

# 1

## Introduction

### THE VALLEY FAMILY

On a hot night in Jakarta, a dozen members of a large extended family met at a restaurant in one of the many residential neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the city. They thought of themselves as the Valley family because their traditional, multifamily home had been located in a hollow in their native village of Koto in West Sumatra. Some of the diners were siblings; others were first cousins. A few of their children, who had been born in Jakarta and were married themselves, also attended. Some of their spouses came from other parts of Indonesia and sat a short distance away from the older family members. Except for these younger relations by marriage, everyone present was a descendant of a single Minangkabau woman, the grandmother of the older diners named Aminah, who represented the founding generation of this matrilineal family. As it happened, she had had no living sisters so the family had contracted at her generation but had expanded again as her four daughters and two sons married and had children. This generation was the parents of the older people present, and those who remained alive on this date were around ninety years of age. Most of the diners were over sixty, the age at which Indonesia labels a person “elderly” (*lansia*), but a few were in their fifties and were approaching the time of life when they would have

to make decisions about their future. Many of those present were already retired; all were middle class; and most had had a college education. As they ate, conversation turned towards a usual topic that invariably came up any time any of them met — their life in the village before they moved away. For most of them, that moment had occurred when they were in their early twenties, had finished their education, and decided to move to Jakarta to seek better opportunities than were available locally in West Sumatra, their province of origin. One of them had left the village much longer ago and, through a combination of circumstances, had grown up in the city of Makassar, in South Sulawesi, a province on another island in the eastern part of Indonesia. Eventually, everyone present married and had children. A number of them had married other Minangkabau like themselves, even if they had met their partner in Jakarta, while several had married people from other Indonesian ethnic origins. The subsequent generation, their children, were now adults and were beginning to have children of their own. These family members had been born in the *rantau*, the Minangkabau term for regions outside the traditional settlement areas of the ethnic group, and had grown up under very different circumstances from their parents and grandparents. The conversation on this night took place in Minang, the first language of this and previous generations of the family. The younger Jakarta generation did not understand much of what was discussed and spent the time talking to each other in Indonesian and dealing with their young children. All of the older people spoke Indonesian well, some extremely so, to the point where their Minang was no longer fluent, but talking to each other about the family and things they had done in their youth required that they speak in the language of the village. The use of Minang, and the specific dialect of their region, indicated their ethnic identity generally, but, to other Minangkabau, placed them as coming from the *darek*, the highland region at the centre of West Sumatra that was the original home of their ethnic group. By the end of the evening, the stories and reminiscences had demonstrated that the diners shared a very strong cultural memory that was likely at odds with what they had experienced first-hand and certainly very different from their daily life in the years since they had left the village. Now, as older people living in modern-day Indonesia, they were experiencing a life that would have been unimaginable to them as young people. What they saw of their older relatives' experiences was completely unlike their own situation

and was, in fact, almost unrecognizable compared to what they might have expected if they had ever thought consciously about it.

## **OLDER INDONESIANS TODAY**

The people having dinner and talking about their family and childhood on that night in Jakarta are part of a growing population of older people in Indonesia. Like many countries around the world, the Indonesian population is ageing. Like other developing countries, several decades ago life expectancy in Indonesia was low, balancing a high birth rate. However, considerable improvements in the standard of living and health status of the population have meant that people are now living longer. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2014) reports that average life expectancy for Indonesians of both sexes has reached seventy-one years. More notably, individuals currently aged sixty can expect to live on average eighteen more years. These figures have increased from sixty-two years of average life expectancy and an additional expected sixteen years of life at age sixty as recently as 1990 (WHO 2013). In 1950, shortly after Indonesia achieved independence from the Netherlands, life expectancy for both sexes was only 37.5 years (UN 2011).

The government of Indonesia calculates that, by 2020, 11.34 per cent of its population will be elderly. Indonesia is currently the fourth largest country in the world in terms of population, and this proportion will amount to some 29 million people. In 2000, there were about 14.4 million elderly Indonesians who made up 7.18 per cent of the population (Kementerian Kesehatan 2013). The rapid increase in this demographic group led the Indonesian government to form a national commission in 2004 to address the needs of the older population, which was a direct result of this observed population change. Historically, many of Indonesia's public health initiatives centred on maternal and child health, which reflects another pressing issue, namely high birth rates associated with continuing population increase (WHO 2008).

For this reason, Indonesia has had coordinated family planning activities in place since the 1950s. In 1969, the agency responsible for population management, Badan Koordinasi Keluarga Berencana Nasional (BKKBN, or National Coordinating Family Planning Agency) was founded with the responsibility for providing family planning information and support across the country (BKKBN 2011*b*). During the thirty-two-year

New Order government of President Soeharto, which ended with his resignation in 1998, BKKBN ran a series of campaigns through their regional branches involving the use of health promotion, clinical support, and social marketing to encourage Indonesians to have smaller families, ideally with no more than two children per couple. Indonesia's family planning activities during this period were very successful and were recognized with a United Nations Family Planning Award in 1989 (United National Population Fund 2014). In 2001, Indonesia implemented a system of regional autonomy that gave an unprecedented level of authority and responsibility to municipal and regency level governments. At this time, some of BKKBN's functions were devolved to these lower levels of government. These changes took effect in 2003, and, in 2009, BKKBN was given a new focus that expanded its primary function of supporting family planning. Its name was changed by national law to become Badan Kependudukan dan Keluarga Berencana Nasional (National Agency for Population and Family Planning), retaining its original acronym (Republic of Indonesia 2009). BKKBN's current vision is called "Balanced Population Growth 2015" (Penduduk Tumbuh Seimbang 2015) (BKKBN 2011). This reflects Indonesia's continuing concern with its fertility rate which is now 2.4 per woman of childbearing age (World Bank 2018), but also with its expanding population of older people who require facilities, health care, and social support at levels the nation has not experienced in the past.

For Indonesia, the rapid increase in the size of its elderly population was unanticipated. As a developing country, the government had tended to focus on issues that had historically been significant and that are associated with the achievement of its Millennium Development Goals (MDG). While health concerns such as infectious disease and immunization, maternal and neonatal health, nutrition (especially for children under the age of five), and accidents remain significant, Indonesia is now at a tipping point and is experiencing a risk transition from its past status to a situation that parallels that already being experienced in many countries of the world, namely a growing burden of chronic disease, much of which can be associated with the ageing population (WHO 2009). In 2010, the proportion of the population that was over sixty was the same as that aged under five (BPS 2011), suggesting that Indonesia's transition to a situation more closely replicating that now observed in the West is well underway.

In addition to being much larger than in the past, the Indonesian population aged over sixty is not evenly distributed around the country.

In rural areas, approximately 9.19 per cent of the population is considered elderly (aged over sixty). In cities, the comparable figure is 7.49 per cent (Adioetomo and Mujahid 2014). The age dependency ratio for older people has reached 13.3, meaning that for every 100 people of working age there are about thirteen older adults. This figure represents an average of rural and urban areas. When these are considered separately, the difference in population make-up is again visible with the ratio being 15.2 elderly for every 100 people of working age in rural areas and 11.5 elderly for every 100 people of working age in cities (Adioetomo and Mujahid 2014). The proportion of the population that is over sixty differs from region to region. There are more older people proportionally in East and Central Java, especially in the Yogyakarta region, than elsewhere in the country and fewest in Papua and the islands of the Province of Riau (BPS 2009). As might be expected based on norms around the world, there are more older women than older men in every part of Indonesia, particularly as age increases. However, there are significant differences in the family status of older men and older women; 59.61 per cent of elderly women nationwide are widowed or divorced, but 82.78 per cent of elderly men are married (Kementerian Kesehatan 2017). This social pattern is important in understanding the experience of older people in Indonesia and likely reflects prevailing norms by which older women who are widowed or divorced tend not to remarry while older men in the same situation generally do, often to a woman who is somewhat younger.

Increasing age is generally associated with increasing levels of illness and poor health. While there are older people everywhere who have no health complaints, on average this demographic group accounts for a great deal of disease and typically makes heavier use of health care services than younger people. For many years, the health of the elderly was not a major priority of the Indonesian government because of the large proportion of the population composed of children and young adults. However, at the present time, the health of the elderly is a growing concern. The morbidity rate for people over sixty is about 30 per cent, meaning that, for every 100 elderly, thirty of them have some kind of ongoing health problem. In rural areas, the rate is 32.96 per cent; in urban areas, this rate is slightly lower at 27.20 per cent (BPS 2014). This differential is likely associated with income, a factor that is closely related to education and has the potential to affect health in a variety of ways (Berkman and Kawachi 2000). The level of poor health varies considerably across the country, ranging from a

low of 23.67 per cent for this age group in Jakarta, the capital, to a high of 48.99 per cent in East Nusa Tenggara. Other areas with high levels of poor health among older people include Aceh (46.18 per cent) and Gorontalo (42.78 per cent), while comparatively better health is reported for the elderly in Yogyakarta (24.71 per cent) and Central Java (26.73 per cent) (BPS 2014). These differences are likely associated with level of development in the region in question as well as personal factors associated with individual older people (income, education, occupation, and so forth). However, it is also possible that cultural factors play a role; the people of Aceh are part of the larger Malay world, the people of Central Java and Yogyakarta are Javanese, while Gorontalo is a province located in the northern part of the island of Sulawesi whose inhabitants are also of Malay origin. While a majority of Indonesia's elderly report using modern health care facilities to address their health needs (60.47 per cent), a significant proportion use a combination of modern and traditional methods (27.63 per cent). In West Sumatra, the region occupied by the Minangkabau who are the subject of this book, 45.02 per cent of the elderly population, the highest in the country, use only traditional health care, which includes *dukun*, traditional practitioners who use a combination of home-made medicines and treatments and magic (BPS 2009). This probably reflects attitude more than opportunity as West Sumatra is one of the better developed provinces, and the majority of the population has access to modern health care facilities (Kementerian Kesehatan 2012).

Attitudes about health, health care, and ageing in general among the elderly are likely related to level of education and ability to access information in Indonesian. This is an important aspect of Indonesian society. For the vast majority of Indonesians, one of the nation's more than 700 local languages is their first language. This is especially true for individuals now aged over sixty years old, although most Indonesian young people also speak a local language first and begin to learn Indonesian formally when they enter school. Today, most have considerable exposure to the national language through television and advertising before they reach school age, but there remains a social gradient with respect to language. Because all public institutions, education, the media, government, and business use Indonesian, a person who cannot master the language generally cannot work outside the traditional environment where local languages are used. There are many people, especially among the large populations of rural to urban migrants in Jakarta and other large cities, who speak a highly

colloquial, informal dialect of Indonesian in addition to their local language but cannot interact in the formal environment that uses standard Indonesian (Fanany 2012). Health information and health care services are part of the Indonesian language context and, while it is possible to find practitioners who speak particular local languages especially in the regions where the language is used, this social context is an Indonesian one. For this reason, use of modern health care facilities is associated with ability and ease of using Indonesian, which in turn is associated with higher levels of formal education and exposure to the contexts where the language is used.

In West Sumatra, only 7.88 per cent of the elderly have never attended school and only 45.06 per cent are illiterate (BPS 2014*b*). These figures are among the lowest in Indonesia. Nonetheless, West Sumatra is one of Indonesia's more homogeneous regions, occupied almost entirely by members of the Minangkabau ethnic group. For this reason, there is little reason for members of the community of any age to use Indonesian outside of the formal institutions, such as school or government. Many of the elderly in this region have little cause to use Indonesian, except perhaps to read the newspapers or watch television, and in practice, may not be comfortable using Indonesian in their day-to-day affairs. Observation suggests that many of today's elderly who live in West Sumatra understand Indonesian but do not speak it well or at all. They are often very unfamiliar with the highly colloquial Jakarta dialects favoured by many young people and used heavily in the entertainment media. For Minangkabau who live in other parts of Indonesia, Indonesian is a fully functional second language, and many speak it with native fluency. However, those that were born in West Sumatra retain an attachment to their first language which is an integral part of their identity. The prominence of the Minang language for all members of the ethnic group is a reflection of their environment and also their heritage and traditions as well as the matrilineal nature of Minangkabau society.

## **THE MINANGKABAU SOCIAL SYSTEM**

Minangkabau society has a matrilineal social structure that is unique in Indonesia. Currently this group is the largest matrilineal society in the world (Cribb and Kahin 2004). It is thought that this type of social structure is very old and represents an ancient form of social organization (Holden, Sear and Mace 2003). For the Minangkabau, descent follows the maternal

line, with children remaining members of their mother's family for life. Communal property, which may include a traditional house, rice fields, fish ponds, and other productive assets in the rural environment, belong to the extended family and are available for use by all of its members. The way in which these assets will be used is determined by a process of consensus within the family led by its senior women who are acknowledged to be the heads of the family. Personal income, such as from a paying job, is not part of these communal assets and can be used at the discretion of the earner. A leadership role comparable to that of older women exists traditionally for the male members of the family. The maternal uncle (the brother of one's mother) holds the status of *mamak* and has a special responsibility towards the children of his sisters. His own children are part of their mother's (his wife's) family, and the responsibilities of a father in traditional Minangkabau society tend to be less significant than those of the maternal uncle.

Extended families in a given location, as defined by descent from a common female ancestor, tend to be related through marriage or descent at some distant point in the past. In many cases, these past connections are obscure and have never been recorded, except in the understanding of members of the generation in question. Social relationships and obligations are very important, and people do tend to respect and understand the network of connections relevant to their own age and status. Traditionally, these networks were reinforced from generation to generation by specific types of desirable marriage. One of the most prominent of these was a match between the son or daughter of the *mamak* to the daughter or son of one of his sisters. The individuals involved belong to different families (making the marriage acceptable by traditional social rules) but has the advantage of keeping wealth within the extended family and concentrating the power that such wealth brings in the traditional context. There is some evidence to suggest that marriages of this kind are considerably less frequent than in the past because young people have wider circles of acquaintances and often meet people they wish to marry in the mixed community of universities or in other parts of Indonesia where they live and work. The problems associated with this type of cousin marriage were a common theme of early Indonesian literature by Minangkabau writers.

*Marantau*, a period of temporary migration, was an important feature of Minangkabau society in the past. Young men would typically leave



their village of origin to live and work in another location for a period of time before, ideally, returning home to settle. In practice, however, many of these migrants stayed permanently in other parts of Indonesia and the larger Malay world, forming large Minangkabau communities in the neighbouring provinces of Riau, Jambi, and Bengkulu; in Jakarta and other large Indonesian cities; in Negeri Sembilan in Malaysia; and very recently in Sydney and Melbourne, Australia. The pull of the *rantau*, the destination of such migrants, has always been very strong, and the members of the Valley family described above are part of the large population of Minangkabau who choose to live outside of West Sumatra. Opportunities have historically been limited in West Sumatra, and life within the extended family can be restrictive.

There is evidence that the practice of *marantau* is very old. It is embodied in traditional expressions and proverbs and also defines the spatial divisions of the Minangkabau environment. Legend holds that all Minangkabau originated in the central highland regions of the area that is now West Sumatra. This occurred in the distant past, and, in theory, all Minangkabau can trace their origins to one of three original areas, referred to as *luhak*, that now make up the modern regions of Tanah Datar, Agam, and Lima Puluh Kota. There is some evidence that Tanah Datar is the oldest of the three because its traditional epithet is *luhak nan tuo*, the old or original region. By contrast, Agam is called *luhak nan tanang*, the tranquil region, and Lima Puluh Kota is *luhak nan bonsu*, the youngest region. Historically, every place else, including other areas that are now part of West Sumatra and are inhabited almost entirely by Minangkabau, was considered the *rantau*. This includes Padang, the provincial capital of West Sumatra, the coastal regions of Pasaman, Pariaman and Pesisir Selatan and other parts of the province. In most people's current conceptualization of place, however, the *rantau* is every place outside of West Sumatra and, at a more personal level, any place that is not the location a person was raised. In modern times, both men and women go to the *rantau*, typically to pursue educational opportunities or to work, and the idea that they should return to live in their place of origin seems to have faded in importance. In fact, the *rantau* communities of Minangkabau in Jakarta and elsewhere are permanently established, and most people in West Sumatra have relatives living outside the province in various parts of Indonesia.

While some observers believe it is in decline, the traditional matrilineal social structure is central to understanding the experience of the

Minangkabau elderly. In the past, most Minangkabau spent their whole lives in the village where they were born or in a nearby location. At least some of the people who went to the *rantau* did return and settled near their extended family. A majority of people lived in multifamily homes that were occupied by a female ancestor, her daughters, and their children. This remained common until fairly recently, and the older members of the family described above grew up in this kind of environment. In the past, Minangkabau society, especially in the villages, was segregated by gender. Women and their daughters, having the right to use and manage family property, lived permanently in the family home. Men, as permanent members of their mother's family, would spend the nights at their wife's house but might work on their mother's family land during the day and retained rights and responsibilities towards their own extended family, as *mamak* or in other ways. While girls learned from a young age how to manage rice fields and other productive assets, boys would be socialized into the world of men, which existed largely outside of the family home. An important institution in this context was the *surau*, or prayer house, where boys and teenagers would spend the nights with other boys and unmarried men. The *surau* were important centres for studying religion, martial arts, and other aspects of the traditional context that applied to men. Despite the apparent contradiction with the matrilineal social structure, the Minangkabau are Muslim, and adherence to Islam is considered a central aspect of membership in the ethnic group. This is comparable to all the ethnic groups that make up the Malay world (Lian 2001), and religious principles that come from Islam are important in forming the value system of the region.

Under this traditional system, the elderly had a permanent place within the extended family, at least in theory. Elderly women would live out their lives in the village of their birth and often in the same house their mother and grandmother had lived in. Having been trained from an early age in the agricultural work that provided a livelihood for everyone in the family and village and understanding the intricacies of managing family property, they would gradually progress to a position of authority in the extended family, although their exact role would be determined by the number of women of a comparable age and the assets of their family. As they aged, if they became ill or required support, it would be provided by their own daughters and granddaughters, as their position within the household was assured and was held for life. For men, the situation was somewhat

different. In Minangkabau communities, almost everyone marries. For men, this meant a move from the household of their mother to their wife's home. The son-in-law was traditionally viewed as an honoured guest in his wife's house referred to as *urang sumando*. He was entitled to eat and sleep in his wife's family home but typically maintained extensive interaction with his own family and especially his sisters and their children. If he died before his wife while he was living in her house, his body would be returned to his family to be buried among their members. A man who outlived his wife, however, had no more claim on his wife's family and was expected to return to his own family. In practice, this usually consisted of his sisters who had a traditional obligation to take him in. His position with his mother's family was assured, and men in these circumstances were entitled to return to the household in which they had grown up. If the man had children, they would live with their mother's family where their father could visit them but not stay overnight. They would also be allowed to visit him and possibly spend the night if the families agreed. The same situation would follow divorce for both men and women. For women, there would be little impact on their circumstances as the divorced husband would have to return to his family. For men, divorce would mean a move back to his mother's home and life among his sisters and their families. Children would live with their mother and her family, and the arrangements for a divorced man to see his children might be more complicated than in the case of a widower.

Minangkabau are proud of the fact that their traditional system provides for all its members and especially prevents the possibility of women and children suffering deprivation as a consequence of death, divorce, or abandonment by their husband and father. In practice, however, there were many things that could go wrong with the traditional system. A family might have no daughters. Its assets might be inadequate to support its members, perhaps because there were a large number of female members. It might not be possible to reach consensus about how to use the assets it did have. Quarrels and feuds might develop between members. All of these eventualities were common in the traditional context and remain common today. In the modern context, however, many individuals have additional resources that were not common in the past. Even in rural areas, many people have salaried jobs in the modern Indonesian system that supplement income from family property. Schools, health centres, and village level administrative offices extend even to the most rural areas. A large number

of people are employed in stores, restaurants, and banks in large and small towns. A significant number of people have their own businesses, some of which are very small and amount to little more than selling groceries from their house. Nonetheless, increasing levels of education and an extension of opportunities that are part of the modern Indonesian experience along with rising income have meant that fewer people live in multigeneration homes with members of the matrilineal family, and the nuclear family setting that is the norm in modern Indonesia is dominant, especially in Padang and the larger towns. Even in the villages, many people have built their own single-family dwellings on land belonging to their extended family such that they are living separately but adjacent to other members of the group. This allows some of the conflict inherent in the traditional system to be avoided and has resulted in a more important role for men in relation to their own children, as opposed to the children of their sisters.

This change has been very rapid. Indonesia gained independence in 1945 and immediately began to modernize under its first president, Soekarno, who held power from 1945 to 1965. Development was the primary aim of President Soeharto who governed Indonesia from 1965 to 1998. It was during this period, referred to as the New Order, that many parts of West Sumatra, and the rest of Indonesia, got electricity for the first time. A large number of schools, health care centres, and infrastructure were constructed as well that brought the institutions of the modern Indonesian nation into remote areas. Social change accelerated following the end of the New Order and gained enormous momentum in 2001 with the establishment of regional autonomy that gave unprecedented levels of authority to the local governments of regions and municipalities. The change over the past six decades has proven to be a challenge for the matrilineal system of the Minangkabau.

Nonetheless, values and traditions tend to change more slowly than behaviour and social practices (Inglehart and Baker 2000). The basic principles that governed the matrilineal system in the past remain an important force in forming the perceptions and attitudes of the Minangkabau. The Minangkabau themselves, and also other Indonesians who view their society from a distance, feel that *adaik* (*adat* in Indonesian), traditional law and customs, continues to play an important part in their society, their identity, and that they are still bound by many of their traditional values and considerations.

## MINANGKABAU VALUES AND OLDER ADULTS

The values and perceptions of a given society are difficult to discern, but one method for identifying the kinds of ideas that are traditionally considered important by a majority of the members of a community is through the study of proverbs and other customary expressions that are metaphorical and fixed in form. It is important to note that these expressions typically reflect an ideal, the way things should be, rather than the way they are. In other words, proverbs and other similar utterances offer insight into a specific reality that exists to guide the actions and thinking of residents of the real world (see Fanany and Fanany 2003, for a discussion of proverbial reality in Minangkabau). The values of the proverbial world may be more aspirational than actual but they do reflect the concepts that are viewed as sufficiently important as to have been retained over a long period of time. As a result, proverbs often make use of archaic language and use surface imagery that derives from a long-gone traditional environment. Their underlying meaning, or the way in which native speakers of the language in which they occur understand them, though, reflects ideas that are still seen as having value for current society. Throughout the chapters of this book, proverbs will occasionally be used to illustrate traditional thinking in the Minangkabau community.

In order to better understand the traditional position of the elderly in Minangkabau society, or at least the position they might ideally enjoy, it is worth considering some of the large number of proverbs and proverbial expressions that deal with older members of society. These items exist in the Minang language, are well known to current members of the community, and are typically highly metaphorical. They represent a subsection of all such expressions that deal with virtually every aspect of Minangkabau life and human experience. There are two aspects of such expressions that can provide insight into the way a modern society views an issue of interest, in this case the position of the elderly. The first of these is the surface meaning of the proverb or proverbial expression. The surface meaning relates to the words that make up the utterance and the image they convey. The second aspect is the underlying meaning, or metaphorical intent, of the item. Proverbs and similar expressions are not meant to be understood literally. Their appropriate context of use and the situations which they are understood by users to apply to are part of the language and culture of the speakers of the language; it is this underlying meaning that makes

proverbs and proverbial expressions seem out-of-context in relation to the discourse in which they occur if only their surface structure is considered.

A number of proverbs and proverbial phrases in Minang relate to the physical decline that often accompanies increasing age. These changes include decreased sensory ability, difficulties in balance and movement, loss of teeth, greying hair, and other physical and mental attributes associated with older age. Some examples include:

*Urang tuo indak amuah duo kali kailangan tungkek.*  
An old person won't lose his stick twice.

While this proverb is used to mean "Once burned, twice shy", its surface image is of an elderly person who needs to use a cane for support.

*Rawan murah, garaman abih.*  
Cartilage is cheap, but your molars are gone.

This proverb suggests that opportunity comes at times when it is not possible to take advantage of it and reflects a common circumstance that is often observed in life. The surface image, however, refers to an old person who has lost enough teeth to make it difficult to chew.

Other expressions refer to the nature of personality in old age, specifically to the fact that many older people believe that their ways and opinions are correct and appropriate, regardless of evidence to the contrary.

*Dek ketek taanjo-anjo, lah gadang tabao-bao, lah tuo tarubah tido, sampai mati jadi parangai.*

If they're spoiled when they're little, they'll carry it along when they're grown, it will be unchangeable when they're old, and it will remain their character until they die.

This item means "Spare the rod and spoil the child". It warns of the consequences of allowing children to do whatever they want. Its image, however, reflects a commonly observed characteristic of the elderly, namely that they are set in their ways and cannot (or will not) change, even if it would be beneficial to do so. Another item has much the same meaning.

*Tabiaik pantang tarubah, biaso jadi parangai, lah tuo jadi pakaian.*

Character doesn't change; a habit becomes nature and, when you're old, it becomes your clothing.

Another well-known utterance comments on the fact that the behaviour of the elderly can be erratic and even wilful and may well become more extreme as they age. In particular, it may be used to refer to the fact that older people can become childish in their demands and behaviour and be very difficult to deal with for that reason. The image is of the *keladi*, a plant of the *Araceae* family, that grows very prolifically in Southeast Asia and spreads over time to form large clumps or patches. It is distinguished by its heart-shaped leaves. This rhyming proverb is well known throughout the Malay world and occurs in Malay as well as in Minang.

*Tuo-tuo kaladi, makin tuo makin manjadi.*

(They) age like the *keladi*, the older they get, the more extreme they become.

A number of other items, however, note the importance of older people to the functioning of the community and as sources of knowledge and experience. The following expression, which is more properly termed an aphorism than a proverb because it is not metaphorical, reminds hearers of the accumulated wisdom of the elderly that has contributed to the formation of traditional law and customs (*adaik* in Minang).

*Tiok nagari basuku-suku, nan suku babuah paruik, kato adaik mangko baitu, urang tuo lah lamo hiduik.*

Every region has its clans, the clans consist of extended families, adat is the way it is because the elderly have lived a long time.

Another utterance that uses a similar structure reminds the hearer of the importance of taking responsibility for his or her actions and also of following advice.

*Talangkah suruik, sasek kumbali, baitu faham handaknyo; kato rang tuo indak dituruik, binaso badan kasudahannyo.*

If you take a wrong step, turn back; if you become lost, return the way you came; if you don't follow what our elders have told you, you will end in disaster.

Still other expressions describe the appropriate position of the elderly in traditional society. Utterances of this kind include:

*Nan tuo dihormati, nan ketek disayangi, samo gadang dibao bakawan.*

The old should be respected, the young should be treated with affection, those of the same age should be made into friends.

*Elok nagari dek pangulu, elok kampung dek nan tuo, elok musajik dek tuanku, elok tapian dek nan mudo.*

The region is good because of its leaders; the village is good because of the old people; the mosque is good because of the religious scholars; the bathing place is good because of the young.

This last utterance sometimes occurs in a longer form which mentions additional institutions and the people associated with them. It suggests that the quality of the structures of traditional society depends on the quality of the people who use them. Old people, in this view, hold the village together and are its mainstay because they represent the oldest generation of the families that live there and are the ones most familiar with the traditions and rhythms of life in the community. This status comes with its own responsibilities and difficulties however. One of these is the need for older people to accept and put up with the activities of the young and their way of life. This is also expressed traditionally in an utterance that compares the emotional state of these two groups:

*Adaik mudo mananguang rindu; adaik tuo manahan ragam.*

The young must bear their longing; the elderly must endure.

## **OLDER MINANGKABAU AND SOCIAL CHANGE**

In West Sumatra as well as in the rest of Indonesia, there is a great deal for the elderly to endure as society has changed enormously over the course of their life. The pace of change has been very rapid since Indonesia gained independence from the Netherlands in 1945 and picked up even greater speed since the end of the New Order government in 1998. This, followed closely by regional autonomy which took effect in 2001, has had a major impact on the way of life of all Indonesians. Economic growth has been strong since the end of the Asian financial crisis of 1997–98. By 2006,



Indonesia had a 2 per cent surplus in GDP (compared to a deficit of 3 per cent in 1996) (*The Economist* 2007). Growth of 5.1 per cent was achieved, with 5.3 per cent predicted for 2018 (World Bank 2017).

The strength of the economy has led to the development of a substantial middle class whose interests and activities parallel those of similar demographics around the world. A recent study by the Boston Consulting Group reports that there are some 74 million middle-class and affluent consumers in Indonesia whose ranks are expected to double in size by 2020 (Rastogi et al. 2014). Overwhelmingly, this growing middle class is interested in pursuing a modern lifestyle and participating in global trends. This is perhaps best reflected in the incredible take up of smart technologies and use of social media. Indonesia is the third largest user of Facebook and has more Twitter users than any other nation in the world, with 79 per cent of the population using social media in some form (Vaswani 2012). The negative impact of these trends on the maintenance of traditional culture has been noted as a serious concern by Indonesian scholars as well as members of the media and the public (see, for example, Muktiyo 2010; Jati 2012).

Of course, the rapid pace of change has serious implications for all of Indonesia's local cultures. Its impact on the Minangkabau is of particular interest, however, because of the nature of this cultural community. As discussed above, the Minangkabau are the only matrilineal culture that currently exists in Indonesia and is fairly large. Some 6 million people of Minangkabau origin live in the Indonesian province of West Sumatra with a similar number estimated to live permanently in other parts of Indonesia, especially in large cities like Jakarta and in the provinces of Sumatra that neighbour their region of origin (BPS Sumatera Barat 2016*e*). As a result of generations of *marantau*, members of the Minangkabau population have experienced many of the demographic and social trends that have shaped modern Indonesia, including domestic migration, urbanization, tension between traditional ethnic identity and national identity as Indonesians, adaptation to a multilingual and multicultural context, an ageing population, and issues of cultural consonance — the extent to which a person's experiences accord with his or her expectations. Their experience mirrors that of many other Indonesian ethnic groups, as well as people across Southeast Asia and other parts of the developing world. The Minangkabau population is of special interest, however, because their linguistic and cultural pride is high (Lewis et al. 2016) and, despite being

highly integrated into Indonesian society, has been quite resistant to change. As a result, the impact of social, economic, political, and cultural shifts on the community has been especially visible. Additionally, awareness of the competing forces of tradition and modernization has long been present in Minangkabau society and was the subject of a number of classic novels from the early twentieth century by writers from this background as well as some modern literature from the region. The need to change and adapt to the social and cultural environment has been especially problematic because *adat* has been perceived as being able to withstand all tests of time. A proverb holds that: *Adaik indak lakang dek paneh, indak lapuak dek ujan* (*Adat* will not warp in the sun nor rot in the rain). Many observers feel that this is increasingly not the case, and the traditions of Minangkabau society now face challenges that can no longer be withstood. These changes have had a very significant impact on the experience of the current elderly who have seen the transition from a traditional to a modern society within the course of their own lives.

## THE NATURE OF THIS BOOK

This book contains eleven chapters that describe the experience of ageing in modern Minangkabau society. Its aim is to provide a window into the experience of ageing among the members of one Indonesian ethnic community that is at the forefront of social change with the understanding that this will offer insight into similar forces that are being experienced all around the country by older individuals of all backgrounds and cultural origins. This, in turn, will allow for a better understanding of the needs of older Indonesians in the modern context and will support the development of more effective social policy, the provision of more innovative health and social services, and will suggest ways of addressing growing psychosocial problems experienced by older adults living in various environments.

The book's content is based on a long-term research project conducted over five years in the heartland of West Sumatra that represents the original Minangkabau homeland; in the city of Padang, the capital of West Sumatra, which was originally an area of migration but is now considered to be part of the Minangkabau world; and in the *rantau*, areas like Jakarta and other large Indonesian cities on the island of Java and in eastern Indonesia where significant Minangkabau communities exist but, while long established, are of more recent origin. Having interviewed a large number of older

individuals and their family members in depth about their experiences and current situation, we focus on the ways in which individuals of Minangkabau background, who are now more than sixty years old, see themselves and their families in the context of modern Indonesia and the extent to which these perceptions replicate the situation they observed among their parents and grandparents. We are especially interested in these issues of cultural consonance in the context of a variety of social factors that characterize the modern Indonesian experience, such as language and religious issues, but also the nature of the living environment and interactions with family members and members of the wider public. An understanding of the experience of the elderly is particularly important now as the Indonesian population is ageing rapidly and more than 14 per cent of the population of West Sumatra itself is currently over sixty (BKKBN 2011a).

The picture of the experience of ageing in the Minangkabau community presented here is based on dozens of interviews with older members of this ethnic group who live in different Indonesian environments and whose life experiences span a large number of social contexts. In addition, the experiences of the members of a single, extended family are presented as case studies throughout the book to illustrate in greater detail the kinds of change individuals in this age group have faced and the ways it has affected their life course. These middle-aged and older people were interviewed repeatedly over the course of our study, and we also spent time with them among their family members and in the course of their daily activities. Their stories are complemented by several others of non-family members in order to illustrate the new social phenomena that affect older people, such as life in an institution for the elderly. The names and, in some cases, the exact place of residence of these older people, as well as the name of the village where the Valley family originates, have been changed to ensure their privacy, but their stories are accurate and they shared them willingly, and many times enthusiastically, as way of allowing others to understand their experiences and perceptions as members of the Minangkabau community and also as Indonesians.

## THE VILLAGE TODAY

Mid-afternoon in the village of Koto seems unusually quiet. The sun is shining brightly, and everything is very green and fresh in the village

where the Valley family comes from. However, no one is walking along the paths, and there are no children playing in front of the houses. This is a very different scene from just twenty years ago when there were many more people in Koto, and a large number of them were children and teenagers. Today, many of the people in the village are middle aged or elderly, and those that are not often have a reason or personal characteristic that has prevented them from leaving. Two of the younger members of the Valley family who are still in the village fall into this category. One has been disabled since childhood and, outside of a short time at a training programme for people with handicaps in another city, has always lived with her mother, who is the oldest member of the family still in their village of origin. The other is the thirty-year-old daughter of a member of the middle generation. She is viewed as “simple” and is felt to be unable to take care of herself. She lives with her mother, a retired school teacher, and interacts mostly with the few other family members still living there. One male member of the extended family is present. He is a grandson of Aminah and the brother of several of the people who were at the dinner in Jakarta described above. He spent some time working in other parts of Indonesia and then returned to the village where he lives with his wife at her family’s house. The spread of the family across Indonesia is the subject of conversation this afternoon. This was triggered by a piece of news that came by SMS advising the family in Koto that one of the grandchildren was getting married. The younger members of the family who are present on this afternoon are impressed by how quiet things have become. However, Maryati, their great aunt who is the youngest daughter of Aminah from whom the family descends, sees things differently. “The family has expanded”, she notes with pride. As a very old woman, she remembers how things used to be and can make comparisons that perhaps the others can’t.