Lebra argues, because given the 'compulsion for repayment on the part of the debtor', the donor 'considers his action as a social investment that will pay off some day' (*ibid.*:95). Not showing initiative like

Lazim, lacking willingness to study like Omar, or over-reliance on support from the accepting institutions were seen as disregarding the financial and informal investment made in the Indonesians by the employers. Seemingly implicated in a relationship of reciprocal obligations according to which they were receiving preferential treatment and support reaching beyond the confines of the workplace, but which was expected to be 'repaid', Lazim's and Omar's reliance on receiving *amayakasu*, or on being indulged, meant breaching this expected mutual commitment.

What seemed to be different about the relationships which Iffah, Lanny, or Daris had with their employers and supervisors, and the equivalent relationships forged by Lazim and Omar, was that unlike the former three candidates, neither Lazim nor Omar particularly liked their immediate supervisors. Although Lazim had a friendly relationship with his manager, Mr Kawamura, he thought of his floor manager, *kakarichō*, as not being too *pintar* (Ind.: smart, clever, able), and they were involved in a conflict at least once during my research there. Similarly, Omar resented Ms Sakai for withholding his passport and treating him like a child (from Ind.: *seperti anak*). Therefore, not feeling involved with the individuals who directly oversaw their work, and at times having explicitly negative feelings about them, did not propel Lazim or Omar to fulfil what they knew was expected of them. Of course, in such interpretations there is always an element of personal character influencing people's actions and attitudes. However, it seemed that for both Lazim and Omar it was also important that they did not really plan to stay on in Japan, and hence training, despite all the provisions and efforts invested in them, was not high on their personal agenda. The invocation of the *amae*-flavoured attitude of the Indonesians highlighted the contractual side of the provisions and personal engagement the employers displayed in their dealings with the EPA candidates. Without similar personal engagement on the side of the Indonesians, this contract failed to be fulfilled.

Chapter conclusions

Due to the provisions of the EPA programme, the Indonesian candidates occupied a precarious position in the accepting institutions. On the one hand, they were required to train in order to obtain the Japanese national qualifications which would allow them to remain and work in Japan after the EPA training period had finished. This meant that their time in a given institution as EPA candidates might have been only an initial stage in their longer career in the Japanese eldercare sector. For some of them, this was indeed the goal. For example, Irdina intended to bring her family, two children and a husband, to Japan once she was a qualified caregiver. On the other hand, the permanence of the Indonesians' professional engagement in Japan was uncertain. For example, Iffah, Lazim and Omar never envisaged their lives in Japan. They simply used the opportunity presented by the programme to experience something new and to earn additional income. People like Amir or Daris kept their options open. If they managed to pass the examination, they would consider remaining in Japan, depending on the situation at home and at work at the time. Some others, even if originally toying with the idea of remaining in Japan, became discouraged by the lack of conditions to learn and train the way they had imagined. Some of the latter candidates decided to tag along until the end of the EPA contract; others resigned and returned to Indonesia.

For the accepting institutions which entered the programme with a vision of training a new workforce, the outcome was therefore uncertain as well. It was impossible to guarantee that even those candidates eager to remain in Japan would be able to do so. What is more, even if they passed the national examination, the candidates were under no obligation to carry on working for the same institution in which they trained under the EPA scheme. It was not guaranteed that they would reach the objective, even for those accepting care homes which used the EPA programme as a temporary means of dealing with labour shortage and the high turnover of staff, either. Unable to change their place of work, the EPA candidates were perceived as more likely to remain in the same institution for the length of the training programme. However,

because the Indonesians were not embedded in the Japanese labour market, it did not matter whether they worked in their accepting institution for one year or four. Neither was it important that they received a positive professional assessment of their performance at work. If they were not planning or were unable to remain in Japan, in the worst-case scenario, they would return to Indonesia. Whatever its length, the Japanese experience on their CV would be a bonus regardless of their performance in Japan.

Moreover, since the candidates were protected by the governmental scheme and their situation was closely monitored by the media and supporting organisations, sending back a candidate would have been unacceptable, if possible at all. Even when one of the candidates turned out to be pregnant after several months in training, she was not sent back. By conceiving she came near to breaching the terms of her employment, since one of the conditions for participation in the programme for females was not being pregnant. She worked with her pregnancy concealed until one day she was taken to a hospital feeling unwell. Soon after she gave birth to her child, she and her employers reached the consensus that the child would be taken to Indonesia to live with the young mother's family while she finished her contract in Japan.

While charged with the responsibility for successful practical implementation of the EPA programme, in the constellation of circumstances as described above, the accepting institutions did not have much in terms of management tools, such as offering or withholding promotion or discharging the workers. Having invested in their arrival and training, the institutions were eager for the Indonesians to contribute their labour for as long as possible, at the same time contributing to the success of the overall acceptance scheme. It is from such a situation that the interpersonal relationships between the Indonesian candidates and their employers emerged.

To an extent, the objectives of the Indonesian candidates and their employers overlapped. While my informants wanted to optimise their Japanese experience, either in terms of professional development, financial gain, or simply quality of life in Japan, the employers needed them to perform their tasks as well as possible—ideally, pass the national examination and remain to

work in their institutions. Therefore, concerned about the well-being of their charges, but also about the candidates' suitability for care work as individuals as well as Indonesians of whom they knew little, the employers took on a role of benevolent but strict wardens, parental figures in the Indonesians' representations. Intentionally or not, such informal relations between the employers and Indonesian candidates implicated them in a network of mutual sympathies and commitments which served as a means to manage and manipulate. On the one hand, while the employers were able to get to know their new staff members and through this familiarity dispose of any uncertainties about employing non-Japanese which they had had before, they also placed themselves in a position close enough to influence the actions of the Indonesian candidates not solely through the legitimised authority of formal employment relations. I have also shown how this tactic could fail, when the interpersonal relations went awry.

On the other hand, the same informal relationships allowed the Indonesian candidates to exercise what Halvard Vike (1997) calls moral control. Vike proposes that 'the potential for control within a social group sharing a moral universe lies in the multiplicity of their social relations'. 'Moral control', he continues, 'is hard to maintain if, say, leaders are known to their followers in a specialized and public capacity only. Therefore, the efficiency of moral control depends on drawing on broad fields of relevance in social relations, so that, for instance, private matters may be made relevant in the evaluation of leadership performance' (1997:205). Hence, the close relationships with their employers provided also for the Indonesians an arena where they could reclaim a degree of control over their lives in Japan, when, for example, they requested a long holiday break during Lebaran. In this way, the extra-professional intimacy of close interpersonal relationships between the candidates and the employers imparted to both parties a degree of control and ability to manage those matters with which either of them was concerned most.

The following chapter looks at how the situation inside the institutions was presented in the Japanese mass media. While expanding on the media attention already referred to in relation to monitoring the acceptance implementation, the

proceeding discussion situates it in a broader context of Japanese debates about the future of their nation.

Chapter Five

National Predicaments

We must commit ourselves to drawing an image of

the future country of Japan and deepen the debate

(*Mirai no Nihon no sugata o egaku kakugo de giron o fukameru beki da*

未来の日本の姿を覚悟で議論を深めるべきだ)

(*Nippon Keizai Shinbun*, 10.11.2010)

When speaking to my Japanese friends and other newly met people shortly after I arrived in Japan at the end of November 2008, that is, about three months after the first Indonesian batch of nurse and caregiver candidates arrived at the Narita and Kansai airports, a common reaction to my research theme in Japan was surprise and a kind of amusement at such an unusual and unheard of topic. 'Unheard of' were the Indonesians I came to study. It seemed that the intergovernmental Japan–Indonesia Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and people coming to Japan under its provisions were in the minds of people not related directly to the programme. This was despite the fact that in the three major newspapers' national editions, *Asahi Shinbun*, *Nippon Keizai Shinbun*, and *Yomiuri Shinbun* (henceforth *Asahi*, *Nippon Keizai*, and *Yomiuri*, respectively), there were 18 separate articles published in the three weeks following the Indonesians' arrival in Japan.

The inconspicuousness of the EPA acceptance gave way to a much wider awareness about the new foreign workers. This began to happen when, at the end of January 2009, the first Indonesian care worker candidates graduated

from six months of language and professional training and were to be dispatched as employees to care institutions across Japan. The graduation ceremonies in the training centres attracted considerable media attention on a national and particularly on a local level. Since then, between the end of January 2009 and the end of December 2010, the three newspapers published, on average, one article specifically related to the EPA Indonesians in their national editions each week over the two years, with periods seeing mention of the Indonesians every day. In addition to a special section (from Jpn. *tokushū*) on various migrant groups in Japan, the cover of *Nikkei Business* on the 23rd of November 2009 featured a photograph of an Indonesian candidate and an elderly woman apparently involved in a conversation in what seemed like an eldercare home. The main caption at the centre of the cover in bold characters read 'Migrants Yes. Shortage of 10 Million Workers is Coming' (*Senmannin no Rōdōbusoku ga Yatte Kuru*). In addition to the material published by the newspapers, numerous items referring to the EPA Indonesians were published on the Internet as well. These included various articles, but also sometimes very informal discussions on different fora. As well as several nation-wide television programmes referring to the acceptance, there were also various local television stations which took up the EPA candidates and their accepting institutions as a focus of their reports. These were often accessible for online viewing, and posted on YouTube or embedded in Facebook pages by the candidates themselves. Finally, special editions and special feature articles on the EPA Indonesians or the acceptance programme in general appeared in professional care- and health-related publications, such as *Nurse Senka* (Specialisation Nurse), *Care Management*, and *Iryō Rōdō* (Medical Labour). In 2009 a journalist Idei Yasuhiro (2009) published a book devoted to care provided to Japanese by foreign carers both in Japan and outside of its borders, but mainly focusing on the EPA acceptance. Perhaps hardly surprisingly, such sustained media coverage seemed to eventually mark the presence of Indonesian care workers (and nurses) in the minds of a wider Japanese public. From January 2009 on, I no longer encountered bewildered faces when disclosing my research topic. Instead, I would get involved in concerned

discussions over the future of the Japanese care system for the elderly, the current and future situation of the Japanese workforce, the situation of the accepting care facilities, and the plight of the Indonesian candidates.

In this chapter, I look at the various discourses which surrounded the EPA acceptance, basing my discussion primarily on the mass media reports on the programme. In the process I aim to explain why this numerically relatively minor group of foreign workers attracted what seemed to be disproportionate media attention. I suggest that the media representations of the EPA candidates and the debates surrounding the acceptance programme were expressions of particular ideologies of a Japanese nation trying to position itself *vis-à-vis* the projected demographic changes and globalising processes, such as the EPA, which brought about a need for a redefinition of certain representations of contemporary Japanese society.

Changing Japanese society

In discussing details of the EPA acceptance, a call for reconsideration of the future shape of Japanese society was voiced by Asato Wako, an associate professor in migration studies at Kyoto University. In an interview televised by a Japan Broadcasting Corporation (henceforth NHK) nation-wide station in January 2010, professor Asato said:

> Japan's proportion of the elderly has exceeded 20 per cent; from now on, the population will also continue to decrease. In the time of such transition, it is a matter of great exigency to [decide] what social system to build. If we were, for example, to talk about the nurses, it is of course necessary to supplement the lacking human resources by introducing a comprehensive social security system in order to bring back to work the dormant [qualified but not working in the profession] nurses. However, the situation of health services in different regions [of Japan] is varied; therefore, for example, I think we should have an option to bring human resources from abroad as well.[50] (NHK 2010)

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50 "日本は高齢化率が２０％を超え、今後も労働力人口も減少します。こうした転換期に、どのような社会システムを作っていくかというのは、まぁ、すごく重要な喫緊の課題なわけですね。例えば、看護師について言えば、人材、不足する人材をですね、例えば福祉制度の

This statement points to a very important aspect of the Japanese society's reality and the discourses about its future which constituted a background to the EPA acceptance and, as I argue below, also contributed to the presentation of the programme in reference to Japanese ideologies of nation.

Population crisis and the future shape of Japanese society

The continuing low fertility rate in Japan has been responsible for halting the growth of the population, which reached its peak of 127.75 million in 2005 and is predicted to decline to just above 100 million by 2050, and possibly even to 64 million by 2100 (Kono 2011). Framed within the context of a declining population and the subsequent labour shortage—the one already experienced by the care institutions as well as the direr version still to come—it was not uncommon in the Japanese national media to come across such expressions as 'the sense of crisis' (from Jpn.: *kikikan*) or 'a population crisis' (from Jpn.: *jinkō kiki*) as part of the discussions surrounding the EPA programme (see Goodman & Harper 2008 for alternative views on Japan's demographic situation; *cf.* Kono 2011). A *Nippon Keizai* article presented the acceptance of foreign workers with a sense of immediacy:

> Which way to choose, and to what level to increase the 1.7 per cent proportion of foreigners in the population are precisely the topics which ought to be discussed as the national strategy. We must not forget that we are now in a position where the debate cannot be postponed any longer. The time when the medical and care services, agriculture, manufacture industry, [and] research development are definitely going to lack manpower is right in front of us. [iii]
> (*Nippon Keizai* 28.09.2009)

One way to mitigate the predicted problems arising from the declining labour force was to invite foreigners and to provide conditions for them to more freely

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充実化によって潜在的な看護師を、まぁ、復職してもらう、看護師に復職をしてもらうといった、まぁ、もちろんそういう方法をとらなければいけないわけです。ただ、地域医療の実情はさまざまですから、例えば外国からの人材を越えをするというような選択肢はあっていいかと思います." (transcribed by the author, BS)

enter the Japanese labour market and settle in Japanese society. For some article authors it was not the time any more when Japan was in the position to benevolently let the foreigners in. Rather the time had come for Japan to ask the foreign workers to grant Japan a favour and offer their labour. The EPA Indonesians were indeed sometimes portrayed as such benevolent guests who offered to look after the elderly for whom they were under no obligation to care. Therefore, placed in the context of the Japanese society's future, which, given the demographic changes, was imagined to be substantially different from its present, the concerns over the ultimate outcome of the EPA programme were connected to a wider issue of Japan's strategy for the coming decades. Another facet of this strategy was related to the issue of a growing proportion of the elderly in Japanese society.

Silver society

Shōshi kōrei shakai, 'a society of few children and longevity', and its variations, such as *shōshi kōrei mondai* or *shōshi kōrei ka*, 'the problem of the declining birth rate' and 'the low fertility and ageing' respectively, had by the time of this research long become widely used terms to describe the condition of Japanese society (see Coulmas 2007). Events such as the conference organised by the German Institute for Japanese Studies, which took place in June 2009 in Tokyo under the telling title *Imploding Populations: Global and Local Challenges of Demographic Change*, indicated the currency of the issues (*cf.* Goodman & Harper 2008; Coulmas & Lützeler 2011).

Concomitant with the longevity society was the issue of securing care provision for the growing numbers of the long living elderly. While many people in their 'silver years' were enjoying good health, and tapping into their needs and vitality were the so-called silver markets and offers of silver employment, many Japanese elders still needed vital support in their everyday life. Everyone was expecting to need it at some stage of his or her life. Therefore, the implementation of a system which would guarantee adequate provisions to those who may need to rely on others (read: the state) for well-being in their old age featured in many a discussion I happened to listen to or

partake in among the Japanese with whom I worked during my research. Admittedly, the majority of the individuals with whom I shared these conversations were related to the nurse and caregiver acceptance programme. Their interest in and awareness of the looming 'care crisis' might therefore be more pronounced than among the wider Japanese society.

However, the subject was a common theme in the media as well. The repeatedly featured discussions saw reporters in their thirties ponder about just how large contributions in taxes they would have to make in the future, who would look after them, who would pay for their future care given the low birth rates, and the apparent unwillingness of many Japanese to engage in care work. Moreover, alongside such speculative deliberations it was also common to encounter published reports describing 'care hell' (from Jpn.: *kaigo jigoku*) of care provision at home by often single family members, dealing with the growing problem of 'elderly to elderly care' (from Jpn.: *rōrō kaigo*) among aged couples, 'care exhaustion' (from Jpn.: *kaigo tsukare*), and, most disturbingly, 'care suicides' (from Jpn.: *kaigo jisatsu*) committed by family members turned carers, 'care murders' (from Jpn.: *kaigo satsujin*) of incapacitated parents, and 'double suicides' (from Jpn.: *kaigo shinjū*) of elderly couples who could not face the burden of caring for each other. Even if the general statements about the problems of an ageing society might not have conveyed a clear idea what these would be, the vivid descriptions of individual struggles and of people pushed to commit drastic acts most likely brought the problems closer to the wider population as well. During the electoral campaign of 2009 all parties' manifestos declared a commitment to introducing improvements in the long-term care provision system and/or improvement of the working conditions in the sector—another indicator of mainstreaming the problem of the aged society and of the awareness that 'silver democracy', in which the majority of votes would be in the hands of the elderly, was arriving (see Coulmas 2007).

The ageing society and the anticipated shortage of people able to contribute their labour to the Japanese economy and, not least, to support the care provision for the growing numbers of the retired elderly carried with them an

image of a society structured in new ways. Most evidently, the difference in the population size of the young and the aged generations was expected to become even more disproportionate, the national economy was expected to have to be scaled down, and robots were imagined to become a more common appearance, filling positions which lacked manpower in public spaces and at home. Conversely, Japan could also become a home for more foreigners.

EPA candidates supplying Japanese labour force

The arrival of the EPA Indonesian workers fed directly into such debates over the appropriate means to tackle the various projected problems coming with Japan's ageing society and the declining population. Long at the forefront of public debate were the questions of who was going to provide financially for the expanding numbers of the elderly in need of support and, with the falling fertility rate, who in the 'shrinking society' was going to contribute to the national treasury to secure the tax base necessary to sustain Japan's economic prosperity and guarantee its citizens the standard of living to which they were accustomed. Depending on the proposed solutions the vision of the future Japanese society varied. In one incarnation, Japanese society, albeit less numerous, remained self-sufficient—that is, not reliant on foreign workers. The other vision presented a Japanese future as unavoidably opened to significant numbers of migrant workers in order to sustain the country's existence. The EPA Indonesian caregiver candidates arrived to work in a sector where concerns over Japan's future, fuelled by the above discussions, met. Therefore, their arrival under a scheme which offered a possibility (however uncertain, as shown in Chapter One) for the foreign workers to remain in Japan permanently was taken to represent a step in the direction of opening Japan to foreign labour. *Nippon Keizai* (17.05.2008) made this link directly by writing that 'the EPA has the potential to provide a breakthrough in initiating a change in the closed Japanese labour market, as it has been referred to'.[51] As such, I want to argue, the EPA acceptance, although numerically insignificant, triggered

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51 "ＥＰＡは閉鎖的といวれる日本の労働市場を変える突破口になる可能性を秘めて
   いる".

debates over what the future shape of the Japanese society should be, and how, and whether, foreigners could be included in it.

In this context of Japan's changing demographics and the forecast difficulties the country might face in securing a sufficient labour force within its own borders, the EPA Indonesians were referred to as *kichōna jinzai*, *senryoku, kichōna senryoku*, and *kuni senryoku*, or precious, valuable human resources, strategic potential, precious strategic potential, and national strategy, respectively, which was not to be wasted for the sake of Japan's future (e.g., *Yomiuri* 03.08.2008; *Asahi* 28.04.2009; *Nippon Keizai* 09.03.2009 and 30.06.2010). In the light of the perceivably 'half-baked' (from Jpn.: *chūtohanpa*) acceptance programme, which was in many an opinion fated to send the candidates back to their country, an article in *Asahi* (29.11.2009) rhetorically asked, 'If things carry on like this, pretty much everyone will fail [the exam] and return to their country, which will put into question the whole meaning of the EPA [acceptance?]'.[52] It was therefore common to read in the national newspapers the calls for the *kuni*, the country, or the *seifu*, the government, to take responsibility for the acceptance. Without the guidance and perpetually called for financial support, it was the accepting institutions and hospitals which were charged with the task of realising what was perceived to be a national policy, or *kokusaku*. The articles often used such terms as *genba marunage*, or 'dumping it on the [accepting] sites' (e.g., *Asahi* 02.11.2009 and 26.11.2009), *shisetsu makase*, or 'leaving it to the institutions' (e.g., *Nikkei* 27.09.2009), or *genba ni ichinin sarete iru*, 'left entirely to the [accepting] sites' (*Asahi* 02.11.2009), and *hottarakasu*, meaning 'to neglect' (*Asahi* 29.11.2009). The general gist of the articles was that the government once again had not tackled the foreign workers issue full force. The media represented it as a demonstration of a lack of responsibility (from Jap.: *musekinin*) on the side of the central government for dealing with the issues on which Japan's future hinged, and the EPA acceptance itself as a litmus test for Japan as a country open to immigration.

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52 "このままではほとんどの人が不合格のままで帰国し、EPAの意義が問われかねない … 扉を少し開けて後はほったらかしでは、政府の対応はあまりに無責任である".

Test case

Although not necessarily always in the same words, the idea of the EPA acceptance as being a 'breakthrough' in labour migration regulations and a 'test case' or 'model case' for the future, larger-scale acceptance of foreign workers indeed often appeared in the articles published by the *Asahi*, *Nippon Keizai*, and *Yomiuri* between 2008 and 2010. Even if at the time it was limited to those institutions having the capacity to support the training of foreign workers, the EPA acceptance was to provide the 'know-how', and if implemented smoothly in the care sector, some hoped it could be expanded to other sectors as well (e.g., Fukuma Tsutomu, a Chief Secretary of the Japanese Council of Senior Citizens Welfare Services in NHK Debate 29.10.2006).

In March 2009, during a seminar organised by the Japan Association for Migration Policy Studies at Waseda University, Furuya Tokurō, who took part in the EPA negotiations on behalf of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), was reported to comment:

> at the same time as the issue [acceptance of foreign workers] has been attracting national attention, this [EPA] acceptance is considered to be a pilot case foretelling the shape of the future acceptance of foreign workers.[53]
> (*Imin Seisaku Gakkai* 13.03.2009)

Therefore, the idea of testing in preparation for the larger-scale intake of foreign workers in the future, presented as unavoidable, was combined with the hopes for the 'settlement' of the EPA candidates in Japan. This showed that at least part of the discourse produced by the 'official' sources, here a pro-migrant workers MoFA, was presenting the EPA as something more than a clause in an economic agreement. On the day following the approval of the EPA with Indonesia by the Japanese higher house of parliament, the House of Councillors, the *Nippon Keizai* newspaper published an article presenting the

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53 "同時に、この問題は国民の関心を集めていることもあり、今後の外国人労働者の受け入れのあり方を占うパイロットケースになっていると思われる".

The document can be accessed at: http://iminseisaku.org/top/contents/100313_furuya.pdf.

forthcoming acceptance in the context of the foreign population in Japan and the foreseen problems they might encounter. The last lines of the first paragraph read:

> From now on the labour shortage in nursing and care will become even direr due to the low birth rates and the ageing of society. It is often pointed out that the future of social security is contingent on the success or failure of the labour open country—the acceptance of the Indonesian nurses and whether they will start to settle (*teichaku*) is the touchstone.[54]
> (*Nippon Keizai* 17.05.2008)

This perception dominated among the accepting institutions and hospitals as well. Expressed through the notion of *teichaku*, meaning 'becoming established, fixed down', or settled, it reflected the objectives and hopes of the accepting institutions for the Indonesian EPA candidates to become a permanent addition to their workforce.

The perceived need to test foreigners' acceptance in view of a future wider opening of the country implied two things. Firstly, as pointed out above, it suggested that contrary to the officially approved goal, the EPA acceptance was perceived in terms of Japan's internal labour market issues. Secondly, the need for a test, and its possible failure, rested on an assumption that working and settling in Japan might not be an easily achievable goal. The settlement of non-Japanese required some testing, for their compatibility with the Japanese social milieu to find out who fit in, how to help them to fit in, whether they would be perceived as fitting in, and also, importantly, whether the new arrivals would find Japan enticing enough to consider it an option to settle there at all. Such deliberations pointed to the idea that apart from the procedural adjustments, such as the organisation of training, there would need to take place less tangible changes in order to welcome the foreigners not only to the labour market but to the society as well. The concern was with the ability of foreigners

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54 "少子高齢化で看護や介護分野の人手不足は今後さらに深刻化する。社会保障の将来は「労働開国」の成否にかかっているとの指摘は多く、インドネシア人看護師らの受け入れや定着が進むかが試金石となる".

to fully participate in the Japanese social fabric, not least due to the internal dynamics of Japanese society.

It was, therefore, clear that the importance of the EPA acceptance did not rest in its numerical scope. It was rather the programme's timing and location within the particular sector which had long been an object of popular interest. However, as already suggested, it is not sufficient to consider this demographic and labour-oriented context to account for why this particular workers' group should become a centrepiece in debating Japan's immigration policies. The Japanese ideology of homogeneity, combined with the collapsing of such notions as society, nation, and ethnicity, as discussed in Chapter Two, also contributed to the EPA acceptance's media popularity and its framing within the discourses of Japan's future as a nation. The remaining part of this chapter presents the main discourses which surrounded the EPA Indonesians and offers a glimpse into the representations of the workers in the media.

Kaikoku, an open county

A 2006 article discussing the EPA between Japan and the Philippines referred to the deal as a 'new step towards a country open to labour' (*Asahi* 26.09.2006). In the first five short paragraphs[55] the article briefly commented on the general provisions of the agreement and mentioned several points still to be agreed upon by the negotiators. The remaining eleven paragraphs concentrated on the clause within the agreement which regulated the acceptance of foreign carers and nurses. According to the author of the article, the commercial arrangements to be implemented between the two countries were welcome developments in Japan's international trade relations, but the acceptance of carers and nurses was 'epoch making' (from Jpn.: *gakiteki na*) (*ibid*.).[56] On another occasion the acceptance was an issue of 'utmost interest'

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55 I am referring here to the text layout as it appears in the Portable Document Format (pdf) obtained from the electronic databases. Despite differences stemming, for example, from a horizontal orientation of the text as opposed to the vertical of the original, the division of the text into parts seemed to reflect the organisation of the original articles.
56 "今回の協定では、画期的なのは、日本が条件付きながらフィリピン人の看護師と介護士の受け入れを認めた点だ。労働市場の開放が盛り込まれたのは初めてで、「労働開国」への新たな一歩として評価したい".

(from Jpn.: *saidai no shōten*) (*Asahi* 04.11.2004).

What new epoch was proclaimed to be in the making was expressed through the compound *kaikoku*, literally meaning an 'open country'. On the occasion of the Indonesian workers' arrival, it was the second most often used expression in the articles related to the EPA acceptance published between 2004 and 2008 in the national editions of the *Asahi*, *Yomiuri*, and *Nippon Keizai* newspapers. Coming second only after 'Indonesia', used either as a denominator of a country or as a part of the nationality indicator, the *kaikoku* was sometimes used with a preceding qualifying *rōdō*, meaning 'labour', or *jinzai*, 'human resources'[57] to form the expressions 'labour open country' or 'country open to labour', and 'country open to human resources', respectively.

Kaikoku, an 'open country', is an antonym of *sakoku*, a 'closed country', or a 'country in isolation'. Originally, the latter term was used to describe the isolationist policy of the Tokugawa shogunate ruling over feudal Japan in the Edo era between 1600 and 1868. After a period of relatively abundant relations with peoples from outside the Japanese Archipelago, shortly after gaining control over other clans, the first of the shoguns, Tokugawa Iemitsu, introduced *sakoku*, or isolation policy (the term used at the time was *kaikin*, meaning sea restrictions). The policy remained in force until 1853, when the arrival of 'the Black Ships' under Commodore Perry at the Japanese islands 're-opened' Japan and brought it back into the international political scene. Even if the extent to which Japan of the Tokugawa era was a 'closed country' is debatable and the origins of the term as coined by the Japanese as a self-description is questioned (see Lie 2001), the very idea of Japan as having a history and perhaps a tradition of being closed or as remaining in a self-imposed isolation remained alive and found its expression in the homogeneity discourses as discussed in Chapter Two.

Although according to the official statement of purpose of the EPA acceptance programme, which, as I have already explained, was presented by the Japanese government as a Japanese contribution to training Indonesian care

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57 This example comes from later articles, *Nippon Keizai* 23.01.2009 and 19.10.2009, where the term is used in the articles' body text.

and nursing specialists, framing of the EPA programme to refer to an increase in human movement across (and into) the country's borders suggested an interpretation of the EPA acceptance as representing a shift in Japanese migration policies. Just as at the end of the Tokugawa period Japan saw an increase in foreign presence on the Isles, so was to be the function of the EPA acceptance. Such interpretations of the EPA programme in terms of opening up to international flows of people were evidently based on self-reflective representations of Japan as 'Japanese only'. These representations were at the basis of arguments supporting the 'opening' as well as of those against it.

Boring homogeneity

Sakanaka Hidenori, one of the vocal proponents of Japan redesigning its immigration policy, the Head of the Japan Immigration Policy Institute and a former director of the Tokyo Immigration Bureau, concerned with the political and social qualities of the Japanese society under the current immigration policy, shared with me his view in summer 2009 that Japanese society as it was, with a limited number of non-Japanese within it, was simply 'boring' (from Jpn.: *tsumaranai*). The Japanese not only looked the same, with 'straight black hair', but were also preordained to produce uniform, unvarying ideas. The suggested Japanese lack of ingenuity, a kind of creative stagnation, stemmed from their 'boring, all the same ways of thinking'. Referring to the EPA acceptance, which, in Mr Sakanaka's opinion, should be but the first step to a more general acceptance of foreign workers, he added that with the acceptance of more foreigners there would be more people with new, fresh ideas revitalising society.

Similarly, during our interview, a manager, and a son of an owner of a care home participating in the EPA acceptance, laid out a vision of having people of multiple nationalities working in his institution. He had accepted one Indonesian worker during the first intake and continued to accept during every following effectuation of the EPA acceptance programme. At the time of the interview, he had already accepted Filipino workers from the first batch and Indonesians from both intakes, and was planning on accepting the EPA

Vietnamese as well, were the agreement between Japan and Vietnam to go through. Despite anticipating it to be more challenging than having people arriving from only one country, he entertained the idea that such diversity would not only increase the vitality of the Japanese staff, who through interactions with foreigners would have a chance to experience something new, but also positively affect the well-being of the elderly living in his facility, precisely because it was not 'just Japanese' (from Jpn.: *Nihonjin bakkari*) and therefore less monotonous. 'It is so enjoyable to have a foreigner around' (from Jpn.: g*aikoku no kata ga irassharu to totemo tanoshii desu*), commented an elderly woman residing in another accepting institution when I asked her to reflect on the candidates' performance at work.

That being a foreigner could be a very compelling factor in its own right became palpable when I was trying to obtain permission to observe one of my Indonesian friends at his workplace. After being introduced to the head consultant of the institution, over the following two weeks I was invited to a series of meetings attended by increasingly 'important' people. After explaining the content of my research, I had to justify my request for not just a one-off visit but a series of regular visits over the coming months. I felt that I had gained an understanding when the head of personnel answered the question directed at me, saying that an extended observation should allow me to notice changes over time, which was not far from what I would have said. Finally, during our last meeting I was informed that an executive director of the institution had decided to allow me access to the ward where my friend was employed. According to his words, conveyed to me by the head consultant, who later became my main contact person there, my presence was expected to be interesting and beneficial for the residents, who would have a chance to see and interact with a white person (from Jpn.: *hakujin*). A foreigner in an institution for the elderly was seen as an attraction introducing an element of rarely encountered national (ethnic, cultural) otherness, an entertaining novelty to the residents' monotonous lives.

The above examples and commentaries show that the Japanese homogeneity, otherwise valued positively as a source of societal cohesion and

uniqueness, and indirectly as the reason for Japan's economic success, in the context of the EPA acceptance was represented as something which needed to be mitigated. The homogeneity was, therefore, not just a source of harmony, familiarity, and praised predictability in which it was possible to achieve 'communication of unity' (Lebra 1976). It was also a source of monotony, even dullness. Japan's stringent immigration regulations were seen as isolating the nation from foreigners and their invigorating influence. Pointing to the unusualness of such a situation, in reaction to a Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) radio programme featuring a phone interview with one of the EPA Indonesian care workers, one of the listeners pondered:

> In Japan, where dwindling of birthrate and ageing society are steadily progressing, if we import only goods but not people, Japan as a country will not be able to survive. Shouldn't Japanese, too, learn more about their partner's language and customs? There exist in the world multi-ethnic states. Only Japan's insular as ever [invocation] "because they are foreigners" is a puzzle.[58] (NHK Radio 10.11.2009)

Against the idealised image of Japan as mono-ethnic, the NHK listener proposed an alternative view of Japan where cultural and linguistic exchanges could be a norm. Such a proposition re-imagined the Japanese nation as not necessarily bounded by shared language and customs. Moreover, it proposed disconnecting the idea of Japanese society and the state from the ethnically defined nation. A similar undertone was implicit in the statements suggesting the internationalisation of the Japanese language.

An employer overseeing the acceptance of two Indonesian women care workers from the second batch told me during an interview in January 2010 that for him it did not really matter whether someone was Japanese or not. He asked, 'What does it mean to be a Japanese?', and clarified his approach by

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58 "少子高齢化社会が今後益々進む日本、物だけではない人を輸入もしなければ日本の国は成り立たなくなる。相手国の言葉・習慣を日本人もモット学ぶべきではないか。世界には他民族国家が成り立っている。日本だけが合いも変わらず島国的な「外国人がから」というのは考えもの".

saying, 'If only you can speak the language you should be allowed to live and work here'. For him the language was the qualifying factor for a person to be accepted as a member of the society and as a co-worker, or an employee in this particular case. This did not mean, however, that getting over this hurdle was to be easy. He appreciated the long way his two Indonesian charges still had ahead of them to become independent members of his working team, and of the wider society as well.

Mitigating the perceived difficulty of the Japanese language was therefore one of the means to make Japan into a more hospitable place for foreigners and potential future co-residents, if not co-nationals. Two newspaper texts suggested that the Japanese language should no longer be considered a language exclusively for the Japanese people. In June 2010 *Asahi* newspaper published an interview with a former chairman of The Society for Japanese Linguistics, Nomura Masa'aki. The chairman argued against the notion contained in a report recently submitted to the Ministry of Education, which proposed increasing the number of Chinese characters designated for everyday use. In the chairman's understanding an excessive number of obligatory Chinese characters was not only a significant barrier to everyday functioning for individuals with impaired vision but, being impossible to memorise, threatened the very survival of the Japanese language.[59] Moreover, he stated that the

> Japanese language is no longer the property of the Japanese people only. There have already arrived in Japan candidates for carers and nurses from Indonesia and the Philippines, but they struggle at work as well as with the national examination due to the Chinese characters. Undoubtedly, from now on there will be more and more foreigners coming to Japan. In the world of the Internet where the English language holds an imperialistic power, for the Japanese language to survive it is essential that we decrease the number of Chinese characters to make it easy to use and learn for the foreigners.[iv] (*Asahi* 26.06.2010)

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59 Ultimately, the number of daily-use Chinese characters was increased in November 2010 (*Japan Today* 20.11.2010).

A similar point was made by a 76-year-old man teaching the Japanese language to Indonesian technical trainees, who sympathised with the EPA candidates expected to gain command of the language within three to four years while working full time. According to his letter to the *Asahi* newspaper, he felt for the trainees as he admitted that the different modalities of the language, such as the women and men language variants, dialects, and polite forms, were plentiful enough to confuse him as a Japanese. It went without saying that if the Indonesians were to work in Japan they should have a grasp of the language sufficient not to hinder their performance at work. However, he saw a need to

> start treating the beautiful Japanese language which is so
> rich and diverse not as a national language, but rather as
> a second [i.e., to be learnt as a second language], that is,
> an international language.[60] (*Asahi* 23.07.2009)

While by the reference to its difficulty the representation of the Japanese language does not challenge the notion of its uniqueness, the above propositions suggest opening up to foreigners one of the emblematic elements of the Japanese nation. Such 'internationalisation' of the language was to be one of the necessary, but beneficial, changes of the internationalised (globalised) Japan where it was possible to imagine a coexistence with such 'hybrids' as non-Japanese people speaking Japanese, and with larger numbers of non-Japanese residents in general.

Invigorating internationalisation

Similar ideas were presented by the Japanese media, which situated the EPA acceptance within the discourses of diversity, glossed as *tayōsei*, and multiculturalism, or literally multicultural coexistence, *tabunka kyōsei*. The

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60 "だが、豊富で多様で美しい日本語と言われている、いわゆる「国語」から、これからは第２外国語として日本語、つまり国際語としての日本語としてありようを考えて、インドネシア人に接していくよう心がけたいものと思う".

advent of both, which came to the accepting institutions with the EPA programme, was to lead to revitalisation of the atmosphere in the accepting care homes. For example, it was expected that the foreign employees would revitalise the working atmosphere of the institutions by introducing some difference and hence variety to the predominantly, and often solely, Japanese working environment. One of the articles read:

> The institution said that they accepted [the Indonesians] hoping for intermingling, socialisation (from Jpn.: *jinzai kōryū*) with the staff. Despite bearing the cost of 600,000 yen [around 4,500 pounds sterling] for the half-year training after the arrival to Japan, […] the director of the care home said: "rather than motivated by the shortage of hands to work, our primary aim is to introduce diversity (from Jpn.: *tayōsei*) into the workplace".[61]
> (*Asahi* 28.04.2009)

The revitalisation or invigoration (from Jpn.: *kasseika* and *kappatsuka*) of the workplace expected to come with the foreign employees also figured as the second most common reason (on par with *kokusai kōken*, or 'international contribution', and *kokusai kōryū*, or 'international exchange, mingling'), for accepting the EPA Indonesians to care institutions in the already mentioned survey conducted by Garuda Supporters towards the end of 2009. In a broader perspective, the foreign workers were presented as indispensable for Japan's ability to sustain 'the society's vitality' (from Jpn.: *shakai no katsuryoku*) (*Asahi* 26.09.2006). Another article saw the internationalisation as inevitable:

> Green Homeland [a care home] as a consigned institution engaged in training and promotion of employment has been unaffected by the labour shortage of the recent years. The … institution's director explains her aim in accepting the Indonesian candidates: "While supporting foreigners aspiring to become carers we contribute to international cooperation/aid (from Jpn.:

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61 "施設側は「人材交流になれば」と受け入れた。来日後の半年研修で６０万円を負担するなどコストが、上野興治施設長は「人手不足というよりも、職場に多様性をもたらすことが一番の狙いです」という".

kokusai kōken), simultaneously we can cultivate an international way of thinking, international feel (from Jpn.: *kokusai kankaku*) among our Japanese members of staff, and we can learn from each other ... we were fortunate to have received skilled workers thanks to which the staff morale heightened and the workplace livened up; these things are difficult to translate into a monetary value. It [the acceptance] is also an advance investment towards the internationalisation era that will definitely come".[v] (*Yomiuri* 24.05.2009)

The above article fragments illustrate how the EPA acceptance was not seen solely in terms of training Indonesian care specialists in line with the official goals of the programme. Rather, while the Indonesian workers were depicted as already contributing to improving the working environment of the accepting institutions by their sheer presence, the praising of the opportunity for international 'mingling' and for fostering the 'international feel' among the Japanese pointed towards the future. Such exposure to non-Japanese workers effected by the EPA programme was to prepare the Japanese for living in a diversified, internationalised Japanese society which would 'definitely come'. Such discourses clearly suggested a vision of Japan and Japanese society as being at or approaching a threshold between the imagined 'open' future and the closed, 'Japanese only' present (and past).

As I indicated in the first chapter, the majority of the accepting institutions claimed to have accepted the EPA Indonesian workers in order to mitigate the labour shortage, either one already experienced or one expected in the near future. In light of the above mediated representations, it is therefore evident that the EPA scheme was simultaneously perceived in terms of labour market needs and Japanese ideas of a homogeneous nation. If it were not for the assumed present homogeneity of the Japanese, the Indonesian workers would not have been posed to introduce difference, revitalise workplaces, or provide an introduction for Japanese workers to internationalised interactions. The following sections show how the Indonesian workers were imagined as agents of such revitalising internationalisation. They also illustrate the ways in which the Indonesians were imagined as compatible with the social milieux of the

Japanese eldercare institutions. However, before moving to the images of the candidates as they appeared in the Japanese mass media, I pause on the source of these images and discuss how they came to be influenced by the Indonesians themselves.

Production of EPA Indonesian mediated images

In his analysis of television programmes representing Brazilian *Nikkeijin* in the early 1990s, Tsuda Takeyuki (2003b) discusses the extent to which the Japanese media were engaged in reproduction of the establishment views and what conditions made it possible for them to take an adversarial position to them. Tsuda suggests that in Japan the mode of acquiring information through *kisha kurabu* (from Jpn.: journalists' club) convened by governmental departments and other institutions tended to restrict the material disseminated by the media to that reflecting the official stance. However, as he also notes, there were certain areas on which information could not be obtained through such dominant channels. One of these areas was immigration. The lack of official information forced journalists to conduct independent research in order to produce materials on immigrant lives. In fact, as Tsuda further notes, at the time of his research numerous documentaries were produced criticising the Japanese government for inadequacies in the way Japan was receiving foreigners.

Because initially there was indeed a lack of official sources of information on the lives of the EPA candidates, as I noted in the previous chapter, throughout my time in Japan the EPA Indonesians were frequently visited by various journalists. Such direct collection of information undeniably affected the image constructed by media representations, which, as I show below, were predominately sympathetic towards the Indonesians and critical of the government. One of the reasons why these images were positive was the friendly, intimate relationships which the Indonesian candidates developed with their employers and with some of their co-workers and the elderly, which I discussed in the preceding chapters. Also it is sensible to assume that those accepting institutions where perhaps the relationships between the Indonesians

and the staff and/or employers were not running smoothly for whatever reason would be less inclined to accept a request for a journalist visit. What is more, the candidates were aware of what kind of stories the Japanese journalists were expecting to hear and sometimes adjusted their comments to these perceived expectations. As Amir once told me, referring to his latest interview, he simply said what they wanted to hear—that is, that it was difficult, that he was trying, and that he wanted to work in Japan in the future, while in fact he was still undecided and was planning to build a house in Indonesia for himself and his newly wedded wife.

Another factor which had a bearing on the kind of images conveyed in the Japanese newspapers and other reports had to do with the EPA Indonesians' being embedded in a network of relations which sometimes extended back to their time in the training centre. For example, some of the teachers from the centre remained actively engaged not only in the private lives of the candidates. I would also meet them at different gatherings organised by support groups, or at conferences where the EPA issue was debated. Similarly remaining involved were those who volunteered to become host families or *kaiwa* partners (conversation partners) to the Indonesians during their language training. They, too, maintained phone contact, sometimes sent letters, and visited their 'adopted children', but also participated in various support organisations. As already noted, these organisations lobbied for improvements of the EPA programme and through their personal contacts with the Indonesians their information was directly based on the narratives produced by the candidates. These narratives were based not solely on one's personal experiences but, thanks to the continuing contact between the candidates, on an accumulation of others' histories, too.

My informants' connectedness with the individuals from the training centre and among themselves was further accompanied by their contacts with the officials from the Indonesian embassy as well as from the Japanese political scene. In May 2009 the Japanese Council of Senior Citizens Welfare Services organised a *happyōkai*, or a presentation day, on which the EPA caregiver candidates of the associated institutions presented their experiences to date.

Many of them, including Amir and Jasir, who wrote a joint presentation, decided to use the opportunity to appeal for improvements to the programme. This was particularly significant since one of the main individuals in the organisation hosting the event was an *amakudari,* a former senior bureaucrat, who maintained personal connections to powerful figures within the central administration. The same meeting was attended by representatives of the Indonesian Embassy, one of the Minister-Counsellors and his secretary/deputy, and an Indonesian news agency reporter currently based in Tokyo. During the reception which followed the formal presentation part, the candidates freely mingled with all the guests present, and took the opportunity to introduce themselves to the Minister-Counsellor and to snap a picture or two together. A month later, in June 2009, an official launch (attended by many media representatives) of a newly formed support organisation, which aimed at supporting both the candidates (care workers as well as nurses) and their accepting institutions, took place in the Shibuya district of Tokyo. Among the invited guest speakers were representatives of the Indonesian Embassy. After they addressed the audience the representatives joined the candidates in a room booked for them to eat lunch (provided by the support organisation) and to store their belongings. Sitting and standing shoulder to shoulder with the candidates, the officials engaged in a friendly conversation with the candidates about their experiences, expectations, and problems. These problems were later conveyed to the Japanese counterparts of the Indonesian officials.

Therefore, although it was not within the competence of any of the mentioned organisations or individuals to introduce any changes to the programme, they provided channels through which to disseminate the Indonesians' views publicly in a manner which guaranteed being listened to and having their statements recorded by the national mass media. The agenda presented by the Indonesians could therefore be passed on through Japanese official channels and used in the lobbying to reform the foreign care workers acceptance system. This agenda was also the source of the EPA representations dominant in the Japanese newspapers during the period of this research.

EPA candidates' media representations

Alongside the explicit debates of a new, diverse Japanese society, there were a great number of media-produced descriptions which presented the EPA Indonesian candidates in a positive light. In fact, I did not come across any account of the acceptance which in any way put the candidates in a negative light. Any criticism was always levelled at the organisation of the acceptance programme, usually stressing the hardship it caused for the Indonesians. Negative reactions of the elderly towards the Indonesian workers were also only rarely reported in the media. Rather, through building up their stories from personalised relations about individuals in specific accepting institutions, the newspaper articles and television programmes gave a friendly 'face' to the practical implementation of the governmental agreement and to the workers who arrived. Unlike images of a generalised portrait of foreigners in Japan, these new workers were not engaging in illicit activities or heightening crime rates. Instead, they were smiling. *Egao*, or 'smiling face(s)', was one of the most commonly used words in the descriptions of the Indonesians' demeanour after their arrival to Japan. 'Care in a foreign country—supported by *smiling faces*' (*Asahi* 22.02.2009, my emphasis), and '"I'll stick it out with work and studying"—*smiling faces* and confusion—Indonesian carer candidates one month into appointment' (*Asahi* 27.03.2009, my emphasis) are just two examples of article titles using the noun. In the short scenes described in the texts depicting the EPA Indonesians at work, they were usually interacting with the elderly, pushing their wheelchairs, or feeding them—always with a smile on their faces (from Jpn.: *egao*), affectionate, kind (from Jpn.: *yasashii*), cheerful (from Jpn.: *akarui*), and/or polite (from Jpn.: *teinei*). Beside the descriptions one could often see a photograph conveying the heart-warming atmosphere of the moment described.

An article titled 'Caring hearts—having crossed the border' published in the *Yomiuri Newspaper* (07.01.2009)[62] read, 'in an elderly care institution

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62 This article describes the situation in a care home which received two Indonesian candidates who were exempted from the introductory Japanese language course and took up their positions as candidates ahead of everyone else. Therefore, the newspaper could report on a situation in the institution before the main group of the candidates completed their language training.

Indonesians, [names of candidates], smiling, nestle close to the elderly who are enjoying their *osechi ryōri*';[63] the same newspaper a little over a month later wrote, 'in an elderly care institution, Indonesians from the island of Java who arrived in Japan to obtain carer qualifications, ... somewhat shyly danced "*Ohara Bushi*"[64] in a garden bathed in sunlight as though spring had arrived. Around them the smiling faces of the elderly ... one person in a wheelchair was even following their movements with both hands', while a caption to one of the accompanying pictures showing an elderly resident with one of the candidates in the middle of some verbal exchange, read: 'speaking affectionately to the elderly in Japanese, with a warm look in their eyes' (*Yomiuri* 17.02.2009). On another occasion, it was reported that a 'cheerful voice and a smile on the face … softens the expressions of the patients. "He's very attentive", the elderly think of him very highly' (*Yomiuri* 15.03.2009).

Similar accounts were produced by readers and listeners of the media reporting on the EPA Indonesians' situation at work. The following is the final section of a letter from a 71-year-old male reader whose mother lived at a care institution which had accepted two female Indonesians:

> "Ms Nagatani, let's wash hands". They called my 99-year-old mother whose name they so quickly memorised. Those affectionate smiling faces, [that] natural cheerfulness. I'm sure the trainees have a lot of problems, but I hope they will keep cheering up Japanese elderly.[vi] (*Asahi* 13.03.2009)

Such affectionate attitudes were also expressed by presenters as well as listeners of an NHK Radio programme 'Will they settle? Foreigners [in] Care and Nursing' broadcast on the 10th of November 2009. The discussion revolved around the problems with the organisation of the EPA programme, but the presenters had also arranged a live phone conversation with an Indonesian caregiver candidate living now in one of the northern, and therefore considered cold, prefectures of Japan's main island. The candidate answered the questions

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63 Japanese New Year's food in which each ingredient and dish has a symbolic meaning.
64 A rhythmic dance performed to a traditional melody from the Kagoshima Prefecture.

about her work and the cold weather in simple sentences, sometimes losing grammatical fluency, but often laughing, and claimed that even though it was difficult for her to communicate in Japanese at the moment, she would 'do her best' (from Jap.: *ganbarimasu*). Once the conversation was over, those present in the studio commented on her good Japanese and perseverance despite having to work in such unfamiliar conditions, not only in a foreign country, but also in a climate to which she was not accustomed. Later, one of the presenters posted a commentary on the programme on the Internet. It read:

> that voice, considering the unfamiliar everyday environment and [her] work, so unimaginably cheerful, frank, and strong, brimful of positive attitude, made me spontaneously encourage her to "keep up the good work", but it was not only me, I have received e-mails as well.[65] (NHK Radio 10.11.2009)

The author of one of these emailed messages, a woman in her sixties, praised the candidate:

> This Indonesian young lady is splendid, isn't she? I'm sure her cheerful and vigorous responsiveness makes the atmosphere around her brighten up as if flowers blossomed. My mother is also receiving care in an institution, and she relaxes whenever there is a cheerful member of staff around.[66]
> (NHK Radio 10.11.2009)

On a different occasion, quoted in a newspaper article, a colleague of two female candidates admitted:

> Before they took up their positions, I was worried whether they would be able to follow shift reports, but I

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65 "その声は日常の慣れない生活や仕事からは想像出来ない明るく素直で力いっぱい前向きな姿勢に満ちていて、思わず"がんばって下さい"とエールを送りたくなったのは私だけではなく、メールもいただきました".

66 "インドネシアのお嬢さん立派ですね。明るい元気な受け答えで周りがきっとぱっと花が咲いたように明るくなるでしょう。私の母も介護施設にお世話になってますが明るい職員の方々にいつもホットします".

was worrying unnecessarily. If anything, their cheerful and hard-working attitude has been acting as a stimulus. The institution has become better (...)[67]
(*Nippon Keizai* 23.01.2009)

Such highly prized conduct of the Indonesians was reported to have affected not only the elderly Japanese residents of the institutions but the candidates' co-workers as well. According to a director of an eldercare institution where two Indonesian candidates were accepted,

it seems like through their [the EPA candidates] frank, polite, and respectful approach towards the elderly, we, the Japanese are being reminded of what we began to forget[68]
(*Yomiuri* 17.02.2009),

because, although

the government sees it [the EPA acceptance] not as a means to reduce the labour shortages, but as an element in an economic exchange ... it has a great impact on the care sites. For the Japanese staff working alongside the candidates, it seems to be an occasion to reconsider what working in care means[vii]
(*Yomiuri* 24.05.2009),

while a team leader of five male nurse candidates conceded:

they are hard-working but are able to remain attentive. They have something that we Japanese have lost and hence provide a stimulus.[69] (*Yomiuri* 15.03.2009)

A similar thought was expressed by a Japanese colleague of two young

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67 "着任前は仕事の申し送りうまくいくか心配していたが、取り越し苦労だった。むしろ彼女の明るく一所懸命な姿が刺激になっている。施設の雰囲気がよくなった".
68 "素直で礼儀正しく、お年寄りを敬う姿は私たち日本人が忘れかけたものを教えられているようだ".
69 "一所懸命で、気配りもできる。日本人が失ったものを持っていて刺激になる".

Indonesian women who, exempted from the initial language training, took up their appointment earlier than the majority of the EPA carer candidates:

> But I needn't have worried. They pray outside of working hours, do not come late and so on. They grasp things fast and were quick to became an asset. I was glad to see that, appeased by their friendly, smiling faces and affectionate tone, one resident, who used to be angry on a daily basis, stopped complaining. They have a strong sense of respect for the elderly, always trying to think from a position of the other person. It made me reflect on myself, who—in the busyness of things, I tend to lose this compassion.[viii] (*Yomiuri* 24.05.2009)

Moreover, the relations between the 'attentive and considerate' Indonesian workers and the elderly who received their care were often presented in the paradigm of family relations. A resident receiving care from two female Indonesian candidates was reported to say,

> I was worried about the language, etc., but now I do not feel any inconvenience. It feels as if I was looked after by my grandchildren.[70] (*Nippon Keizai* 23.01.2009)

A direct link between care for the residents and one's family members was also drawn by quoting the words of a male candidate who was looking after his grandmother before departing to Japan:

> I will look after the residents just as I did after my grandmother.[71] (*Asahi* 31.01.2009)

The individualised representations of the Indonesian care workers as providing affectionate care to the Japanese elderly therefore built an image of the Indonesians as more familiar. Moreover, through the references to the cared-for residents enjoying and appreciating the presence of the foreign workers, the

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70 "言葉など心配していたが、まったく不便を感じない。孫に世話されているみたい".
71 "祖母と同じように介護します".

Indonesians were constructed as idealised 'substitutes' for familial carers. Perhaps more evidently, this was effected through the narratives of the Japanese co-workers and supervisors who in the Indonesians' affectionate comportment saw a reflection of qualities which, as they claimed, had been in fact characteristic of Japanese. Through such narratives they created an image of the Indonesian carers as possible to identify with. In a later section I expand in more detail on the function fulfilled by such endorsing representations of the EPA candidates, while here I turn to the other side of the debate, one which argued against the desirability of Indonesian care workers or foreigners in general.

Homogeneity and security

In many representations of foreigners in Japan, the discursive homogeneity achieved through the shared inherited essence served as a guarantor of harmonious coexistence. The representations of foreigners as posing danger to the public security and the dissemination of information about rising crime rates among the non-Japanese populations in Japan were not anything new or unique (Tsuda 2003b). The opponents of relaxing Japanese immigration policy, or those who argued for approaching the issue with caution (from Jpn.: s*hinchō*), would point to the European countries which were presented as 'failed' examples of immigration, where the inflow of people from outside of state borders has led to a variety of social problems and sometimes to violent confrontations with the local population and/or authorities. For example, in a 2009 *Nippon Keizai* article, Saeki Hirobumi, a chairman of a multinational electronics corporation and a proponent of the 'unnecessary immigrants theory',[72] was reported to say,

> when I often used to travel with work to foreign
> countries, I had many opportunities to listen to people
> from the developed European countries which had
> accepted many immigrants, such as the United

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72 See his book: *Imin fuyō ron: shōshika, jinkō genshō nani ga warui?*, or 'Argument for Unnecessary Migrants: What's Wrong with Low Fertility and Population Decline?', Sankei Shinbun Publishing, 2010.

Kingdom, Germany, and France. They would all tell me "it was a mistake to accept immigrants. Japan should not accept [them]". I cannot understand the efforts to simply accept immigrants and not learning from the so many examples when it failed.[ix]
(*Nippon Keizai* 09.03.2009)

Although by no means generalisable to the majority of Japanese society, such concerns were sometimes expressed in a very direct manner by right-wing organisations. While xenophobic attitudes are perhaps nothing unusual within such groups, in many countries the freedom to voice and act upon such convictions has been limited by law. In Japan, however, overtly expressing unwelcoming and deprecating ideas about non-Japanese is not strictly prohibited. For example, a Japanese friend of mine sent me an Internet link to a video of a demonstration against voting rights for foreigners organised in January 2010 by a right-wing organisation called the Association for the Restoration of Sovereignty (from Jpn.: *Shuken Kaifuku o Mezasu Kai*). During the march through the Shinjuku district in Tokyo, near the buildings of the prefectural government, the man leading the march was speaking thorough a microphone with speakers mounted on a car driving at his side. He spoke about the worsened security in Japan where, unlike 20 years ago, it was now unimaginable to leave a window open at night, because it was too dangerous. He argued that the danger was posed by the Chinese (referring to the Chinese with a derogative *Shina jin*). As the march was passing in front of the Washington Hotel three young men, apparently tourists, emerged with their luggage from the main entrance. Apparently having noticed their presence, the leading man began to chant in English 'white pig go home' (a Japanese equivalent of 'white pig', *shirobuta*, has been used as a derogatory term, usually in reference to white Americans or Europeans). Apart from gently ushering the three tourists back to the immediate front of the hotel building and assuming a position between them and the demonstrators, the uniformed men (most likely police) seemingly assigned to oversee the demonstration did not react to the incantation of the crowd, nor did the passers-by.[73] The normality

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73 Internet URL: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzmgyFQNvvU (accessed on 15.08.2010).

and the permissiveness granted to such statements made in public, and then disseminated via social media, the outright banning of foreigners from bars and clubs (sometimes lifted if a foreigner is in the company of a Japanese person), and other means of systemic differentiation and exclusion of the foreigner have fed into the imagination of Japan which was to remain Japanese and for Japanese only, and therefore comfortable and safe. As shown below, in the context of care provision, the presence of foreigners amidst and in close proximity to the Japanese bodies was also presented as an at least unwelcome possibility.

Foreigners in care

During the press conference for The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan held on the 3rd of August 2010, Nakamura Hirohiko, a director of an accepting institution and a former chairman of the Japanese Council of Senior Citizens Welfare Service, paralleled the opposition to accepting foreign workers under the EPA to the already mentioned earlier imaginations of Japan as a closed country of the Edo period. During a Q&A session, to a question on whether the Japanese nurse associations were not opposed to the EPA programme, Nakamura replied:

> This is an embarrassing story, but... The first to proceed with the negotiations were the Philippines. Really, regardless of the request made by the Philippines, the nursing circles wanted to set the number [of the accepted workers] at 10, 20 people—this was the nursing organisation. They did not want to allow foreign hands touching the Japanese patients, this was... a really unthinkable... [voice from behind the camera: *chairman, simply, they were against*] …They were very much against, it was just like the way of thinking of Tokugawa Iemitsu [laughter from the audience] … who did *sakoku*, that is [directed at the interpreter as if clarifying the analogy; audience laughs and the same voice from behind the camera says: *he did put it succinctly*].[x]

Nakamura's reference to *sakoku*, a national closed-door policy implemented in Tokugawa-era Japan (1603–1868), was a deliberate attack on the often xenophobic reactions towards foreigners' presence in Japan and the idea that Japan should remain as free from foreign population influences as possible. His comment on the undesirability of the foreign touch on the Japanese bodies made in response to a question which was, rather, intended to elicit information about labour-market related objections, reveals the usually unvoiced concerns over the bodily proximity of the foreigners to the Japanese bodies. The objection allegedly made by one of the nursing organisations points to the particular sensitivity of the EPA acceptance given that its provisions placed foreigners in a setting where they were working directly on Japanese bodies, not on machines. I discussed this unusualness and its relationship to Japanese notions of cultural intimacy as based on the ideal of homogeneity in Chapters Two and Three.

Apart from the sheer physicality of contact, those opposed to inviting foreigners to work as care providers presented their objections in terms of the quality of care. The concerns primarily revolved around the foreign workers' ability to communicate in Japanese. The insufficient mastery of the language could pose danger to the elderly (and hospital patients in the case of foreign nurses), but was also a likely obstacle to sustaining the psychological component of care. For In Toshie, the Chairman of the Japan Home Helpers Association who took part in a debate over the acceptance of foreign care and medical workers, broadcast by the Japanese national television channel, NHK, in October 2006,

> the question is whether it really would be possible to maintain the quality, were we to expand the acceptance. Care is a difficult task for the Japanese themselves. It requires the exquisite ability to read the subtleties of the elderly's heart and to sense or infer their needs. This would be very difficult for foreigners coming from a different culture.[74] (In Toshie, NHK Debate 29.10.2006)

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74 "広く受け入れたときに、本当に質が保たれるか疑問です。介護はもともと日本人でも難しい仕事です。お年寄りの求めていることを察知し、心の機微を読む繊細な能力が必要ですが、文化の違う外国の方に、とても困難だと思います".

The lack of an intimate knowledge of the Japanese culture was to preclude the foreign carers from providing satisfactory care to the elderly because as non-Japanese they would not be able to learn it or to sufficiently identify with the cared-for residents. Moreover, as I have already mentioned in previous chapters, the foreigners' ability to provide adequate care to the Japanese was also thought to be precluded by their coming from outside the relations of national reciprocity. In the same debate In also was of the opinion that

> we Japanese, grateful to our seniors for their efforts, such as during the War, are able to provide them with care of a far greater quality than foreigners. (*ibid*.)

The statement can be read in two meanings. Firstly, it assumes that Japanese carers, either medical or caregivers, were inherently better equipped to care for their fellow country-men than those who did not share in this commonality. Secondly, the association of the quality of care with one's loyalty to the elders based on an assumed relation of 'obligation and duty in the intergenerational pact' (Simoni & Trifiletti 2004) suggests that this loyalty might (could) not be expected from those who were not members of the Japanese national community. In either case, the quality of care is linked directly to one's national belonging and an unspecified ability to relate to one's co-nationals on the basis of this belonging. Apart from assuming likeness between people of the same nation who through knowledge of themselves were able to interpolate the needs of the other, the statements also point to the saliency of the bonds of reciprocity between members of the same nation. Being Japanese implied a bond between the cared-for and the carers which endowed certain rights, but also imposed obligations. In In's opinion, foreigners could not be presumed to respond to the intergenerational obligations existing among the Japanese. Since I already discussed these connections between nationality, culture, likeness, mutual trust, and reciprocity in the second chapter, I do not expand on these issues here. Instead, I move to a closing section, where I consider possible meanings of the discourses and depictions of the Indonesian EPA candidates.

Internationalisation once more—the third opening of Japan?

The beginning of the 1990s in Japan witnessed a debate between the proponents and opponents of 'opening of the country' to foreign workers, similar to the one surrounding the EPA acceptance. Lie (2001) suggests that the earlier emergence of the debate was a function of growing visibility of particularly Iranian workers who, due to the lack of other information outlets, gathered in public spaces, such as the cities' major parks, to exchange information about work opportunities (*cf*. Morita 2003). Goodman (2003) notes that the debate was also linked to the fact that in 1993 Japan's migrant population was recorded to have increased 62 per cent since 1983. This proliferation of references in the Japanese media to Japan as an 'open country', making a direct link to the end of the isolationist policy of the Tokugawa era, Lie (2001) calls, somewhat ironically, the second opening of Japan. The irony lies in his contention that Japan was never really a closed country, either under the Tokugawa rule, or immediately before the 1990s. It could not, therefore, be opened, either. The silencing of the colonial period when the nascent Japanese nation-state accepted millions of non-Japanese, notably Koreans, and the later 'confining to the closet' of the existing minorities merely served as ideological tools for creating the image of a mono-ethnic, and therefore closed to foreign people and influences, nation-state identifiable with the dominant group of the Japanese. In reality, Lie argues, 'the myth of monoethnic Japan is fundamentally a post-World War II construct' (2001:141). Academic representations of Japan have long accepted and argued for such a view (e.g., Denoon et al. 1996; Weiner 1997; Douglass & Roberts 2000; Goodman *et al.* 2003; Graburn *et al.* 2008; Willis & Murphy-Shigematsu 2008).

Another parallel between the earlier debates and the current one is the invocation of the internationalisation and diversification of Japanese society. As Burgess (2004) argues, the use of such terms as internationalisation, *kokusaika*, *kyōsei* (coexistence, symbiosis), and *tabunka* (multicultural) in Japan, despite their face-value connotations, served in fact to reaffirm the notions of Japanese national homogeneity through the control of others by including them within reaffirmed boundaries between the Japanese and the

others who were locked into particular kinds of difference. As a result there was more pressure on Japanese to become 'more Japanese' and on foreign residents to become 'more ethnic' (*ibid.*). Such indeed seemed to be the case with the EPA Indonesians who, unlike the Japanese, were, for example, always smiling. Such results of official multiculturalism—dividing and reasserting difference—have been widely criticised and are behind the declarations of the 'death of multiculturalism' in Western industrialised countries. The promulgation of the view of multicultural policies as dead has been seen by some as providing justification for 'withdrawal of political commitment to multiculturalism' (Ahmed 2012:202).

However, seeing the overly positive representations of the EPA Indonesians in the media and the projections of multiculturalism as merely ideological discourses serving the dominant national ideology would be as negligent as taking them at face value. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the Indonesian candidates forged a variety of meaningful relationships with the co-workers, elderly residents, and employers, which cut across rigid cultural differentiations inherent in the idea of so-called hard multiculturalism. Such experiences became the basis for the media representations, which, I suggest, can be seen as a form of criticism, or rueful self-recognition (Herzfeld 1997), and a function of imagining an alternative reality achieved by distancing oneself from the dominant ideologies.

Slavoj Žižek in his introduction to *Mapping Ideology* (1994:7) discusses propositions of *Neues Forum* groups in former East Germany which, at the time of the disintegration of the Communist regime, argued for a 'third way' for East Germany which would be neither capitalism nor the already existing socialism. Although Žižek deems the propositions 'illusory', he acknowledges that they were the only ones which did not obliterate the social antagonisms inherent in the capitalist (or socialist, for that matter) system, antagonisms which were subdued under the dominant, and ultimately successful, project of including East Germany in the capitalist world. Žižek concludes that we should look out for the 'narratives of possible but failed alternative histories [which] point towards the system's antagonistic character, and thus "estrange" us to the

self-evidence of its established identity' (*ibid.*). The possible, if not failed, narratives of satisfying coexistence with the Indonesian workers, and other foreigners more broadly, served as a tool to distance the actual representations from the official ideology. The media narratives posed as representing the popular voice through the use of individual voices, interviews, and opinion polls projected an image of a new, possible workplace where Japanese and foreigners could successfully co-create wholesome working relations. The concerns over how and whether the Indonesians would adapt, whether they would decide to stay on, and whether and how 'Japan' could adapt to their needs all attested to the existence of the dominant homogeneity ideologies, but at the same time questioned their legitimacy.

Presenting the reaction of a nursing organisation as embarrassing in his statement quoted above, Nakamura echoed voices which, concerned with the success of the EPA acceptance, feared that the programme would fail (the success of the scheme being measured by the ability of the Indonesians to acquire Japanese qualifications by the end of their on-the-job training, and by their consequent settlement, or at least long-term residence and work, in Japan). On the one hand, the failure was presented in terms of the Japanese state being unable or unwilling to establish a sustainable immigration system allowing foreign workers such as the EPA candidates to more freely take advantage of the opportunities in the Japanese labour market. An EPA-like system was not only 'impudent' towards the candidates (from Jpn.: *kōhoshatachi ni shitsurei*), but also an 'internationally embarrassing' matter (from Jpn.: *kokusaiteki ni mite hazukashii hanashi*). The international gaze looking at Japan's way of dealing with foreign workers was a recurring theme, particularly in the conversations among the members of the support group with whom I worked. To return the Indonesian candidates back to Indonesia if they did not pass the Japanese national examination was to contribute to the worsening of Japan's international image, or the 'feelings about Japan'.[75] On the other hand, the concern was whether Japan as a whole would prove

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75 "若い労働力を日本に送り出し、その十分な見返りが得られるかをインドネシアの国民は注目している。「冷たい政策」に憤りを抱いて研修生たちが帰国し、その話が広がれば、対日感情の悪化につながりかねない". (*Asahi* 02.04.2009, Opinion Column)

hospitable and adaptable enough to provide the Indonesians with an environment in which they would feel welcome and be willing to settle. Either way, were the EPA programme to fail, it would be an 'embarrassment' on an international scale, giving away Japanese uneasiness and ambivalence about welcoming foreigners in their country, either on a systemic or social level. Nakamura's introduction of his tale as embarrassing was an expression of collective acknowledgement, or rueful recognition, of the Japanese predicament underlying the established national identity.

Sakanaka Hidenori, the already introduced Head of the Japan Immigration Policy Institute, noted a change in the attitudes towards foreigners in Japan. As if to substantiate the basis for his optimism, towards the end of my visit to his office in July 2009, Mr Sakanaka presented me with newspaper clippings discussing an opinion poll on the attitudes towards receiving medical and care services from foreigners published by the *Sankei Newspaper* five days before our meeting. The results showed that out of 910 respondents (629 men and 281 women) 58 per cent were in favour of the acceptance of foreigners into medical and care sectors, 44 per cent responded that they would not feel uneasy or anxious if cared for by a foreigner, and 52 per cent agreed that the current acceptance should be extended beyond the two countries (Indonesia and the Philippines) (*Sankei Shinbun* 03.07.2009). Despite the majority of the respondents admitting to expecting discomfort if cared for by a foreigner, and nearly half not supporting the idea of expanding the acceptance, Mr Sakanaka found the results very pleasing, as he saw them as indicative of attitudes towards foreigners in Japan undergoing changes in the direction he had been advocating. As a comparison with past attitudes, he recalled that not so long ago many people were even against accepting foreigners to Japan as tourists. He added that probably the results would have been even more 'pro-foreigners' had the survey been conducted by another newspaper, as the *Sankei Newspaper* was rather conservative as were, presumably, its readers.

Although Mr Sakanaka saw the EPA programme as a harbinger of change, he appreciated the limited nature of the acceptance which did not promise any great systemic transformations any time soon. He remained, however,

optimistic about the meaning and ultimate function the EPA acceptance was to play in shaping Japanese attitudes towards foreigners. He saw such small, as if uncertain, steps as a typically Japanese 'revolution' (from Jpn.: *kakumei*) which was at the same time progressive and conservative. 'Even in [Meiji] *ishin* there is an "*i*"', he said, referring to the Meiji Restoration which marked the end of the Japanese feudal era of the already discussed closed-country, *sakoku*, policy (*ibid.*). The Chinese character '*i*' in the Japanese term for 'restoration', *ishin*, means 'rope, tie', but also 'to maintain, to keep', suggesting perseverance despite the coming of the new, indicated by the other character forming the term for restoration, *shin*, meaning 'new'.

Chapter conclusions

The seemingly disproportionate interest of the Japanese media in the EPA acceptance and the predominantly positive representations of the Indonesian candidates were therefore an expression of and a commentary on the anxieties born from the contemporary condition of Japan as a nation. Faced with the prospect of a growing number of foreigners settling in Japan as a result of its demographic changes and facilitated, but also caused, by Japan's international engagements (such as the EPA), the Japanese had to revisit the ideological underpinnings constructing their society. The EPA acceptance, which brought non-Japanese to work on Japanese bodies, placed them at the heart of ideological conflations of race, culture, and nation and therefore forced a rebranding of foreigners from dangerous unknowns to good-hearted, familiar individuals with whom one could connect and identify. This new brand of foreigner was then disseminated through the mass media. Therefore, rather than dismiss the positive images as simply reinforcing the ideas of national uniqueness, I believe that we should see them as examples of reassessment and as an exercise in re-imagining a different definition of a Japanese society. If not the third opening of Japan, at least the EPA acceptance can be seen as one additional push towards the continuous reconceptualisation of Japan as a country and a nation partaking in global engagements which inevitably

influence the social imaginations feeding the construction of national intimacies.

Conclusion

Reluctant Intimacies

Intimacy is not being absorbed by the other,

but knowing his or her characteristics

and making available one's own

(Anthony Giddens 1992:94, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*)

The arguments throughout this thesis have revolved around the idea of intimacy. Intimacy has been evoked as a representation of a national community as well as a mode of interpersonal relationship. A perceived lack of intimacy, notably on a cultural level, has been shown to bring about conflicts, fears, frustrations, and negative stereotyping. As indeed has long been argued for Japan, so too in the case of the Indonesian workers' acceptance under the Economic Partnership Agreement, the construction of the foreigners' otherness was influenced by the potent 'intuitive theories' which conflate the local notions of nationhood with the ideas of race, ethnicity, and culture. These essentialising ideas acting as discursive means of exclusion of those deemed non-intimate have been shown to guide the Japanese (but also the Indonesians) in their mutual encounters on a personal as well as on a national level. However, as I hope has become clear from the accounts throughout the chapters, inside the Japanese eldercare homes which accepted the Indonesian

care workers, such essentialising conceptualisations became complicated by the development of intimate relationships on different levels of experience. These relationships allowed for attributes other than cultural to become the basis for mutual identifications which could then serve as alternative reference points in everyday interactions. Such reconfiguration of encounters, from being seen primarily in terms of cultural affinities and lack thereof (as was evident in the Indonesians' constructing an image of a head-driven Japanese, in the preparations of the eldercare homes for the candidates' arrival, in the reactions of some of the elderly to their presence, or indeed in the media discourses invoking 'diversity' and 'multicultural coexistence'), into encounters between individuals who are culturally different but, on other levels, possible to identify with, exposed the existence of a double register according to which the application of the established divisions between *us* and *them* became less straightforward.

As I have shown, such practical identifications stemmed from the nature of the tasks in which the Indonesians were involved in the care homes. Through crossing boundaries of the cared-for bodies, the Indonesian workers crossed boundaries between themselves and the Japanese carers on an individual, rather than cultural, basis. These and other bodily engagements, such as in sport, overrode the saliency of cultural identifications. The underlying non-verbal knowledge of the other person created through shared practices allowed for a greater affinity and an ever-expanding capacity for comprehension. I have also shown that a commonality of positioning within the hierarchy of a larger-scale organisation, be it an eldercare institution or a country, could also become a source of extra-cultural identification. This was, for example, visible in what I referred to as alliances between the Indonesian workers and the elderly residents who shared their marginality in relation to those 'of power' within the institutions—that is, the Japanese staff who oversaw the lives of the elderly and who usually supervised the Indonesians. An identification was also found in the mutual self-recognition between the Indonesians and Japanese of a shared plight as care workers within the value system of a wider society. The care workers, through the direct, intimate nature of their involvement in the

bodywork of eldercare, shared in the knowledge of the practices placed 'beyond the limits of official discourse' (Twigg 2000:400). Perhaps not exactly 'class consciousness', but through being implicated in the transgressions of the bodily and social taboos associated with dirt and the limits of human bodies (Twigg 2000) as a part of their everyday routines, the Indonesian and Japanese eldercare workers come to share a 'solidarity of the workgroup' (*ibid.*:402) which was also based on their perceived as stigmatised, if rhetorically valued (Anderson 2010), profession.

Such alliances should not be underestimated. It has been recognised that the so-called 'new elite' of professional world travellers find that they have more in common with each other—that is, with those who lead a similar lifestyle and perhaps have the same profession—than with their co-nationals. At the lower-earning echelons of societies the international movement of people has more often been represented in oppositional, or conflictual, terms. While indeed jobs and income might be less stable in lower-paying positions and among so-called manual, or low-skilled, workers and therefore more likely to lead to disgruntlement over economic rights and privileges, this does not have to imply a lack of possibility for workers to identify with each other across the national divisions often translated into, and sometimes stimulated by, cultural stereotypes. Such a possibility of identification was realised in the accepting eldercare homes.

At the same time, at the level of public discourse as reflected in the Japanese mainstream newspapers' and a selected number of other media's reports on the EPA acceptance, the popular representation of the Japanese nation-state as culturally homogeneous (although not questioned on the grounds of its ideological nature) came to be re-imagined in 'multicultural', 'internationalised', and 'diversified' terms. Such discursive reconstitution was apparent in the narratives of 'boring homogeneity' and 'revitalising diversity', in the propositions to 'internationalise the Japanese language', and in the representations of the Indonesian workers as compatible with the Japanese ideas of eldercare workers and as possible to identify with.

This is not to say that the idea of the Japanese nation-state as culturally uniform has been done away with. The associations of foreigners with danger, social discord, and perhaps even disgust (as in the opposition to the foreign hands touching Japanese bodies) were still powerful. The notion of a 'closed' Japan has indeed been reflected in the very way the EPA acceptance came to be and in the schism between the governmental departments over the issue. The terms of the Indonesian workers' acceptance maintained a certain representational balance. This was achieved not only by allowing small numbers to train in Japan and presenting the scheme as an international assistance programme, but also by demanding that the candidates all be qualified nurses in the first round, and graduates in any specialisation at a high education level in the consecutive rounds. Presented as Indonesian 'elite' (from Jpn.: *erīto*) and as *yūshū*, that is, 'excellent' or 'superior', the EPA candidates were not simply unskilled and training to become professionals in Indonesia, and not really migrants, either. Through such means the EPA scheme fit within the popularly recognised paradigm of Japan as a non-immigration country. As Bridget Anderson (2011) argues in her paper presented during the *Making Connections in the Transnational Political Economy of Care* conference, 'states must be seen to prioritise the interests of the "nation" and "the people" in ways that go beyond simply a response to the demands of capital', especially given that '"national interest" is bound up with "national identity"'. The introduction of a small number of highly-educated and to-be-qualified migrant workers who were to return to Indonesia in exchange for beneficial economic provisions, on paper, would not 'upset the country's mythical ethnic homogeneity' (Cornelius 1994:396).

However, as we have seen, the presence of migrant workers in Japan has gained an additional dimension. It has come to be posed at the centre of the debates over the future definition of the Japanese nation-state in the face of ongoing demographic changes. The Japanese government, while trying to maintain control over the intake of the EPA candidates, also took the responsibility for the outcome of the programme. When people arrive in another country and apply for jobs as individuals, the role of the

state/government as a guardian of success and merit for the employers and employees alike is pushed to the background. In the case of the EPA, the state's role was very much exposed, and therefore expected to be fulfilled. Given the discourses of population crisis and the ambivalent message which the EPA scheme's provisions sent about the 'opening' of Japan, the fulfilment of the government's role came to be seen in terms of the Indonesians' settlement in Japan. In a way, a policy aiming at containment of foreignness created accidental heroes (or martyrs) of Japan's still debated future and its ongoing internationalisation.

Such positioning of the EPA acceptance affected the development of cordial relationships between the Indonesian candidates and their employers. Although partially predicated on the perceptions of cultural otherness, they also eventually came to be primarily a function of a professional engagement rather than a cultural negotiation. The difficulty of studying towards the examination set as one of the conditions of the EPA acceptance, the efforts to try and avert the anticipated failure to pass it, the shared frustration over the inability to count and be counted as workers equal to the Japanese personnel, the questioning of the very requirement of obtaining the Japanese qualifications, the solitude of deployment, and other 'problems' stemming from the organisation of the acceptance created the shared feeling of 'being in it together' which brought the employers and the Indonesian candidates closer to each other, more than would have been possible were the Indonesian workers to have arrived unsolicited under widely available worker visas (were such existent in Japan). Even if for different reasons, the Indonesian workers and their Japanese employers were involved in the same endeavour. Effectively, Japan's official attention to the national interest as articulated by Anderson (2011), cited above, prepared a ground for alliances which were to stand in opposition to these officially sanctioned representations.

As Lauren Berlant (2000:2) writes, 'intimacy builds worlds'. If multiculturalism is not to represent societies divided by sharply defined cultural enclaves, and integration is not to stand for flat-out assimilation, then there is a need for a platform on which people otherwise conceiving of

themselves as different can identify. As was apparent in the experiences of the Indonesian EPA workers, their Japanese colleagues, the cared-for elderly, and the employers, bodily and interpersonal intimacies achieved through shared experiences and outlooks can become such a platform. Cultural non-intimates, therefore, do not need to 'absorb' one another, just as Anthony Giddens (1992:94) suggests (although his thoughts refer specifically to a romantic relationship) in the quotation opening this Conclusion. Rather, they should acquire knowledge of one another. I think that in Japan such knowledge-conveying platforms are formed particularly where, as was the case with the EPA candidates, foreigners are seeded in small numbers in local communities (see Burgess 2008). There they have greater opportunities for person-to-person interactions and, therefore, for forging various intimacies on which to build mutual understanding and tolerance. As Graburn and Ertl (2008) suggest, in such specific settings cultural markers of identity may be increasingly less deterministic in constructing the social 'scapes' of these settings.

As has been shown, there are now questions as to the legitimacy of the still-powerful discourses of homogeneity as constructing the Japanese reality which increasingly do not reflect the everyday experiences of the people at whom they are directed. Moreover, these discourses are perceived as potentially harmful to the future of the Japanese nation-state. In part, the basis for such questioning lies in direct personal experience, such as that made possible by the EPA acceptance. In his own work among factory workers Michael Burawoy (1979:18) writes that ideology becomes 'a material force once it has gripped the masses', and he also points out that 'ideology is ... not something manipulated at will by agencies of socialization—schools, family, church, and so on—in the interests of a dominant class. On the contrary, these institutions elaborate and systematize lived experience and only in this way become centers of ideological dissemination. Moreover, dominant classes are shaped by ideology more than they shape it' (*ibid.*:17). Despite their small numerical numbers, the intimate encounters between the EPA Indonesian eldercare workers and their colleagues, the elderly residents, and the employers reached the masses through the mass media representations and discourses reluctantly,

and sometimes quite boldly, questioning the ideas of Japanese nationhood within the current political–economic and, arguably, demographic globalising processes.

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外国人高度人材、受け入れ促進　出入国管理基本計画

10.11.2010
ＴＰＰ参加へ人材鎖国や規制も見直せ（社説）

Yomiuri Shinbun:

03.08.2008
［社説］外国人看護師　大切な人材として育てたい

07.01.2009
ケアの心、国境超え

17.02.2009
異国で学ぶ介護

15.03.2009
インドネシア人看護師候補に焦り　着任１か月、国家試験に言葉の壁

24.05.2009
［支えたい］外国人介護福祉士候補者　「共働」で仕事見つめ直す

Endnotes

i   Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare
    Internet URL: http://www.mhlw.go.jp/houdou/2009/03/h0331-10.html

" 現下の社会・経済情勢の下、派遣・請負等の不安定な雇用形態に
ある日系人労働者については、日本語能力の不足や我が国の雇用慣行に不
案内であることに加え、我が国における職務経験も十分ではないことから、
一旦離職した場合には再就職が極めて厳しい状況におかれることとなりま
す。こうした中、母国に帰国の上で再就職を行うということも現実的な選
択肢となりつつある状況です。このような状況を踏まえ、与党新雇用対策
に関するプロジェクトチームにおいても帰国を希望する日系人に対する帰
国支援について提言されているところであり、厚生労働省としても、切実
な帰国ニーズにこたえるため、帰国を決意した離職者に対し、一定の条件
の下、帰国支援金を支給する事業を平成 21 年度より実施することとした
もの
です。（別添参照）なお、我が国に引き続き在留の上で再就職を果たそう
という方々に対しては、従来から日本人と同様の再就職支援、雇用維持の
ための各種事業や住宅確保支援策の活用といった取組みを行ってきている
ところですが、今後も地域の実情に応じた通訳・相談員の増員等相談支援
体制の機動的な強化や日本語能力も含めたスキルアップを行う就労準備研
修の円滑な実施を通じて、再就職支援等の支援を適切に実施することとし
ています".

ii インドネシ人看護師・介護福祉士　人材マネジメント手引き JICWELS 2008

" インドネシア人を受け入れる施設においては、日本人職員と同等の報酬
でインドネシア人看護師・介護福祉士候補者を雇用し、研修していくこと
になります。しかし、インドネシアの文化を背景とし
てそだち、日本と異なる価値観を当然と考え暮らしてきた人々を雇用する
ことから、日本人職員とインドネシア人看護師・介護福祉士候補者の間で、
働き方等の違いを感じることも考えられます。ぞのよ
うな場合に、通常、日本人に対して行っている雇用管理や指導といったマ
ネジメント手法だけを頼りにして就労させるのでは、意欲を持って来日し
たインドネシア人のモチベーションをうまく保っていくことができない、
あるいは優れた資質を持っているにも関わらずその能力を十分に発揮させ
ることができないといった事態を招くことにもなりかねません。
そこで、国際厚生事業団では、病院・介護施設がインドネシア人看護師・
介護福祉士候補者、看護師、介護福祉士（以降、インドネシア人看護師
等）を適切にマネジメントしていく上で、インドネシアの国情や同国で暮
らし、働くインドネシア人の\気質・価値観等をしっていただく必要がある
と考え、今般、この手引きを発行するに至りました".

Endnotes

iii *Nikkei Keizai Shinbun,* date: 28.09.2009

" どんなやり方をとるか人口１・７％の外国人比率をどこまで高めるかは、それこそ国家戦略として考えるべきテーマ。忘れてならないのはその検討をもはや先送りできない現実だ。医療や介護の現場で、農業、工業、研究開発の現場で働き手が絶対的に不足する時代は目の前にきている".

iv *Asahi Shinbun,* date: 26.06.2010

" それに、もはや日本語は日本人だけのものではありません。インドネシアやフィリピンから介護福祉士や看護師の候補者が来日しましたが、漢字が壁となり、実務や国家試験に苦労している。今後、日本にやって来る外国人はますます増えるでしょう。ネットの発達で英語が帝国主義的な力を持つなか、日本語が生き残るには、外国人が学び、使いやすいように、漢字を減らす必要があります".

v *Yomiuri Shinbun,* date: 24.05.2009

"「緑の郷」は、雇用・能力開発機構の委託を受け、介護職員の育成を行っているため、近年の人材不足とは無縁だ。インドネシアから候補者を受け入れた狙いについて、「国際貢献として、介護福祉を目指す外国人を支援しながら、日本人職員が国際感覚を養い、お互いに学ぶため」と古川幸子施設長は説明する。（。。。）「有能な人材がきてくれたおかげで職員の士気が高まり、職場が活気づいていることは、金銭には代え難い。必ず訪れる国際化の時代に向けた先行投資でもある。」とそのメリットを強調する".

vi *Asahi Shinbun,* date: 13.03.2009

"「長谷さん、手を洗いましょうね」。９９歳の母の名前をいち早く覚えて呼びかけてくれた、あの優しい笑顔、持ち前の明るさ。研修生にはご苦労が多いだろうが、日本のお年寄りを元気にしてほしいと願っている".

vii *Yomiuri Shinbun,* date: 24.05.2009

" 政府は、「人手不足の解消が目的ではなく、経済交流の一環」との立場だが、介護現場に与える影響は大きい。候補者と共に働く日本人職員にとっては、介護の仕事を見つめ直すきっかけになっているようだ".

Endnotes

viii *Yomiuri Shinbun,* date: 24.05.2009

" だが、心配無用だった。お祈りは勤務時間外に行い、遅刻などもない。のみ込みも早く、すぐに戦力となった。人なつこい笑顔と優しい口調でなだめられ、普段は怒ってばかりの入所者が不満を言わなくなったのに感心した。「お年寄りを敬う意識が強く、常に相手の立場になって考えようとするんです。忙しさでつい、余裕をなくしがちな私が身を振り返りました」".

ix *Nippon Keizai Shinbun,* date: 09.03.2009

" 。。。海外で仕事をすることが多く、大勢の移民を受け入れた'英国やドイツ、フランスなど欧州先進国の人々の話を聞く機会がたくさんありました。彼らはみな「移民を受け入れたのは失敗だった。日本は受け入れるべきでない」と言っていましたよ。すでに失敗した例がたくさんあるのに学ばず、安易に移民を受け入れようとするのは理解できません".

x The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan conference held on the 03.08. 2010

" これは恥ずかしい話ですけれども、この。。最初に交渉が進んだのが、フィリピンとの交渉でございました。本当にこのフィリピン側の要求があったにもかかわらず、十人、二十人ぐらいで看護の世界は決着をつけたいというのが看護の団体でございました。日本人のこの患者に外国人の手は触れさせないというような、まぁ、本当に考えられない、えぇぇ（会長、簡潔に反対だった）もう反対、反対で，まるで徳川家光のような考え方でございました。(laughs from the audience) … 鎖国をやっててね　（towards the interpreter) 。。（簡単に言ったんです）". (transcribed by the author, BS)