



# Introduction

In the summer of 2009, on a hot August night that promised to offer a spectacle of shooting stars, Jasir and I were standing on a top-floor terrace of an external staircase in the building where Jasir shared a flat with two other young Indonesian men. We were looking up at the dark sky over this town in rural Japan in hope of spotting the fleeting line of light made visible to us by a dying meteor. As the display was markedly scant we filled the time talking about Jasir's work.

Twenty-three years old at the time, Jasir had arrived in Japan almost exactly a year earlier, in August 2008, as one of the 208 Indonesians who were selected to train in Japan under an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) signed between Indonesia and Japan. Half of this group were nurse candidates, and half were caregiver candidates (*kōhōsha*; Jpn.) in a total of ninety-nine institutions spread across the country (Fukushi Shinbun 2008). On paper at least, the candidates were able to stay and work in Japan indefinitely as long as they passed a relevant Japanese national examination within a timeframe set under the agreement for each profession. Although qualified in Indonesia as a nurse, Jasir was now a caregiver candidate (*kaigofukushishi kōhōsha*; Jpn.) because he lacked the minimum two years of practical experience required under the EPA scheme as a condition to train in Japan as a nurse. Alongside two other Indonesian men, he was now working in a facility offering residential and day care services to elderly Japanese.

A year into his stay in Japan, Jasir had formed an opinion on the experience. *Manusia mau rasa berarti* (Ind.), a human being wants to feel that he means something, and not *seperti tidak dibutuh* (Ind.), as if he was unneeded.<sup>1</sup> Jasir was referring to his disillusion with the situation at the eldercare institution where he worked. He recalled an instance when he had noticed an elderly woman fall out of her bed and experience faecal incontinence just as he was changing bedding in the room she shared with two other residents. Jasir knew that he was not allowed to help the woman autonomously. Instead, he had to summon other members of staff, who had to abandon whatever task they were involved in and

rush to lift the woman off the floor and clean her up. Jasir's role was limited to passive observation even though he felt perfectly capable of dealing with the situation, particularly given his nursing background. Such a manner of dealing with emergencies (and indeed most other tasks involving direct contact with or action on the bodies of the elderly) made Jasir feel irrelevant. To his mind, these feelings were not what a human being should be experiencing.

Another 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 the frustration over his inability to acquire an independent standing at work. He, too, had arrived in Japan in 2008 and was now working as a caregiver candidate at the same rural eldercare institution as Jasir, but on a different ward. At the age of twenty-five, and qualified as a nurse in Indonesia, Amir found himself on a plane to Japan only a few days after his own wedding. As a married man he was now hoping that his wife would become pregnant when he goes to visit her in Indonesia; and by working in Japan he felt he was attending to his family's material future. A hopeful father and the family's breadwinner in Indonesia, in Japan Amir resented being treated as a child (*seperti anak anak*; Ind.). Confined to tasks such as setting up the tables for meals, preparing elderly residents' toothbrushes for easy use after they had finished eating, wiping the tables, changing bedding, and so on, Amir was not allowed to perform any duties involving handling of the elderly. Moreover, apart from having no freedom to act independently at work, he was not even allowed to leave the town without first notifying somebody from the employing institution about the destination and the anticipated return time. Amir saw these limitations as unjust and based on prejudiced perceptions of his practical and mental capabilities, which seemed to be simply 'unreliable, undependable, not to be trusted' (*tidak dipercaya*; Ind.). He explained that he had come 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. He did, however, expect to be treated on equal terms with the other employees, and was hoping for recognition as a reasoning adult, or as 'an adult person who can think for themselves, a person who has their own brain/with a brain of their own' (*orang dewasa yang bisa berpikir diri sendiri, [orang yang] punya otak sendiri*; Ind.).

I met Jasir and Amir for the first time on 4 January 2009 during a residential language course they were undertaking after arrival in Japan under the EPA scheme. Along with another fifty-four caregiver

candidates assigned to the same training centre, Jasir and Amir spent six months there attending classes devoted primarily to language acquisition, but also focused on the introduction to the eldercare system in Japan. Once the training was over, candidates were scattered across Japan to work and train towards obtaining a Japanese caregiver qualification. The EPA that brought the Indonesians to Japan was primarily an economic treaty concerned with regulation of tariffs. However, it also opened an unprecedented possibility for non-Japanese workers to find employment and remain in Japan permanently. Moreover, for the first time in Japan's history it stipulated that a government-led programme should bring workers into eldercare provision from outside of the country's national borders. Although almost negligible in numbers (208 people in 2008), the arrival of the Indonesian workers became a topic very widely publicised by the Japanese media. Often discussed in light of the progressing ageing of Japanese society, the Indonesians' arrival has become a pivot for the Japanese reckoning with the national imagination that has been reluctant to open up the country to outside influences, but is now forced to do so due to the ongoing demographic changes.

## Ideas behind the Research

In this book I concentrate on the early period of the EPA Indonesians' presence in Japan when they were still discovering the nature of the work they had signed up to perform, and when they only began to negotiate their relationship within the workspaces and beyond. The arrival of this new group in a sector that at the time had not seen many foreign workers in Japan was a promising field of investigation into the formation of mutual imaginations and into the negotiation of newly forming relations. Before conducting the research described in this book, my main question was whether it mattered that the Indonesian workers would be providing direct, that is bodily, care to the Japanese elderly. Would their immediate and unalienable positioning in direct proximity to the Japanese bodies influence the mutual imagining and the experiences of the Indonesians and the Japanese? Would the physically 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 rather 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 demographic shifts 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 demographic processes and their global political, social and economic embeddedness.

Through the prism of the Indonesian eldercare workers' experiences in Japan, this book explores the day-to-day practices, national imaginations and public discourses to track their potential for constructing, recognising and denying the viability of certain kinds of person. The ability to imagine oneself, another individual or a group as a viable option for a partner at work, a neighbour, or in this particular instance, a care provider, care receiver or a member of the same society, is at the basis of a migratory encounter. It shapes the experiences of the migrants and the host society alike. Using ethnographic descriptions of the Indonesian workers' lives at work and beyond in Japan, as well as already existing materials on Japanese constructions of foreignness, I rewrite the mechanisms of constructing national imaginations in the language of intimacy to trace the connections between the ideas of the national, interpersonal and bodily intimacies. The choice of care provision as the setting for observation of national imaginations rendered making this connection unavoidable. Therefore, the book revolves around the idea of 'intimate imagination', a cluster of processes by which the intimate spheres inform the way we position (imagine) ourselves in relation to others, and by which the imagination defines and redefines the reach of the intimate on a personal and cultural (national) level, and acknowledges the viability of some people as friends, colleagues, employees, co-residents or co-nationals while denying it to others. The exercise in thinking about migration in terms of negotiations based on

intimate imagination aims to suggest that the notion of intimacy can be a useful operating tool in understanding resultant interactions. The notion's composite nature allows for more flexibility than such ideas as otherness or difference. In fact, intimacy allows us to foreground what experiencing the other and its differences is actually about. The notion of intimacy, which in this book is expanded to emerge beyond the romantic or eroticised relationships, although not always explicitly mentioned by my informants, appeared as 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 relationships between the Indonesian workers and those Japanese with whom they met directly. 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, which I describe in Chapter 2. As a term that 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 that at first glance had little to do with each other. In the process, I also highlight the need to acknowledge and track (rather than deconstruct) the processes of stereotyping and their role in shaping the migratory experience understood as encompassing both those who arrived and those who 'were arrived to' as a result of a migratory movement. The essentialising stereotypical imaginations were recounted and sometimes produced anew to define the reach of the intimate imagination, allowing it to construct incarnations of viable friends, co-workers or co-citizens. Finally, the Indonesian experiences in Japan have also something to tell us about the way the Japanese nation, and the individuals that form it, imagine themselves in light of the ongoing demographic transformations.

## **Japan-Indonesia Partnership Agreement (EPA) Background**

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 makes 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. A brief look at the genealogy of the programme that brought the Indonesian eldercare workers to Japan shows why certain discourses about Japan's ideas of nationhood, which are discussed in later parts of this volume, emerged in response to this particular instance of labour migration.

For Japan, the bilateral EPA with Indonesia that brought Amir and Jasir to Japan was part of a bid to maintain the country'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 and attending to Japan's 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 preferentially tariffed products of other countries that 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 MoFA, by March 2011 Japan had signed fifteen EPA/FTAs,<sup>2</sup> primarily with South East and East Asian countries, but also with Mexico, Chile, India and Switzerland.<sup>3</sup>

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. The agreement opened the door for Japanese investors to locate their resources in Indonesia, but by no means obliged them to select Indonesia as the destination of choice for their investment. Indonesian commentators pointed to the need for Indonesia to lower its costs and simplify its regulations before the potential of Japanese and other foreign investment could be realised and be of sizable benefit to the Indonesian economy.<sup>4</sup> 'Japan got to

expand their production in Indonesia for some bananas', commented an employee at the Indonesian embassy in Tokyo during our first meeting 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 employee felt that the profitability of the agreement's provisions for the two countries was of completely different, incomparable scales, where Japanese companies would 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.<sup>5</sup> This relative positioning was presented as having resulted in the EPA's clause on the acceptance of Indonesian nurse and caregiver candidates into Japan.

Although primarily concerned with the revision of trade and tariffs regulations, Japan agreed to accept a thousand nurses and caregiver trainees (officially known as 'candidates') within two years of the date of implementation of the EPA. The same provision was earlier included in a similar treaty between the Philippines and Japan, but due to delays in ratifying the agreement by the Philippine senate, it was from Indonesia that the first-ever group of foreign workers to be employed in the care and health sector – and under a government-led scheme at that – arrived in Japan in August 2008.<sup>6</sup> 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 practice 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 to human traffickers, the stricter regime for receiving a visa resulted in a significant decline in the number of Filipina women finding work in Japan. Through the EPA scheme, the Philippine government established a new route for their nationals to seek employment in Japan. 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 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.

The decision to grant the request to accept foreign workers under the EPA was not made unanimously by the Japanese side. In line with the arguments coming from the nurses' and caregivers' professional associations, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) was adamant in its 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 employees rather than importing people from abroad. Therefore, the EPA acceptance was not to be a means of addressing the internal problems of the Japanese labour market but rather a skill-transfer scheme. On the other hand, both the METI and the MoFA also engaged in the negotiations on the EPA, as long-standing proponents of an opening of the Japanese labour market to people from a wider range of occupations were in favour of the proposed acceptance. Gabriele Vogt (2006: 11) observed that the MoFA saw EPAs such as the one signed with Indonesia as a means to avoid the lengthy legal proceedings required for an introduction of new immigration policies. Instead, by signing bilateral agreements with selected states, the MoFA de facto shaped these policies by removing them from under the 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, which I highlight later on in this book, there was an ulterior, hidden motive (*sesuatu di belakang*; Ind.) for their being sent to Japan under the EPA. The sense of being a trade off in an economic deal was amplified by the experiences such as those talked about by Amir and Jasir. What was the point (*tujuan apa*; Ind.) of their presence in the eldercare homes, asked Amir, if they were to be perceived as unviable members of staff, unrecognised as individuals able to contribute knowledge or personal qualities to the construction of the care homes as working and living spaces? Symbolically, this lack of recognition was inscribed in the conditions of the acceptance that stipulated that the Indonesian candidates would not be included in the institutional employee count. Their work was thus rendered invisible in official duty rotas that might have contained the Indonesians' names, but still had to include enough Japanese employees to meet

the legally required ratio of staff to cared-for residents, as if the Indonesian workers were in fact not there at all. Thus, the candidates themselves believed that they were simply used to buy a good deal for Japan in an agreement that was primarily aimed at economic cooperation. The 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.

## Objectives of the Accepting Eldercare Institutions

In contrast to the officially promoted objective of the EPA acceptance scheme, 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.<sup>7</sup> This was according to a questionnaire survey conducted in autumn 2009 by one of the support groups that emerged in response to the acceptance. A similar picture emerged from an analogous investigation carried out by the MHLW in March 2010. Here, out of thirty-seven respondents, who incorporated care home as well as hospital representatives, thirty-three said they treated the EPA acceptance as a test case for future acceptance of foreign workers, thirty saw it as an opportunity for 'international contribution' (*kokusai kōken*; Jpn.), and twenty-nine hoped that the EPA workers would revitalise the workplace (MHLW 2010). Thus, contrary to the official discourse in line with the argumentation of the Japanese MHLW, the accepting eldercare homes were treating the scheme as a way to supplement the insufficient number of workers available to work in eldercare within the internal Japanese labour market. This was particularly so in light of Japan's changing demographics whereby one of the main considerations was an ever higher number of older people in need of care expected to be supported by an ever lower number of people in the active workforce. The proportion of working-age people to non-working elderly was expected to drop significantly. While in 2010, there were, on average, two workers supporting one elderly person, by 2060 this ratio was predicted to drop to 1.3 or even 1.0 (IPSS 2012). Such demographic trends were expected to aggravate not only the domestic eldercare labour market, which has already been wrought by shortages and high turnover of personnel (often explained as an outcome of unsatisfactory working conditions in terms of pay and the physical strenuousness of providing eldercare), but also affect the

wider economy of the country, which would have to operate on a diminished tax base. Frequent discussions in the main mass media 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 and who would pay for their future care given the low birth rates and the apparent unwillingness of many Japanese to engage in care work. The already long waiting lists for admission to an eldercare institution offered an indication of the difficulties the country might face in securing an adequate eldercare provision system based on sufficient labour force within its own borders in the coming decades. In joining the EPA scheme in order to stave off the current or expected shortage of people to work, the eldercare institutions were also foreseeing the time when a foreign care worker would be a viable option, and one coming with a degree of necessity as a means to tackle Japanese labour shortages. Not unlike in other industrialised nations, the changing demographics combined with the increasing participation of women in the labour market and a decrease in the incidence of multigenerational households has complicated the arrangements needed to support family members in their old age. Across the globe, eldercare has come to be more commonly outsourced to non-family members, with hiring a domestic worker being one solution. Increasingly, it has also become an accepted, albeit not unproblematic, practice to place the elderly (or to choose to be placed in one's old age) in an external facility dedicated to providing round-the-clock professional care and support. In Japan in 2009, the hiring of a live-in person to look after the elderly's needs had not yet taken root. Instead, it was the external care facilities that were gaining popularity as a viable option to ensure adequate eldercare. It was to these kinds of institution, laden with the ideal of familial eldercare, that the Indonesian workers first arrived.

## **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 resident ratio of 1:3 until they obtained the Japanese qualifications.<sup>8</sup> Also, until they became certified caregivers or nurses, they were not allowed to change employers, although they could report any problems to a helpline established by the 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.

This latter provision was without precedent in Japan in that it opened a path for a group of foreign workers to permanent residence in Japan. On the other hand, however, the national examination, which required a high degree of literacy in Sino-Japanese characters, was widely perceived as a particularly 'high hurdle' (*hādorū ga takai*; Jpn.), practically precluding the Indonesians from ever obtaining the right to work and remain in Japan. Passing the examination 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 pass rate among Japanese, which over the years had oscillated around 50 per cent, and the zero pass rate of Indonesians in 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 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 offered a possibility of settling in Japan and on the other made it nearly impossible to use this path, sent an ambivalent message about the official intentions of the acceptance. This apparent ambivalence of the programme was picked up by various 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 book, was consequently connected to the ideas of Japanese nationhood.

## Contemporary Migration and National Imagination

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 that 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 nations' cultures. This is because contemporary nations are still imagined as fairly bounded entities that 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 representative for the imagined shared ideas and ideals that are meant to guide actions and interactions of co-nationals in similar ways. I will return to discuss this issue in more detail later in the book. 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. The identification of nations with given cultures suggests a degree of incongruity between the national 'us' and 'them'. In Japan, too, there exist powerful ideas distinguishing Japanese from non-Japanese.

The Japanese Nationality Law (Art. 2–5)<sup>9</sup> 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. Provided that one fulfils certain conditions of residency and 'upright conduct', it is also possible to become a 'naturalized' Japanese national. Such civic

inclusion in a nation does not, however, necessarily convey the recognition of shared sociality or 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 (Yoshino 1992; Weiner 1997; Lie 2001: 130–36; see also Oguma 2002). The history of the representation and social and legal position of people of Japanese descent, the *Nikkeijin*, the permanent residents of predominantly Korean and Chinese origins and children of returnees or of 'mixed' background in Japan, illustrates how such convergence works to construct individuals and groups as either similar and therefore sharing in cultural commonalities, or different and unfamiliar. The arrival of the EPA Indonesians in Japan, their experiences and representations described in this book, need to be seen against the background of such historically sanctioned Japanese national imaginations.

### *Descent without Culture*

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 had created a surplus of work opportunities, which were not being filled by the native workers. Prior to 1990, foreign workers, some of them undocumented, were arriving from South Asian countries – such as Pakistan and Iran (with both of which Japan had signed a visa exemption agreement) and Bangladesh – and from countries closer to Japan, such as China, Taiwan and Thailand. 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: 278 after Yamanaka 1996: 76–77). 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 Sino-Japanese 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 Japanese Brazilians 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: 67–71, 159), the reality of the *Nikkeijin* acceptance did not fulfil expectations either. Even if able to speak the Japanese language, common 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 were no longer 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 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 (*bokoku*; Jpn.), 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 had 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 a lack of familiarity with 'our country's' (*wa ga kuni*; Jpn.) labour market (which, given that many of the Japanese Brazilians had

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.<sup>10</sup>

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 had taken 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: 58–59).<sup>11</sup> Therefore, one not only needed 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 immersion in and spatial proximity to Japanese society that the *Nikkeijin* and *kikokushijo* lacked are characteristic of a large proportion of the nearly four hundred thousand *Zainichi* Korean residents in Japan.<sup>12</sup> After the Second World War, 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: 3). 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; nor 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 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 than just South Korea (*ibid.*).<sup>13</sup> 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: 73–74). This requirement was ultimately abolished in 1993.

The descendants of the disenfranchised former colonial subjects were 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 make efforts towards granting, albeit still limited and of a probationary nature, voting rights in local-level elections to their special permanent residents (Tegtmeyer Pak 2000: 252–53). However, the *Zainichi* still do not have the right to vote in the general elections, they have limited possibilities to achieve professional positions of power, 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 Sino-Japanese 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 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 stay 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 had been born in Japan, had 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 Japanese 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*), and 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 from the imagined commonality of culturally defined sociality.

### *Halves and Doubles*

Similarly, whether or not a person of Japanese nationality born of parents of whom only one was Japanese is popularly recognised as being 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 that 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, unspecified, kind of blood. Such linguistic silencing of the non-Japanese essences in a person is also apparent in the virtual absence of a Japanese term equivalent to an English-language expression used in such countries as the United Kingdom and the United States, namely ‘British/American of such-and-such descent’ or simply Japanese American, for example.<sup>14</sup> 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 being composed only of Japanese (without multiple or ambiguous ethnicities) with the support of statistical data.<sup>15</sup> Jeffry Hester (2008) notes, however, within the Korean circles in Japan, the propositions of a possible 'hyphenated' (2008: 139) identity representing the *Zainichi* as Japanese of Korean origins – that is, *Kankoku-kei Nihonjin* or *Korian-kei Nihonjin* (ibid.: 145–46). 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 Japan in large numbers 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 have been 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 brought about not least by globalising or internationalising processes (for example, Ko 2009: 30).<sup>16</sup> 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: 204–5), 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*).

## Homogeneity, Demographic Change and Internationalisation

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 are often 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 *Yamato 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: 26–27).<sup>17</sup> 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 people not fitting such ethnicised definitions, the need for dissociation of *nihon minzoku* (‘Japanese ethnic group’) from *nihon kokumin* (‘Japanese nation[al]’) has been argued (Yamawaki, Kashiwazaki and Kondō 2002; Gotlieb 2012: 2–3), the association remains powerful. It finds its expression in the ideal of homogeneity working as a dominant folk theory (Gelman and Legare 2011; see also Yoshino 1992; Weiner 1997; Lie 2000, 2001; Befu 2001).

The ideal of homogeneity gained prominence in Japanese self-representations via a rich body of post–Second World War literature devoted to the ‘discussions’ or ‘discourses’ of Japaneseness, collectively known as *nihonjinron*. Japanese society in this ideological frame is ideally composed of similar individuals fitting the ethnicised image of a Japanese person, and is bound by culture, language, history and tradition intrinsic to the Japanese, and only to them. Stringent immigration regulations reflect and perpetuate these national imaginations. In 2008 people registered as foreigners accounted for 1.7 per cent – that is, around 2 million – of the total population of 127 million. Such a relatively small portion of non-Japanese has contributed to the common (mis)perception that there has been no immigration to Japan at all (Douglass and Roberts 2000: 11), supporting the popular image of Japan as relatively homogeneous and unique in its ways of social organization and interpersonal interactions. This image reinforces differentiation between who is, or can be, considered ‘a Japanese’, who can or should belong to the Japanese nation and/or society. Such considerations underlie the

debates about whether Japan should allow more foreigners to settle within its borders.

These debates have become particularly salient in view of the profound demographic transformations that Japanese society has been experiencing in recent decades. As the most aged society in the world today, Japan is at the forefront of the demographic change expected to affect populations across the globe. As of 2013, no less than 32.3 per cent of the Japanese population were over the age of sixty, a proportion predicted to further rise to 42.7 per cent by 2050 and then drop only slightly to 41.1 per cent by 2100 (United Nations 2013: 24). Simultaneously, Japan's population is poised to shrink. It is predicted that having reached its peak of 127.75 million in 2005, it will decline to just above 100 million by 2050, and possibly to 64 million by 2100 (Kono 2011: 42). The challenges posed by such demographic changes – including an ever higher number of older people in need of care<sup>18</sup> – have brought about considerations about viable ways of organizing the society in the forthcoming decades.

In Japan, two visions of the future have emerged. According to the 'Small Option' (Sakanaka 2005) the future Japan is less numerous but self-sufficient. It operates on a downsized economy and possibly utilizes robots to fill positions that lack manpower due to the smaller size of the working age cohorts (Mori and Scarce 2010). The 'Big Option', sometimes denying feasibility of the former, presents a Japanese future as unavoidably open to significant numbers of migrants in order to sustain the country's existence (Sakanaka 2005). Consequently, one of the main questions has been whether to opt for a country that should limit the number of non-Japanese residents as much as possible, or whether Japan should intentionally become home to more foreigners. Both propositions rely on a different image of what Japanese society should or could become. Both, however, are a reflection of the dominant portrait commonly serving as either the ideal or current representation of Japanese society. In this context, neither the objective validity of either of the propositions nor their respective advantages and disadvantages are an issue.<sup>19</sup> Instead, what is central here are the implications these discourses may have for the Japanese national imagination, since both solutions present different cultural visions of Japan. It is these visions that will ultimately shape Japan's future, and they are the factors that inform experiences of such people as Amir, Jasir and the remaining 206 Indonesian caregiver and nurse candidates who arrived in Japan in 2008. Given its focus on care, and eldercare in particular, the EPA scheme fed directly into the deliberations over the prevailing image of Japanese national homogeneity

in light of the demographic and concomitant economic and social transformations.

The arrival of the Indonesian workers in Japan in 2008 has been framed in Japan in terms of *kokusaika* and *tabunka kyōsei*, often translated as ‘internationalisation’ and ‘multicultural coexistence’ (or multiculturalism), respectively. Such interpretation of this new migratory flow relied on the utopian image of Japan as homogeneous, despite the efforts by both scholars and various activists to replace it with a more nuanced representation of Japanese society. Up until the 1990s, the tendency was to focus on Japan’s minorities, who were defined as either indigenous to the isles, or foreign. The first group was represented by the Ainu, Okinawans and Buraku (for example, Vos and Wagatsuma 1967; Higler 1971). The latter referred to the Korean and Chinese residents who were brought to Japan by force during the Second World War and their descendants, and to the more recent migrant workers from Asia. While providing vivid examples of cultural plurality in Japan, these accounts focused on the groups’ marginality within Japanese society. As such, they further contributed to the dominant representations of ‘the Japanese’ as homogeneous. The arrival of the so-called newcomers – that is, the postwar groups of refugees from Indochina and the female entertainers from Asia in the 1970s, the male migrants from South and South East Asia in the 1980s, and, in particular, the *Nikkeijin*, that is, people of Japanese descent since the 1990s – has propelled an additional challenge to the ideal of homogeneity (Burgess 2008: 63). Analytical 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 and Ertl 2008: 5; also Goodman et al. 2003; Goodman 2008: 331).

About the same time, in the late 1990s, the notion of internationalisation, or *kokusaika*, had emerged in the Japanese policy discourse in response to the growing number of sojourners settling in Japan. This internationalisation 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, Nelson Graburn and John Ertl (2008: 7) argued that ‘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 and Ertl 2008: 7) that posed a challenge to the notion of a homogeneous Japanese society.

Along with the internationalisation there emerged in the popular discourse the notion of ‘multicultural coexistence’, or *tabunka kyōsei*, often translated as ‘multiculturalism’. The term has been deployed to account for the progressing acknowledgement of the changing face of Japanese society, including now not only the Japanese but also those old and new arrivals settled, or at least residing, in the country. On a discursive level, *tabunka kyōsei* has become one of the ideals for the future shape of Japanese society. Such discursive commitment may have suggested critical engagement with the diversifying Japanese reality. However, it has been criticised for being a merely discursive policy tool that has not only rectified the difference between the Japanese and the Other, but with its focus on foreigners has also obliterated any differences among the Japanese (such as those related to disability or class status) and among those external Others (Flowers 2012).<sup>20</sup> The emergence of the multicultural ideal did not mean 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, would not be contested. Particularly in popular media discourses, the presence of migrants has often been seen as disruptive to the national fabric of Japanese society. For example, although the authors of articles in scholarly compilations – such as those edited by Douglass and Roberts 2000, Goodman et al. 2003, Graburn and Ertl 2008, Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008 and Vogt and Roberts 2011 – discuss a plethora of cases exemplifying the undergoing changes and the formation of new constellations of (multicultural?) meanings in Japan, they also point to the still powerful national sentiments that resist but also shape these processes. The current book aims to contribute to this literature by focusing on these tensions, but also on alliances within a workplace that until recently has been outside the arena of ‘internationalisation’ – that is, eldercare institutions.

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 the formation of relationships between the migrants, through the way those allowed into the country are selected, through the way their sojourn is organised, and indeed through the way it comes to be imagined. Immigration regulations and the acceptance

criteria select individuals of certain characteristics, which, in turn, affect the image of the country and people's orientation towards the migratory experience. 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 book, a combination of these factors and the migrant workers' orientation towards their own experiences had a profound effect on the way the encounters were imagined and interpreted.

## Care Workers' Migration, Ethnographies of Eldercare Institutions and Multicultural Coexistence

The changing family structure and the increased participation of women in the labour market has had a great influence on the nature of contemporary migratory flows. Domestic work and care for family members, traditionally performed by women who have now left the home to enter various paid jobs, have had to be outsourced to hired workers. Across the globe, the tendency has been increasingly to meet the demand for care personnel by accepting migrant workers (Huang, Yeoh and Toyota 2012). Not surprisingly, then, since the late 1990s, there has been a growing scholarly 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 has been on the exploitative nature of the relationships between the migrant workers and their employers (for example, Parreñas 2001; Lutz 2008). There have emerged discussions on the boundaries between work and care, or formal and informal care (Ungerson 2004; Litwin and Attias-Donfut 2009; Lyon 2010), and on the reconceptualisation of care coming with its marketisation (Finch and Groves 1983; Graham 1991; Tronto 1993; Lee-Treweek 1996; Qureshi 1996; Folbre and Nelson 2000; Zelizer 2000, 2005; Williams 2001; Simoni and Trifiletti 2004; Fine and Glendinning 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; but see also Yeates 2004), 'care drain' (Bettio, Simonazzi and Villa 2006), or 'the international division of reproductive labour' (Parreñas 2001; see also Glenn 1992). Also, given that the majority of

migrant care workers have been women, research focused on their experiences has contributed immensely to the discussion of changing gender roles in modern societies (for example, Parreñas 2001; Liebelt 2011), and the power structures within the domestic sphere and within the wider context of economic disparities between sending and receiving countries (for example, Sassen 1984; Glenn 1992; Phizacklea and Anderson 1997; Momsen 1999; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002).

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 too focuses on a new configuration of personal and structural factors giving shape to the zones of encounters (Faier 2009). Issues highlighted in the domestic work context, such as the workers' 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 (Lovebond 2003)<sup>21</sup> – featured in the experiences of the EPA Indonesian care workers as well, but 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 rather than in private homes. In this context, the employer was not the one cared for, and 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.

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; Vesperi 1987; Shield 1988; Kayser-Jones 1990). Those studies that incorporated workers' experiences initially limited the accounts to the higher-level

staff who provide specialised care. For example, Joel Savishinsky (1991) concentrates on the health professionals, such as physical therapists and social workers, and only mentions in passing the caregivers who provide direct care to the elderly. Savishinsky's predecessors, too, such as Jaber Gubrium (1975: 124–42) and Roger Clough (1981: 89–90), only briefly pause on the 'bed-and-body work' in order to 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 that the front-line staff ascribed to their jobs. While the elderly 'clientele' are represented as forming a network of relationships, the members of staff are discussed as a group of individuals whose social connections remain unaccounted for (see also Somera 1995).

More attention to the sociality of an eldercare home as a workplace is paid by Nancy Foner in her *Caregiving Dilemma*. Foner stresses the 'pressures for rapprochement' and the 'strong ethic of cooperation' (Foner 1994: 142) among the staff despite the various 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' (ibid.: 45). A turn towards the conceptualisation of experiences of direct care by the care providers is visible in the writings of scholars concentrating on 'bodywork' in care provision. This research focused on the embodied and emotional nature of care work (Diamond 1992; Lee-Treweek 1996, 1997), bodywork's ability to break privacies (Twigg 2000a, 2000b), the stigma of the 'dirty work' (Jervis 2001; see also Lawler 1991), and the gendered meanings and perceptions of bodywork (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, Diana Lynn 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 (Bethel 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 the members of staff presented by Bethel are Japanese, and encounters with the new or the unknown are limited to the newness of institutional life and to encounters with Japanese strangers with whom the residents need to form neighbourly relationships. This was also the case in the institution visited by Yongmei 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. The staff voices she presents in her book consider the position of the elderly within the institution from the perspective of the people who look after them. They touch on such themes as professional satisfaction in terms of the ability to provide personalised care and the rewards of being able to help people in need, and discuss 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 only a supportive function towards this end.

The current study builds on the body of work presented above 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 book 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*; Jpn.). This has something to tell us about contemporary Japanese ideas of nationhood and the ways one can imagine the other as a viable co-resident, co-worker, neighbour or friend.

Three existing monographs have taken on a similar task to that pursued by this book. In different settings they too explore the micro-level, interpersonal experiences against the background of macro processes shaping migratory flows. In *Intimate Encounters*, Lieba Faier delves into the interpersonal negotiations between the Filipina women employed

in hostess bars in Japan, the Japanese male customers turned husbands, and their respective families. Faier uses the notion of cultural encounters to 'consider the messy, interactive, and sometimes surprising ways that people create cultural meanings and identities through everyday relationships with others' (Faier 2009: 5). She investigates what social and economic conditions contributed to the production of specific imaginations and desires held by both the Filipina women and the Japanese men. In doing so, she traces the link between the interpersonal relationships and the macro processes shaping them. However, despite the indication in the title, the book does not elaborate on the very idea of intimacy or how exactly it features in the experiences of both the migrant Filipina women and the Japanese members of the accepting rural community. The intimacy of encounters is equated with the formation of romantic and/or marital unions, and is therefore considered only implicitly. Moreover, by focusing on the social and economic forces affecting the lives of the people she studies, Faier does not analyse the minute mores of interactions that constitute the basis of any relationship. In addition, in this otherwise rich ethnography, there is little attention paid to the relationships between migrant and non-migrant co-workers. While globally romantic relationships between migrant and non-migrant individuals are ubiquitous, the majority of interactions are still taking place outside of the familial realm, often in the workplace. The current book introduces intimacy as a wider concept reaching beyond the romantic and sexualised encounters, and looks at how it transforms relationships between strangers who come in close contact through work.

Among ethnographic monographs dealing with eldercare provided by international migrants, Claudia Liebelt's *Caring for the 'Holy Land'* focuses most explicitly on the intimacy of relationships between the carers and the cared-for elderly. Against the background of a restrictive immigration regime in Israel and the national ideology of preserving the country's 'Jewishness' (not unlike the homogeneity ideal in Japan), Liebelt explores how the Filipina migrants in Tel Aviv transcend their representations as disempowered domestic workers. Liebelt's important contribution is showing how 'as female "working class cosmopolitans" ... [the Filipina workers] embody subjectivities beyond the (theoretical) divide between parochial migrants and bourgeois cosmopolitans' (Liebelt 2011: 187). Within this framework, Liebelt discusses the relationships between the typically elderly employers and the Filipina carers. She shows the complexity and ambivalence of the structurally unequal relationships that have become complicated by the formation of intimate ties and feelings of attachment. In Liebelt's

account these ties not only hold the potential to transform the day-to-day practices within the households employing Filipina women, but also have been the basis for public debate over the (legitimate) position of the Filipina domestic workers within the Israeli nation and state. In presenting the subjective experiences of the Filipina women as tightly connected to their interpersonal relationships with their cared-for employers, Liebelt discusses the notion of citizenship as a form of belonging. However, she does not explicitly make the connection between the intimacy of care and the representations of the Filipina on the national level. Nor does she explain how exactly the interpersonal bonds were formed, despite presenting emotional closeness between the carers and the cared-for employers. Liebelt mentions physical proximity stemming from living together, but does not elaborate on the actual processes or experiences within this context that would explain how and why such affective relationships should emerge, or how they could challenge the conventional understanding of citizenship in Israel. The current book makes this connection explicit through an array of ethnographic examples and a theoretical elaboration of the concept of intimacy. Moreover, it situates the debates over national representations within the context of the dramatic demographic change underway in Japan, where already nearly a quarter of the population is over the age of sixty-five. As such, this study addresses the broader issues affecting much of the world populations, and contributes to the debates over how to address the current demographic and ideological challenges without losing sight of the most immediate experiences of the individuals who are at the centre of these global changes.

Finally, David McConnell's *Importing Diversity* explores the practical implementation of the internationalisation ideas during the first decade since the realisation of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme began in 1987. Under the programme's provisions, schools across Japan accepted young graduates from primarily English-speaking countries to assist Japanese English teachers. The stated goal of the programme was to promote internationalisation in Japan. Within this context, McConnell recounts how various kinds of problems were conceptualised, approached and tackled. In doing so, he skilfully uncovers the cognitive frameworks (McConnell 2000: 3 and 167) of the individuals involved, and shows how much of the tension in the relationships between the foreign teachers and the Japanese engaged in the implementation of the programme at different levels of administration arose from the divergent understanding of what internationalisation actually means. While for the JET participants it meant dismantling differences between societies, for the Japanese it was seen as a means to

improve communication between inherently and permanently different societies. While McConnell's detailed account provides an excellent window into the intersection between the ideology and practice, primarily at the institutional level, two areas are left out of his scope of investigation. The book does not expose the impact the JET programme had on its foreign participants, nor does it delve into the particular processes that led to the development of cordial relationships between the foreign English language teachers, their Japanese counterparts, other members of the teaching body and students, despite the tensions on which the author focuses. It therefore does not provide any insights into how the two different ideas of internationalisation informed each other, or how the direct interaction was situated vis-à-vis the dominant cultural representations. The current study deals exactly with these issues. In contrast to McConnell's work, by foregrounding the minute enactments of ideologies on a personal level this book exposes the intricate relationship between the structure and agency – that is, between the dominant cultural representations and individual experiences shaping mutual representations, and ultimately reflecting back on the structure.

## Research Process

The research presented here spans the final weeks of linguistic training undertaken by the first batch of Indonesian workers prior to their employment, and a 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 ninety-nine Japanese institutions (fifty-two care homes and forty-seven hospitals).

In the months that followed the six-month language training, I stayed in regular contact with nine young Indonesian caregiver candidates. There were, however, a number of others, both Indonesian and Japanese, whom I met less regularly, but whose stories also feature in this book. In order to disguise the identities of those real-life protagonists, and my main informants in particular, most of the characters appearing on these pages are avatars. Their actions and experiences are amalgamations of what really happened to a greater number of real-life caregivers. Similarly, I have relocated some of the stories to further camouflage the individual identities, and those of the accepting institutions. Apart from Jasir and Amir, in this book we also follow Lazim and Daris, and three women, Iffah, Irdina and Lanny, whom I introduce in more detail in the following chapter.

A great part of the material used in this book comes from my first-hand experiences and observations within and without the accepting eldercare institutions, and the 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 from media reports, various booklets produced in relation to the EPA programme and statistical data, that originated outside of this time frame, but which is relevant to the story told in this book. In places I also weave in my own experiences in Japan that, I feel, reflect the ideas I am discussing here.

Once the language training was over, the seven friends who we will be following on these pages dispersed to work in six separate institutions. I gained regular access to three of them, and visited the others more sporadically. Obtaining access to the three institutions proved to be a lengthy process as it had to follow first a fairly unforced development of my relationships with the Indonesian candidates, and then a period of negotiations with representatives of the institutions. Hence, for example, while I spent my first night at Iffah's apartment at the beginning of February 2009, it was not until April that I managed to have a first official conversation with her deputy manager, which then resulted in my first period of observation in the institution beginning in early June 2009. Arranging access to Amir's and Jasir's workplace took only a month and I began my observation there in mid April 2009. Finally, I started my research alongside Lazim in July 2009 after a series of meetings with a number of administrative staff from the institution where he worked. The final arrangements with the three institutions were such that I would pay week-long visits to all of them on a rotation basis. This amounted to a total of roughly sixteen weeks spent inside the institutions. During each week I usually 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. Between the visits I spent a lot of time researching and helping the candidates to buy bus or plane tickets, laptops and mobile phones, to set up new bank accounts, to look for possible alternative flats to move into, to translate presentations into Japanese, and so on. Also, 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.

In order to move observation beyond the micro level of quotidian occurrences, I participated in numerous meetings of various support groups that had 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. I also conducted questionnaire surveys among selected employers, supervisors and co-workers of Indonesians who arrived under the EPA programme in the first batch in 2008, and among the Indonesian and Philippine caregiver candidates present in Japan at the beginning of 2010.

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 experiences of people I worked with were very directly shaped by the larger-scale economic and political negotiations between Japan and Indonesia. Such macro-level analyses have become part and parcel of anthropological discussions of migration since, as Caroline Brettell (2003: 2) has put it, to account for how the migratory flows and experiences are shaped, we 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’ (see also Massey et al. 1993). I will be referring to these relationships both as they were played out in the interpretations of the day-to-day experiences as well as at the level of relationships between the two countries.

In Chapter 4, in particular, I 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. Between January 2004 and December 2010 the three major Japanese newspapers, *Asahi Shinbun*, *Yomiuri Shinbun* and *Nihon Keizai Shinbun*,<sup>22</sup> published 312 articles referring to the Indonesian EPA care workers that I analysed.<sup>23</sup> A second type of source is radio and

television programmes, and I added several of these to the collection. In addition, I collected forty-six Japanese texts published on the internet, which total 139 pages. The earliest text in this group is a blog post dated 22 May 2008, and the latest is a news feature from 22 October 2010 that reports on a symposium about the acceptance of the EPA Indonesian care workers.

In my search I also included several 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 they were voices that I did not have chance to concentrate on to any great extent during my research among the Indonesians. Hence, I collected any piece of publicly available information that I came across, either as a result of a purposive search, or purely by chance.<sup>24</sup>

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 catchphrases and are often the only parts of articles read at all (Dijk 2006). The next step was to code the articles' content, and finally to choose specific articles that represented the emerged themes and served as a source for quotations and references. The material obtained from the online resources was coded 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 (perhaps 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. Finally, my intention was 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 received during the period that marked the peak of public discussion on the topic and what this may tell us about Japanese national imagination vis-à-vis the incoming Indonesian eldercare workers.

### *Circulatory Ethnography*

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 that also applied to my visiting Indonesia and participating in events outside of the eldercare homes.

Moreover, the comings and goings, the welcomes and goodbyes 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 by email 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 Matei 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 or a meeting outside of the workplace. In this sense, parts of the material used in this book 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.<sup>25</sup>

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, such as 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 altogether. Therefore, I am able to discuss Japanese motivations and interpretations of the events presented here primarily through 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, and paved a path to meaningful exchanges.

### *Access to People and Ethics of Research*

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. When I was not able to meet the second batch candidates without the mediation of their employers, I decided to approach the accepting institutions directly 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. My attempts at mitigating the coercive nature of the circumstances involved certain linguistic choices.

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 side. 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, 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 about 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 joy of being able to talk in private, despite the Japanese supervisors' physical presence in the room – the inversion of roles whereby the Indonesians were conveying information of interest to the Japanese but in a language unfamiliar to them – that 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.

The mitigation of my researching imposition on the Japanese members of staff and the elderly, and informing them about my position, took on different forms. 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 that 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 and allowed for more detailed explanations regarding the purpose of my presence and the staff's right to opt out from being included in the research outcomes. This was not, however, the case in the institution where 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 in this particular institution, I was not actively engaged in any of the tasks the staff performed and therefore could not use this as an excuse for starting 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 that they were adding to some of the residents' tea.<sup>26</sup> 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 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 with only a handful of the Japanese staff in this institution. Thus, in this book I focus primarily on those encounters that involved individuals I had a degree of rapport with and who I believed had a fairly good understanding of my role.

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 those 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 bathroom together with the elderly waiting for their turn to get inside, then offering water as they left the hot bathroom, and being one-to-one during drying and combing hair, drying feet and putting on socks and shoes, provided opportunities for me to chat with them, as well as with the member of staff whom 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. Jasir, who was based in the same institution as Amir, was assigned to a ward 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 that my presence might have been causing those elderly. I also refrained from observing bathing activities to respect the elderly's privacy, and only twice assisted during changing of diapers when explicitly asked to help. Those of the elderly who had no way of telling me that they would rather be excluded from my research record are mentioned here only sporadically as anonymous individuals. Instead, I draw mostly on the interactions with those who were actively supporting my work.

### *Eldercare Homes as Research Sites*

Entering an eldercare home can be a bewildering experience. For Lynn Mason (1995: 73), who based her writing on a three-year experience as a volunteer in two nursing homes in Denver, Colorado, US, it was a 'culture shock' (see also Tisdale 1987). Maria 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 (see also Vesperi 1995). In fact, as mentioned earlier, 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 (1990), 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 that 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 Carobeth 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 Jay Sokolovsky (1987) and Rene 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 that might come with age. Lynn 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 any 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, as I discussed above. 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 fieldwork. 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 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. During these travels I often had the chance to help 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; nor was I aware of the specific working patterns on a given ward. This caused anxiety. The smells were also different. A discomfoting 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.

### *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 him. When he arrived in Japan we were still 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 only allowed up to six months of residence in any twelve-month period. Being accompanied in the field, 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 in a relationship proved helpful in finding commonalities with my informants. 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 had 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 when we met for the first time. Similarly, when we got to know each other better, the teasing of the two male informants at whose place I was a returning guest, about staying with two men while having a husband waiting in a different city, often allowed me to probe into similarly intimate aspects of their own relationships with their female partners.

## Representations

Before moving on, one note is due on the representation of persons in this book. As mentioned earlier, when relaying individual actions and interactions of the people I encountered during research, I use avatars sharing the characteristics and experiences of the people I met. I also substitute 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. Whether this refers to the particular individuals whose stories I am relaying or to the entire group can be extrapolated from the context. Whenever I refer to a different group, this is clearly indicated in the text as well. It should also 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 that the Indonesian workers shared, but merely as an indication of their formal status in Japan.

Finally, 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 when one is dealing with a non-informant friend compared to a friend whose knowledge or narratives one 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.

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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 mleczek*, 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' (*gaijin no aji o shiteru*; Jpn.) 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. It may, on the other hand, offer quite a pleasant surprise and a new experience that can take us on a trajectory so far unknown. It may further still become an acquired taste that needs to be cultivated and may require persistence. This book tells a story of such a new life flavour experienced by the Indonesians and the Japanese alike, who all approached it in their own ways. In recounting those individual experiences and tracing their embedding in the wider discourses, this book explores what constitutes migratory encounters with the new and unknown, and what gives these encounters a direction in which to develop.<sup>27</sup>

## Notes

1. I use a masculine pronoun because as much as Jasir was making a general statement, here he was primarily referring to his own experiences.
2. 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.
3. Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Available from: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/fta/> [10 March 2011].
4. See, for example, Haswidi 2007; Stott 2008.
5. This perception of the EPA as being potentially not as beneficial to the Indonesian economy as could have been hoped, seems to be behind the request to revise the agreement's conditions by the Indonesian government, issued in early 2015 (Yulisman 2015).
6. For more details, see Vogt 2007.
7. 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 as a countermeasure to the shortage of nurses (Kawaguchi et al. 2008 in Vogt 2011).
8. The ratio varies slightly depending on the type of care facility.
9. Japanese Ministry of Justice. Available from: <http://www.moj.go.jp/ENGLISH/information/tnl-01.html> [7 September 2006].
10. Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. Available from: <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/houdou/2009/03/h0331-10.html> [30 January 2012].
11. Goodman deals with this and related issues throughout his book.

12. This number excludes those who have taken Japanese nationality.
13. The vast majority of Koreans who came to Japan in the colonial period or immediately after the end of the Second World War came from a Korea that was not yet divided into two separate political entities. It was only after the Korean War (1950–53) that they faced the need to specify their affiliation with one state or the other.
14. I have never heard the term in use during my fieldwork, but an internet search for the 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?' (*Naze ... kei Nihonjin tte Iwanai no deshō ka? Kankoku kei Nihonjin toka Burajiru kei Nihonjin toka*; Jpn.). Available from: <http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2010/10/5/watashi-ha-amerikakei-nihonjin/> [5 November 2010]; [http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question\\_detail/q1335111028](http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q1335111028) [5 November 2010].
15. See Wetherall 2008: 264–81 for other ways of formal construction of what he calls 'a raceless nationality' in Japan.
16. See Ko's Chapter 1 on the changing content of the discourses on Japaneseness, pp. 11–31.
17. See Mandel 2008 for discussion of the German case, e.g. p. 207.
18. Between 2000 and 2003 – i.e. in the first three years since the introduction of the Long-Term Care Insurance (LTCI) system – there was a 77.9 per cent increase in the number of people receiving support either at home or in a specialist institution (MHLW 2003). For more information on LTCI and some useful references, refer to Vogt and Holdgrün 2012: 73.
19. For a summary of possible negative and positive effects of population decline, see Kono 2011: 43. For a broader perspective on population ageing in Asia, refer to Goodman and Harper 2008b.
20. For a similarly critical analysis of the concept, see Burgess (2004) 2012.
21. See also Chin 1997; Anderson 2000; Rudnycky 2004; Williams and Gavanas 2008.
22. According to data published in 2009 by the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA 2009), out of the three titles, the *Yomiuri Shinbun* had the greatest circulation at 10.020 million copies, followed by the *Asahi Shinbun* with 8.049 million, and the *Nihon Keizai Shinbun* with 3.052 million. The *Yomiuri Shinbun* is considered to be centre-right, or conservative; *Asahi Shinbun* centre-left, or liberal; and *Nihon Keizai Shinbun* economics- and business-oriented.
23. I did not include here those short telegraphic news items that report on the arrival of a new group of candidates, on the schedule of programme

information sessions, or simply provide a short explanation what the term 'EPA' or its Japanese equivalent stands for.

24. This is also the reason why I do not include these texts in 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.
25. See also Gubrium 1995 for the use of life narratives in his eldercare home-based research.
26. 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.
27. Parts of this Introduction have previously been published in Świtek 2014.