

AFTERWORD

During the final stages of writing this book, Nurijah, whose profile appears in Chapter 2, died. The circumstances surrounding her death were remarkable and illustrate the very significant role cultural consonance, which is discussed in some depth in Chapter 10, plays in the experience of older Minangkabau.

One day a few months ago, Nurijah fell ill. This in itself was not unusual; she had often felt unwell since suffering a stroke in Koto many years before and becoming paralysed as a result of it. This intensified after her children brought her to Jakarta to live. She hated the city and repeatedly asked her daughters why one of them could not return to Koto with her. All four of her daughters live and work in Jakarta and cannot leave, especially for an extended period of time. Finally, Nurijah had to agree to leave Koto and her home there as there was no one who could take care of her in the village. She did not want to live with her son and his wife even though they are also in Koto.

While Nurijah's complaints about her health would not normally alarm her children, this time was different. She began to deteriorate quickly. Within hours, her breathing became irregular, and she was in and out of consciousness, which had never happened before. The daughter, whose turn it was to take care of Nurijah, immediately contacted her three sisters and one brother who live in Jakarta, and they all arrived within a few hours. Everyone agreed that Nurijah's situation was very serious, particularly as, whenever she was conscious, she insisted that she wanted to go back to Koto immediately. The children were all stunned and confused and tried to persuade Nurijah that she was in no condition to travel. They promised to take her back to Koto when she felt better, if that was really what she wanted. Conveying this took hours because of Nurijah's condition and because her speech was even harder to understand than usual.

Finally, Nurijah told her children that she did not want to die in Jakarta. More importantly, she wanted to be buried in Koto next to her husband. Nurijah's husband, who had died many years ago long before she had the stroke, had been buried in the Valley family's burial ground because most of his family was in Malaysia, and those who still lived in his village were all distant relatives with whom he had no contact. When Nurijah was conscious, all she wanted to talk about was when, not if, she would leave. It was apparent to all the children that this was no ordinary wish but an order. They were upset, confused and frantic but tried to find a way to make it possible for their mother to return to Koto. No airline was willing to transport a person who was so ill, and travel by sea would be complicated and difficult. Ships did not sail between Jakarta and Padang every day, and Nurijah was not willing to wait. Travel by land would take as much time as by sea, but they could leave much more quickly. So, the children decided to call the hospitals and arrange to have Nurijah taken by ambulance from Jakarta to Koto as soon as possible, the next day if they could! One hospital agreed. Luckily, money was not a problem, especially for the oldest daughter, Marni (Chapter 8).

Other family members in the village and elsewhere were very concerned by this news. Nurijah's son, Hamzah (Chapter 3), who lives in Makassar, immediately said he would fly to Jakarta that evening and join the others on the trip. In addition to the ambulance, they would use two sports utility vehicles (SUVs) so that everyone could go and they would also be able to bring all the supplies they would need. It was decided that Marni would stay with Nurijah in the village until they could make other arrangements because Marni was retired, even though she and her husband had a business in Jakarta. Marni, who was unable to leave home immediately, would fly to Padang later and get to the village at about the same time as the ambulance arrived. In the end, Marni's three sisters and two of their children, the brother who lived in Jakarta, and the brother who lived in Makassar travelled in the SUVs along with the ambulance.

As Nurijah was put into the ambulance, her children were struck by a change in her mood. All of a sudden, she seemed calmer. The tension left her face and, for the first time in years, she seemed relaxed. The hospital assigned a nurse to accompany Nurijah in the ambulance. There was room for one other person, so the children took turns riding with their mother and the nurse.

Nurijah seemed to be much more alert than when she first fell ill. She was able to tell them when she needed to change position or when she was hungry. Most of the time, however, she slept. Once they had crossed the Sunda Strait on the ferry, however, she woke up more often and would immediately ask whether they were in Koto yet. She seemed better and was looking forward to going back to her house in the village. The closer they got to Koto, the more often she woke up and asked if they had arrived. Suddenly, when they were still some distance from the village, after having travelled hundreds of kilometres in the ambulance, Nurijah weakened again. She was asleep when they arrived and did not awaken when they carried her into the house on a stretcher.

Every relative living in the village and many neighbours were at Nurijah's house when she arrived. But because of her condition, only immediate family members were allowed to be in the bedroom when she was brought in. As soon as Nurijah was put into bed, she opened her eyes but didn't speak. The family tried to speak to her, but she did not respond. Nurijah looked around. Finally, as tears rolled down her cheeks, she said softly, "I'm home, I'm home!". Everyone present began to cry. Soon after, Nurijah turned towards her sister, Maryati (Chapter 1) and called her name. She then looked at her son who lived in the village and said his name. She recognized and addressed each of the others who were present in the same way. She remembered every one of them, even though she hadn't seen several of those present since she was taken to Jakarta many years before.

Nurijah began to deteriorate rapidly. She was no longer able to respond when her relatives spoke to her or tried to offer her something to eat or drink. She died less than two hours after she arrived and was buried in Koto near her husband and other members of the Valley family who had preceded her.