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TOGETHERNESS: LANGUAGE, RELATIONALITY, AND THE POLITICS OF EXCHANGE IN KUPANG, EASTERN INDONESIA

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the politics of relationality and its mediation through the exchange of language, debt, and other semiotic modalities of interaction in Kupang, an eastern Indonesian locale. In analyzing relationality, I argue that notions of *kebersamaan* (literally, togetherness), constitute recursive forms of encompassment that organize and mediate social differences among participants of social interactions. Through social interactions that invoke kebersamaan, Kupang residents enact their sense of belonging to the Indonesian nation-state while also claiming that they are different from other Indonesians. Overall, my findings suggest that kebersamaan justifies and motivates forms of exchange that undergird social difference and political agency. In the two constitutive parts of this dissertation, I ask how enactments of kebersamaan shape two interrelated domains of social interaction: (1) local belonging and the encompassing effects of the nation as invoked in linguistic forms deployed during worship meetings at a congregation of the *Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor* (GMIT), a mainline Protestant church, and (2) gendered forms of inequality as instantiated in the exchange of resources among kin and in local networks of *koperasi*s—cooperatively owned women's microcredit associations.

Keywords: Christianity; debt; encompassment; exchange; gender; Indonesia; language; NGOs; relationality.

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Where contrasts between standard Indonesian and bahasa Kupang are salient, BI indicates standard Indonesian and BK indicates bahasa Kupang.

[] brackets are added to improve the grammatical flow and tone of English glosses.

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Introduction: Speech, Relationality, and Encompassment

As I was about to conduct a year of dissertation fieldwork, I participated in a discussion with staffers of an Indonesian women's rights NGO in Java on what makes my field site, Kupang, a locale in southeastern Indonesia, distinctive. When I described my own research interests in the relationship between language, politics, and gender, the staffers of SKT, the women's rights NGO, enthusiastically responded to my inquiries.[1] According to Kardinah, the executive director of SKT, women in Kupang speak Indonesian—the state's official language—in an "orderly" (*runut*) manner, unlike her fellow ethnic Javanese (including me), whom she jokingly described as speakers of "jumbled up" (*belepotan*) Indonesian. Furthermore, according to her, women in Kupang, who are mostly Christians, are accustomed to leading worship meetings (*pimpin ibadah*) in formal Indonesian regardless of their socioeconomic status or educational background, thereby providing them with a type of linguistic fluency that is rare among women elsewhere in Indonesia, a Muslim-majority country.[2] This conversation intrigued me, and, after a year of ethnographic fieldwork, my observations of the relationship between local practices of speaking and Kupang-area women's organizations confirmed Kardinah's comment. Thus, this dissertation attempts to explain how, despite their location in Indonesia's geographical and economic margins and, perhaps *because* of the religious marginalization, women in Kupang become seen—for example, by local and national NGOs—as exemplary speakers of Indonesian,

[1] To protect the privacy of my interlocutors, the names of organizations and individuals in this dissertation are pseudonyms.

[2] While (Protestant) Christian forms of worship expect both worship leaders and participants to use standard Indonesian without hesitations and infelicities, everyday rituals of worship among Indonesian Muslims use standard Indonesian to a far lesser extent.

and, as a corollary, what the political and economic consequences of these roles of speakerhood are.

In the same conversation, Kardinah's colleagues also explained to me that women's groups in Kupang are different from their counterparts elsewhere in Indonesia. While SKT has worked with women's groups in other parts of Indonesia that adopt rights-focused "feminist perspectives" (*perspektif feminis*) without much attention to women's financial well-being, Kupang-area women's groups have also successfully created a network of microcredit associations (*koperasi*) that disburse loans on a rotating basis—loans that are often crucial for low-income households. Thus, in the months and years that followed this conversation, my dissertation research has focused on the relationship between roles of speakerhood and women's involvement in microcredit associations—a relationship that I analyze as the *politics of exchange*. As an analytical frame, the *politics of exchange* builds on a local concept, *kebersamaan* (literally, "togetherness").[3] *Kebersamaan*, as we see in the chapters that follow, is a cultural concept in Kupang that denotes a form of relationality enacted by the continuation (or discontinuation) of exchange. Such exchange—of signs, words, gifts, commodities—have sociopolitical dimensions, of which *kebersamaan* is a part but is not the whole. Hence, "togetherness" (or the lack thereof) encompasses the politics of how and when and with whom exchange unfolds (or does not). Although past studies of eastern Indonesia and the southwestern Pacific have documented longstanding reciprocal exchanges through gifting and marriage across kin groups (e.g., Fox 1980; McKinnon 1991; Munn 1992; Needham 1974; Valeri 1994; Strathern 1988; Weiner 1976; van Wouden 1968), my dissertation argues that practices of reciprocal

[3] The word kebersamaan is found in both standard Indonesian and bahasa Kupang. Throughout this dissertation, when contrasts between standard Indonesian and bahasa Kupang are salient, I will indicate Indonesian with BI and bahasa Kupang with BK.

exchange extend to present-day state-sanctioned institutions, including church congregations and microcredit associations. Further, it emphasizes that exchange is something done not only with things, but also with words (Ball 2011).

The relationship between kebersamaan and the local politics of exchange is crucial, as my interlocutors often mention kebersamaan as an ideal that explains how and why they share collective resources. For instance, according to Sunny, the leader of a women's microcredit association in Kupang, a strong sense of kebersamaan mobilizes women to quickly pool money to assist a fellow association member who is sick, even when most members of her association are of modest means. Furthermore, throughout my fieldwork, I have observed how kebersamaan mobilizes forms of reciprocity: for example, neighbors assist each other with funeral expenses in the name of kebersamaan, as they anticipate that they too, one day, will face the inevitability of having to host a costly funeral feast for a family member. In other words, this dissertation shows that kebersamaan encompasses forms of relationality activated through reciprocal obligations of exchange.

As a concept that grounds local forms of relationality, kebersamaan, or togetherness, also illuminates how women's participation in church congregations and microcredit associations is mediated by common ideals of speakerhood that my interlocutors refer to in bahasa Kupang as *omong bae* (lit., "to speak well"). While the church congregation and microcredit associations that form the two main sites of my ethnographic research might seem to be disparate entities, these two sites cannot be separated out into discrete institutions. Rather, in the rural and periurban communities of Kupang, the same women perform roles of leadership in church congregations and participate as members of microcredit associations—roles that are

accomplished through, among others, forms of speaking. As I will explain in this dissertation, institutions like these become recognized as morally sanctioned social collectives when participants consider them to be exemplars of kebersamaan—a social ideal that is accomplished through efficacious forms of speakerhood.

For women in particular, processes of socialization into speakerhood under an institutional rubric takes place in worship meetings of the Evangelical Christian Church of Timor (GMIT), a mainline Protestant denomination where more than eighty percent of Kupang residents are congregants. GMIT congregants, furthermore, often explain to me that they aspire to model togetherness, kebersamaan, in other domains of their lives according to the ideals of kebersamaan that they encounter at church. Here, church activity and microcredit associations are linked precisely because registers of speech, and culturally enregistered roles of speaking, *emanate* from one locale to the other: in creating these discursive linkages, processes of emanation occur as persons leverage modes of speaking and being in the world across socio-spatiotemporal contexts (Silverstein 2013). The cultural value that serves to enable that movement, and to legitimize their voices, is kebersamaan, "togetherness."

Beyond Christian ideals as such, my interlocutors describe church-inflected forms of speaking as exemplars of morally authoritative forms of speakerhood—a form of authority that is shaped by the GMIT Church's rise as a politically authoritative institution in Kupang and its surrounding districts (*kabupaten*) since the late 1960s. In particular, GMIT congregants have described the church to me as a place where they first learn about how to speak in public with confidence. As participants and leaders in church congregations alongside men, women in Kupang are socialized into genres of public speaking that incorporate both *bahasa tinggi*, a

churchly register of standard Indonesian, and *bahasa Kupang*, a local variety of Malay that indexes local multiethnic belonging. I argue that, when conducted successfully, these genres of speaking invoke *kebersamaan*, togetherness, as a form of relationality that addresses fellow worship participants as moral congregants at church and in their communities.

As gendered ideologies of speakerhood in the church valorize women as speakers of Indonesian, women have assumed leadership positions throughout the GMIT: by now, most ordained ministers in the GMIT church are women, and women's presence are even more pronounced in the membership of church boards (*majelis*) that govern individual GMIT congregations. Women's predominance in the leadership of the GMIT church stand in contrast to men's predominance in the leadership of religious organizations—Christian and otherwise—in Indonesia.[4] Furthermore, because leadership in the GMIT church and other mainline Protestant denominations emphasize skillfulness in speaking in Indonesian as well as in the local language(s) that congregants speak, participation in the church is key in establishing one's ability as a speaker—a skill that my interlocutors describe as *omong bae*, "to speak well." In my field site, women's skillfulness in genres of speech that simultaneously involve Indonesian and local languages (e.g., bahasa Kupang) stand in contrast to genres of speech associated with men, which tend to emphasize men's links to ethnolinguistically emblematic, customary forms of ritual speech—a category that Kupang residents refer to as *omong adat*, "customary speaking" (see also Kuipers 1986; 1998). In particular, I ask how forms of speaking that are associated with congregational life morally authorize women to become participants in the exchange of debt in

[4] Women constitute the majority of ordained ministers in at least two mainline Protestant denominations in Indonesia: the GMIT in the province of NTT and the *Gereja Masehi Injili di Minahasa* (GMIM) in northern Sulawesi.

microcredit associations—an exchange that also involves genres of speech intended to invoke kebersamaan, togetherness, of association members.

Overall, this dissertation examines the politics of relationality and its mediation through the exchange of language, debt, and other semiotic modalities of interaction. I argue that, while relationality is often idealized as a form of solidarity that my interlocutors invoke as *kebersamaan* (togetherness), these forms of relationality can also be coercive, and they also reproduce forms of inequality. In analyzing relationality, I emphasize that kebersamaan constitutes recursive forms of *encompassment* that organize and mediate social differences among participants of social interactions (Gal and Irvine 2019a). As a form of encompassment across axes of difference, kebersamaan constitutes how Kupang residents define themselves in relation to a constitutive Other, which often takes the shape of an imagined Java. For instance, Kupang residents typify themselves as Christians in contrast to the predominantly Muslim Javanese (see Chapter 1), and they also typify themselves as political and economically marginal in contrast to other Indonesian ethnic groups, including the Javanese, that are associated with trading (see also Chapter 4). At the same time, these oppositions between Kupang and the rest of Inodnesia are not absolute: during social interactions, Kupang residents also index forms mutual belonging that serve as overarching or encompassing enactments of Indonesian-ness—an authoritative source of social and political legitimacy. For instance, Kupang residents also speak standard Indonesian as bahasa tinggi during church worship to inhabit roles that emplace them as Christian Indonesians (see Chapter 2), and they also invoke households as a social unit that makes their livelihoods recognizable to Indonesian state policies on gender and familial life (see Chapter 3). Taken together, these enactments that situate Kupang as a distinct yet constitutive

entity within Indonesia—an encompassing category—emphasize how social interactions invoke political cosmologies that emplace Kupang within translocal relationships of power.

As I will show in this dissertation, I situate the *politics of exchange* not as an analytic that treats social processes in my field site as bounded processes that exemplify kebersamaan (togetherness); rather, it showcases how enactments of kebersamaan are situated in translocal political and economic processes that both fall short of and exceed the state, the church, and other institutionalized apparatuses of governance. To illustrate these processes, the rest of this introductory chapter will proceed by describing the following aspects of my dissertation: (1) an overview of the field site and research questions posed in this dissertation; (2) the conceptual contributions of this dissertation to three intersecting bodies of literature in anthropology; (3) a historical background of social processes that shape Kupang as a site of ethnographic fieldwork; (4) the research methodologies employed by this dissertation; and (5) an outline of the four substantive chapters of this dissertation.

Field Site and Research Questions

Located in Indonesia's southeastern corner, bordering the independent nation of East Timor, the province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT), where Kupang is located, is known for its arid climate and relative remoteness from Indonesia's center of economic development, which gravitates towards the western major islands of Java and Sumatra (see Figure 0.1). At the time of my research in 2018, the population of this region stood at 423,800 in the municipality of Kupang (*Kota Kupang*) and at 348,480 in the rural district of Kupang (*Kabupaten Kupang*)—more than 10 percent of the province's total population of 5.371 million people (*Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Timur Dalam Angka 2019* 2019). Nevertheless, among Indonesia's 38 provinces,

NTT's official poverty rate is the nation's third highest at 24 percent in 2019 (*Penghitungan Dan Analisis Kemiskinan Makro Indonesia Tahun 2019* 2019). This consistently cited statistic has inspired Kupang residents to humorously explain their own province's acronym "NTT" as *Nanti Tuhan Tolong*, "God will help us at some point." Furthermore, in the absence of commoditized natural resources, such as timber or fossil fuels, that facilitate extractive projects elsewhere in Indonesia, Kupang's political and economic vitality depends heavily on state bureaucracies that are funded by the Dutch colonial government and, later, the Indonesian state (Tidey 2022; van Klinken 2014; see also Vel 2008).

Figure 0.1. Map of Indonesia, with the Province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) circled in red by author. SOURCE: United States Central Intelligence Agency. *Indonesia*. [Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 2002] Map. https://www.loc.gov/item/2002625527/ (March 3, 2023).

Throughout my fieldwork, persons and institutions that express affinity to emblems of the Indonesian state, such as those who work for or with the civil service, are recognized as those who embody economic and social prestige. Kupang residents who host wedding or funeral feast, for instance, normatively invite a local state representative, such as a village chief (*kepala desa*),

to attend and deliver a speech at their festivity. Thus, it is perhaps for this reason that Kupang residents often invoke nationalist sentiment and stress their belonging to the Indonesian nation. Nevertheless, this dissertation emphasizes that Kupang residents do not simply enact national sentiments for strategic reasons; rather, as they situate themselves in national political cosmologies, Kupang residents incorporate signs of national belonging such as tokens of the Indonesian language or the institutional form of the microcredit association (*koperasi*), in local systems of exchange (see Rutherford 2003). Such signs of the nation are signs of alterity, indexing that Kupang residents associate with "outsiders" (*orang luar*), and thus, *are* part of the nation, even if they are peripheral and marginal—that is, *separate*.

By the same token, then, while Kupang residents claim perduring relations to the Indonesian state, they also simultaneously maintain their own separateness from the state's exemplary models of national political belonging. For instance, the ubiquitous presence of standard Indonesian throughout church worship is not uniformly valued by my interlocutors, who expect that worship leaders ask questions and respond *not* in standard Indonesian (the language of the state, of the nation, of the not-here in which we also participate), but in bahasa Kupang, the local language, the language of here-and-us and *not* there-and-them (see Chapter 2). Thus, forms of social relationships enacted by my interlocutors do not uniformly accept or valorize the state's normative models of national political belonging; rather, the ethnographic examples I chose highlights how these models are contested and appropriated.

Kupang's complex relationship to the state in the present is mediated by both colonial missionary legacies and the Indonesian state's current policies on religion, which have resulted in a population in the rural district of Kupang that is almost 85 percent (Protestant) Christian and,

in the municipality of Kupang, 70 percent (Protestant) Christian.[5] This is a stark contrast to 86 percent of Indonesia's populace who profess Islam as their religion (*Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Timur Dalam Angka 2019* 2019, 288). Nevertheless, as I show in this dissertation, Kupang residents' claim to Christianity—otherwise figurable as a form of national difference and alterity—forms a fundamental part of their own relationship to the state's model of *agama*, the moral schema of national belonging through religion (see Chapter 1). In turn, the state's model of agama constitutes a normative model of national belonging, as I will discuss in more detail below (Menchik 2014).

Since the rise of the authoritarian New Order regime (1966–98), the Indonesian government has mandated its citizens to profess a state-recognized religion, including Islam and Christianity, and initiated an aggressive campaign of nine-year mandatory schooling in the Indonesian language.[6] Furthermore, in Kupang, the church has proven to be a strong promoter of the Indonesian language as a language of worship, thereby providing avenues of socialization into standard Indonesian even for those who do not pursue higher levels of education. Thus, despite their distance from Indonesia's centers of governance and education in Java, church congregants in Kupang are among the most enthusiastic users of the Indonesian language in worship activities, impressing even other educated Indonesians, such as NGO activists from Jakarta, with their command of standard Indonesian as a language of public speaking. During church worship and at meetings of microcredit associations, women speakers become mediators of what Kupang

[5] Indonesian government statistics categorize Protestantism and Catholicism as different religions.
[6] The list of state-recognized religions has changed throughout the years; as of 2019, one can declare Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, or Confucianism on government paperwork. With some difficulty, one can also file a petition with a local state agency to be recognized as a "follower of [other] beliefs" (*penganut aliran kepercayaan*)—a category that encompasses a multitude of indigenous beliefs.

residents see as powerful signs of the Indonesian state. These acts of mediation are parallel to a social understandings of alterity and foreignness that Danilyn Rutherford observed in the Indonesian island of Biak: "they had to present their words, gestures, and objects as evidence of something other than their own intentions, and yet they had to be able to take credit for conveying them" (Rutherford 2003, 23).

In Kupang, as the power of the church and the state are both enacted in forms of speech, language and the exchange of signs of value, such as money, often go hand in hand, thereby instantiating sign-mediated contestations on which acts of exchange are performed. One way of understanding political contestations over exchange is to analyze it as an economy of representations where "words and things [ought to] be transacted together" (Keane 1997, 178). In broader terms, I take speech not only as parts of social interactions that involve the use of language, but also as parts of semiotic modalities that are taken up by participants of social interactions as meaningful and consequential sign-processes. For instance, during ritual feasts such as weddings and funerals, one encounters two modalities of Christian worship (*ibadah*): (1) a sermon *spoken* by a minister or a church elder, and (2) a donation box (*kotak sumbangan*) where congregants *deposit* proceeds for the church. While sermons are open to be heard by all, even if the message of the sermon may be opaque to hearers, the donation box, which is opaque and features a small opening at the top, allows one to insert an envelope containing cash (or just folded-up cash) without revealing the monetary amount of the donation, *even if* one is—as one must be—conspicuously seen to be so depositing.[7] At church services and funerals, where one most regularly encounters both public speaking and public giving, the act of donating money is

[7] It is considered inappropriate to openly display the amount of money that one is about to donate to a collection box. Thus, my interlocutors take this gesture seriously. My interpretation of this practice is that it prevents accusations of donating to "seek compliments" (*makan puji*; lit. "to eat praises") from others.

practically a necessity, as it reflects one's ethical obligation to *kebersamaan* (lit. "togetherness")—a form of reciprocal obligation that one co-produces with one's kin, neighbors, and interlocutors. Throughout my fieldwork, these donation boxes play an important role in mediating everyday interactions among church congregants, such that nobody participates in a church worship without a performing a highly visible act of giving money to the congregation.

As they describe these rituals of combining, sharing, and distributing collective resources, Kupang residents also often explain to me that they are proud of their sense of togetherness (*kebersamaan*) and of "living as kin" (*hidup basodara*)—sentiments that they use to differentiate themselves from other Indonesian communities that they see as being composed of "loosely tied" (*lepas lepas*) individuals who only rarely come together. For instance, Arthur, a church youth leader in a neighboring village, told me that no one in Kupang hosts a wedding or a funeral without substantial donations of money from kin and neighbors alike. According to him, these forms of financial generosity demonstrate how Kupang residents have "outsized hearts of compassion" (*punya hati kasih terlalu besar*). As Arthur explained to me, an ethnic Javanese Indonesian, this is an opposite of customs practiced in Java, where "everything is measured by money" (*semua diukur dengan uang*): that is, although money might be abundant in Java, Javanese persons sorely lack kebersamaan, because they do not share the money they earned with kin. Thus, according to Arthur, while the circulation of money supposedly alienates Javanese persons from each other, the exchange of money forms the basis of intimacy and solidarity among his own kin, who never fail to mobilize resources for one another (see also Cody 2016; Zelizer 2009). As I will show in this dissertation, the politics of these exchange practices are morally consequential, as one could be seen as unfairly taking advantage of others when one's involvement in exchange is not regarded as tokens of kebersamaan, togetherness.

By considering local forms of relationality that constitute kebersamaan, we come to see how social interaction mediates the *politics* of exchange, that is, moral contestations in the exchange of resources, linguistic or otherwise. In my analysis of exchange, I do not confine my analysis to Maussian ritual exchange of objects that derive their value from gifting, nor do I rely on assumptions of anonymous market-based transactions as the building blocks of exchange (see also Graeber 2001). Rather, as previous research in eastern Indonesia has shown, I consider how genres of socially and politically consequential speech require co-occurrences of linguistic forms with the exchange of other signs of value, such as money, jewelry, or livestock (e.g., Donzelli 2019; Keane 1997; 2007; Kuipers 1998). In response to this body of literature, this dissertation contextualizes semiotically mediated forms of exchange within the political economy of gendered inequalities (see also Strathern 1988; Weiner 1976). Specifically, it examines how the everyday workings of speech and social action in contemporary eastern Indonesia are organized and contested in relation to notions of *kebersamaan*, togetherness.

Contributions to Literature

Through an analysis of kebersamaan, togetherness, and its intersections with local politics of exchange, this dissertation synthesizes and contributes to anthropological literatures on language, politics, kinship, and gender. By analyzing language and other modalities of social interaction, I deploy semiotic approaches that investigate how forms of relationality and alterity are invoked in particular socio-spatiotemporal contexts. In analyzing relationality and alterity, I emphasize the semiotics of *encompassment* as an intervention: I ask how participants in social interaction do not simply index either "us over here" or "others over there," but also overarching forms of social organization that elide or highlight forms of difference among interacting parties and imagined others (Carr and Lempert 2016; Gal and Irvine 2019a). These forms of

encompassment, furthermore, are not simply equalizing, as they often entail forms of *hierarchic inclusion*, where an entity becomes perceived as tokens of an overarching type (Kuipers 1998).

Throughout this dissertation, the semiotic framework of encompassment is important methodologically and conceptually. Methodologically, as a researcher who is identified as a Muslim and an ethnic Javanese Indonesian during fieldwork, my position in relation to my Christian interlocutors, who are fellow Indonesians of various ethnicities from Kupang, is mediated by a shared sense of Indonesian-ness, and of being perceived as having a religion (*agama*), as overarching forms of encompassment. Thus, my interlocutors define my position in relation to others who are supposedly *without* religion, such as non-Indonesians who do not practice a religion (see Chapter 1). Conceptually, these contingent forms of encompassment through comparison and mutual exclusion have a long history in social theory: Georg Simmel, for instance, theorized how the notion of an outsider results in a unifying effect across two interacting parties (Bean 1970; Gal and Irvine 2019b, 159; Simmel 1971). Furthermore, in Evans-Pritchard's famed analysis of segmentary lineages, alliances and oppositions are determined by the relative structural position of two factions within encompassing lineages (Evans-Pritchard 1969). The dynamic and situational nature of these forms of encompassment, therefore, is not simply contained within moments of social interaction. Rather, these forms of encompassment also shape how perduring forms of mutual alignment are recognized and enacted across seemingly disparate socio-spatiotemporal contexts (see Agha 2007; Cody 2011). Thus, in the following section, I will further elaborate how this dissertation's emphasis on the semiosis of encompassment contributes to three bodies of intersecting scholarship in anthropology: (1) language and kinship; (2) language and political authority; and (3) language and the gendering of social domains, particularly in the context of women's rights NGOs.

First, relationships between language and overarching or encompassing social structures have engaged scholars who have studied kinship, marriage and forms of alliance in eastern Indonesia since the middle of the 20th century. This body of scholarship relies on what I describe as a *referential* method: a method that identified isomorphic relationships between units of discourse and units of social life (Fox 1989; Lévi-Strauss 1969; Needham 1973; van Wouden 1968). That is, such scholarly methods mapped units of discourse directly onto units of kinship, thereby giving rise to the idea of kinship as an analytical starting point into how social structures at large are reproduced (see Ball 2018). David Schneider's seminal critique, however, provided a new direction: as an object of study, kinship is inseparable from anthropology's own universalizing project of producing models that explain overarching structures of social relationships (Schneider 1984). Thus, later works on kinship, informed by theorizations of gender as a form of alterity, underscore the dynamic nature of kinship structures, thereby emphasizing the historical specificities of alliances and social status (McKinnon 1991; Traube 1986).

Beginning in the mid-1990s, scholars who contributed to new kinship studies posed new questions on how kin relations are instead mediated by the flow of "substances," such as food, across persons and households—processes of mediation that involve an exchange of signs imbued with social value (Carsten 1995; Lamb 2000; Rutherford 1998). Furthermore, more recent scholarship in kinship studies points towards questions of how relatedness—mediated by the production and circulation of resources—reproduce forms of inequality (McKinnon and Cannell 2013; Tusinski 2016). Recent studies of eastern Indonesia have also demonstrated that kin relations are not limited to forms of intimacy and immediacy: rather, kinship also encompasses understandings of how foreignness and otherness organize everyday forms of social

interaction (Rutherford 2003; Stasch 2009). Hence, rather than defining what kinship *is*, this dissertation's semiotic approach focuses on what kinship *does*: I ask how non-normative uses of kin terms, for instance, enables us to understand forms of relatedness in new institutional contexts, such as youth ministry meetings at a Kupang area Protestant church (see also Nakassis 2014). Thus, following an expanded conceptual understanding of how kin relations are mediated, this dissertation follows an approach that treats units of discourse as *indexes* that invoke particular social structures in particular spatiotemporal contexts (see Silverstein 2004).

Second, this dissertation emphasizes how forms of political authority over multiethnic relations are indexed not only by the Indonesian state's official language, standard Indonesian, but also a multitude of registers *other* than standard Indonesian. Previously, scholars have extensively analyzed how authoritarian regime of the New Order (1966–98) and its aftermath delineate ethnolinguistically emblematic languages that index a particular social group and an ethnic locale, such as "Javanese" from "Java" or "Torajans" from "Toraja" (Donzelli 2020; J. J. Errington 1998; Pemberton 1994a; Siegel 1986). Migration within Indonesia, however, has complicated these correspondences between ethnicity and language, as languages *other* than Indonesian are also used by people of various ethnicities to index local belonging: migrants from outside of Java who live in urban Java, for instance, deploy tokens of Javanese to index forms of solidarity with ethnic Javanese residents (Goebel 2010). Thus, urbanizing locales, such as Kupang, are sites that offer new insights into regimes of ethnolinguistic belonging in Indonesia and elsewhere. In particular, bahasa Kupang, a register of local belonging to the Kupang area, does not privilege any particular ethnic group as its native speakers (J. J. Errington 2014; 2022; Jacob and Grimes 2006). Thus, this dissertation argues that bahasa Kupang's simultaneous use with standard Indonesian allows speakers to invoke forms of nation-wide political authority

while maintaining their separateness from the putative political and economic center of Indonesia—the island of Java. Furthermore, analysis of indexical relationship between discourse and social structure also illuminates Kupang's position as an urbanizing multiethnic locale—an important puzzle for scholars who are interested in questions of semiotic enregisterment in relation to shifting political authorities and political cosmologies (e.g., Bate 2009; 2021; Donzelli 2019; Jackson 2013; Mitchell 2009; Woolard 2016).

This dissertation argues that forms of political authority are not simply mappable onto particular genres of speech; rather, they are enacted and invoked by roles of speakerhood—a dynamic form of alignment or stance-taking during social interaction (Goffman 1981; Irvine 1996). By understanding these interactional alignments, this dissertation analyzes how speakers mediate multiple forms of political authority, particularly through the simultaneous deployment of standard Indonesian and bahasa Kupang. For instance, named registers of speech that are seen to represent Indonesian ethnolinguistic locales only emerge in relation to Dutch colonial and Indonesian views of speakerhood as emblems of local cultural forms (Goebel 2010; Kuipers 2008). While previous scholars have emphasized adequation—the performance of sameness—as an interactional move that accomplishes the work of mediating Indonesia's ethnolinguistic diversity (Cole 2010; Goebel 2015; see also Bucholtz and Hall 2005), I argue that, instead, these interactional moves of finding a relational common ground also perform difference-making. As Kupang residents use the Indonesian language (or other emblems of belonging to the Indonesian nation-state), they contrast themselves against other Indonesians, such as Javanese Indonesians (including myself) while invoking a common ground (see also Chapter 1). By invoking encompassment from the margins through *kebersamaan* as "togetherness-at-the-periphery,"

Kupang residents locate themselves as part of the Indonesian nation, but also assert themselves as a separate entity from the putative center of the nation in Java.

Furthermore, the contingency of encompassing social structures that are invoked during social interactions is particularly salient in Kupang, a locale that first emerged as a colonial military trading outpost, and where no single ethnolinguistic group has a straightforward claim towards the status of a primordial "native" (Hägerdal 2012; van Klinken 2014; Tidey 2014). Thus, relational common grounds that are shared by Kupang residents are dynamic and shifting: they invoke the same religion, ethnic group, national belonging, or institutional affiliations while reinscribing mutual difference in relation to imagined Others (see Chapters 1 and 4). By analyzing these aspects of Kupang's sociohistorical grouding, I argue that language and social interactions play a central role in enacting regimes of marginality and mutual belonging. Such an approach will help us analyze the mutability of identities in social interaction while paying attention to how forms of inequality are reproduced—a key insight from scholars who have analyzed the mutual imbrication of language and political economy (Friedrich 1989; Gal 1989; Irvine 1989). This analytical strategy allows us to analyze discursive alignments of putative centers and peripheries or margins not only as a reflection of unequal politico-economic relations, but also of situated understandings of commensurability and comparability: that is, how social actors co-produce mutual forms of belonging with unequal others (Hankins 2019; Hankins and Yeh 2016; Povinelli 2002). Thus, this dissertation analyzes how local invocations of kebersamaan, togetherness, simultaneously perform local belonging while reproducing political and economic inequalities.

Third, this dissertation emphasizes that the semiotic work of encompassment does not only index mutuality or solidarity; rather, the semiotic work of encompassment that is

accomplished through kebersamaan, togetherness, also reproduces forms of social inequality, particularly gendered inequalities. Following prior scholarship that analyzes constructions of femininity within discourses of local cultural or national distinctiveness (Chatterjee 1989; Cody 2013; Inoue 2006; Sunindyo 1998; Suryakusuma 1996), this dissertation shows how women assume new roles as speakers and as agents of exchange under the banner of kebersamaan, togetherness. Through an analysis of kebersamaan, my aim is to demonstrate how women become recruited into the roles of mediators for state-authorized development projects—projects that are carried together through the Indonesian state's mutual entanglements with religious organizations and NGOs (Li 2007; Rudnyckyj 2010; Welker 2012). These recruitments into the role of mediation, I argue, shows a continuity with women's crucial role as those who work as mediators between market forces and the family—a continuing cultural trope in Indonesia and throughout Southeast Asia (e.g., Brenner 1998; H. Geertz 1989; Ong 1987; Smith-Hefner 2019).

Throughout this dissertation, I consider the multitude of social domains—the church, the NGO, and the household—that become sites of ideological work that differentiates the moral valence of men's and women's participation. In previous literature, scholars have analyzed transformations in gendered social roles as a repositioning or revaluation of public and private social domains (e.g., Berlant 1997; Mahmood 2012). However, rather than considering distinctions between public and private domains as a given, I deploy a perspectival form of analysis: I ask how women, in relation to men, inhabit social roles that are imbued with moral valence in a multitude of social domains—domains that are differentiated by social actors, such as kin groups, state authorities, or NGOs (Gal 2002; 2005; Landes 2003). In turn, perspectives deployed by social actors often deemphasize the differential roles of women (and men), such that gendered differences are denied or explained away. For instance, even as women members of

microcredit associations shoulder the burden of conducting entrepreneurial projects and managing household budgets, women's roles as financial contributors to ritual feasts among kin are lumped together with men's contributions and framed as forms of obligation to the household, *rumah tangga* (see Chapter 3). These forms of *erasure*, as previous scholars have explained, also constitute the semiotic work of encompassment (Gal and Irvine 2019a). Forms of erasure, I argue, are key in understanding how social collectives are recognized through what earlier scholars of personhood refer to "suppression of internal differentiation" (Strathern 1988, 14). Thus, this dissertation also considers how the recent proliferation of women's rights NGOs in Indonesia and throughout the Global South erases and deemphasizes socioeconomic and status differences among women, even as these NGOs aspire to encompass a plurality of women's rights concerns under the banner of activism (see Kowalski 2021; Merry 2006; Moore 2016).

As recent ethnographic work from Indonesia has shown, women, especially from younger generations, increasingly assume prominent roles in educational and political institutions as co-participants alongside men (e.g., Jones 2010; Rinaldo 2013; Smith-Hefner 2019). While this body of recent scholarship on gender in Indonesia has almost exclusively focused on the impact of Islamic political movements on women's political participation, this dissertation suggests that Christian Indonesian women also derive agency from the state-authorized, moral qualities of their religiosity. In particular, moral ideals of "speaking," which are valorized as a central part of Christian worship, have emerged as a key modality in women's participation in NGO-mediated political and economic projects (see Gal, Kowalski, and Moore 2015).

While this dissertation considers the social consequences that are enacted by women's assumption of new roles of speaking, I do not wish to exaggerate the liberatory possibilities of

speakerhood. Thus, I argue that these emergent social roles, such as the role of a speaker, are not unitary perspectives that illuminate a singular structure of liberation or oppression. NGO-mediated forms of political participation, as earlier scholarship on feminism and NGO has illustrated, both establish new forms of political and economic participation while reproducing the conditions of deprivation that justified the need for NGO-based interventions in the first place (Bernal and Grewal 2014; Elyachar 2005; Mahmud 2021; Schuster 2015; Sharma 2008). Thus, even as women assume new roles as public speakers and as borrowers of microcredit loans, I emphasize these new forms of normative obligations have put more burden on women than ever: I show how the double-binds of moral propriety both enable and delineate forms of political and economic participation among women (see Chapters 3 and 4). These gendered double-binds, in turn, are central in the politics of exchange that encompass a multitude of semiotically mediated processes in my field site.

Ethnographic and Historical Context

Befitting my conceptual emphasis on the politics of exchange, my field site, Kupang, became known as a hub of exchange and trading during the colonial era. In this section, I will outline historical processes that contribute to the social phenomena I analyze in this dissertation. First, I will describe how Dutch colonial rule introduced Christianity and helped popularize different varieties of Malay as a language of worship and as a language of interethnic engagements. Second, I will describe how the authoritarian New Order regime (1966–98) of the Indonesian state and the subsequent era of democratic governance contributed to two processes: (1) the primacy of religion (*agama*) as a moral claim to citizenship under an anti-Communist regime; and (2) gendered ideologies of the "household" (*rumah tangga*) that circumscribe women's roles as moral agents of economic activity.

Located on the western end of the island of Timor, the Kupang area entered colonial historical records in the 17th century, when the Dutch and the Portuguese competed for lucrative trading opportunities in sandalwood, which Chinese merchants had obtained from the island of Timor since the 15th century (McWilliam 2005). However, even as the supply of sandalwood from Timor has greatly diminished since the 18th century, the Kupang area remained as a strategic point in defending Dutch colonial interests against Portuguese and British incursions (Fox 1977; Hägerdal 2012). In a section that now constitutes Kupang's old colonial quarter, the Dutch East India Company established a permanent military fort, Concordia, in 1653, which was primarily guarded by local allies who defended Dutch interests against the Portuguese and allied Timorese groups (Hägerdal 2012, 104–10). Unlike the rest of Timor's western half, however, the majority of Kupang's population is not ethnic Timorese (*suku Timor*). Instead, Kupang and its surrounding areas were and continue to be inhabited by a plurality of ethnic Rotenese and Sabunese settlers, whose presence dates to militias employed in Dutch military campaigns in the 17th and 18th centuries.[8] These encounters resulted in major social transformations among the Rotenese and Sabunese: (1) conversion to (Protestant) Christianity; (2) the introduction of Malay as a language of the church and of colonial governance; and (3) large-scale migration to the western end of Timor.

As noted above, Dutch colonial rule resulted in Kupang's continuing character as a multiethnic harbor town that is inhabited by predominantly Christian ethnic groups who speak in bahasa Kupang, a register closely related to eastern Indonesian varieties of Malay. The

[8] The Indonesian government does not compile official statistics on ethnicity; however, the communities in which I conducted fieldwork are all majority Rotenese with smaller numbers of ethnic Sabunese, Timorese, Alorese and Sumbanese persons being present as well. Tuabuna, the village where I conducted the majority of my research on church worship, is described by its Rotenese inhabitants as a place that has been "conquered" (*ditaklukkan*) by the Rotenese from its prior Timorese inhabitants.

numerically and politically dominant Rotenese communities, who hail from an adjacent island about fifty miles west of Kupang, began a long process of conversion to Christianity beginning in the 18th century (Fox 1977, 104). As the Dutch received tributes of slaves and agricultural products from Rotenese nobles, the same group of Rotenese nobles demanded that the Dutch send them schoolteachers to teach them Malay, a language that allowed them to communicate with colonial representatives and to study Malay translations of the Bible—registers that are structurally adjacent to what later became the state-authorized standard register of Indonesian (Fox 2014).[9] As a result, Rotenese elites were among the first groups to publicly embrace Christianity to invoke their moral authority as mediators between their colonial overlords and the local populace (Fox 1977, 101–12). At this moment, the lucrative global trade in sandalwood had declined; nevertheless, Kupang remained a key port in safeguarding the Dutch colonial empire's frontiers from Portuguese to the east and from rival Timorese kingdoms in hinterlands (Hägerdal 2012, 199–245). Thus, to defend its territories against these rival groups, Dutch colonial authorities resettled Rotenese communities in the coastal villages around Kupang—a process that was often conducted by force.

Since the late 19th century, the Kupang area also witnessed the arrival of other ethnic groups, including the Sabunese and Timorese, who also embraced the missionizing activities of the Dutch East Indies church (Fox 1977, 160–77). After Indonesia's independence, the three ethnic groups—the Timorese, Rotenese, and Sabunese—became emblematized in local state discourses as Kupang's "native" (*asli*) populace. Reflecting complex relationships among and between these ethnic groups, bahasa Kupang—and not the ethnic languages of these various groups—

[9] Until the early 20th century, Dutch colonial authorities were adamant in educating their colonial subjects in Malay, and not in Dutch; even then, in 1930, only 0.3 percent of native Indonesians commanded some form of written Dutch (Maier 1993).

emerged as an intra- and interethnic linguistic register that invokes local belonging without privileging any particular ethnic group as "native" speakers of the register (Errington 2022; see also Chapter 2).

After World War II and Indonesia's independence in 1945, the Indonesian state's expansion of a provincial-level civil service in Kupang heralded a new era that marked the rise of a middle-class citizenry that publicly embraced a Christian identity: an ethnically diverse, educated class that includes schoolteachers, church ministers, and civil servants (van Klinken 2014). As local nobilities gradually lost their political power and control over land in the 1950s and 1960s, this emerging middle class occupied prominent political and economic roles in the new provincial capital. In Kupang, the growing numbers of the educated middle class – including and especially among the Timorese, Rotenese, and Sabunese ethnic groups – became congregants of the newly independent GMIT, the *Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor* (lit., "Evangelical Biblical Church in Timor"), a mainline Protestant denomination that grew out of the colonial-era Dutch East Indies Church and became formally independent in 1948. Unlike colonial era missions that focused on members of the nobility, the GMIT initially became attractive primarily among Kupang's urban middle class, many of whom earned their living from relatively stable employment in the civil service. Bureaucrats and GMIT ministers, furthermore, came from the same milieu of the educated middle-class citizenry (van Klinken 2014, 148). Non-elite churchgoers, on the other hand, faced class-related barriers to participating in the early years of the GMIT church. For instance, the language of church service was and continues to be standard Indonesian, a language that is primarily taught at school, and congregants are expected to memorize long passages from the standard Indonesian Bible and preach in Indonesian to become a confirmed member.

In the newly independent nation, the church's "rituals of modernity," such as speaking the Indonesian language and wearing Western clothing to church, became key to its alignment with the promises of progress offered by the Indonesian state (van Klinken 2014, 147). Under this rubric of modernity, elite men and women gained access to morally and politically authoritative positions as ordained ministers (*pendeta*) and church board members (*anggota majelis*) in GMIT church congregations. Although the GMIT synod's initial leadership was entirely male, the church began to incorporate women as ministers early on: Reverend Agustina Elisabeth Radja Haba-Nalley, the church's first woman minister, was ordained in 1953, while Reverend Margaretha Gertruida Noelik was ordained in 1959 after earning a degree in theology from the Jakarta Theological Seminary (*Berita GMIT* 2021, 17). In 1962, Reverend Noelik became head of the GMIT's own theological seminary in Tarus, a village east of Kupang (*Berita GMIT* 2021, 17). As I will show in this dissertation, the presence of women as ordained ministers and authoritative speakers of sermons produced new models of speakerhood for their women congregants, who speak as leaders of worship meetings and in other authoritative institutional contexts (see Chapters 2 and 4).

Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, GMIT's attempts at gaining followers among the rural, non-elite populace of Kupang and its surrounding areas ran against parallel efforts initiated by the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), which also competed against GMIT's political party affiliate, the Christian Party of Indonesia (Parkindo). The PKI gained a large following as it mobilized both members of the educated urban middle-class in Kupang and smallholder farmers in the city's surrounding areas. In particular, the Communist women's organization, the *Gerwani* (Indonesian Women's Movement) was a cross-class organization that facilitated the rise of women political leaders into ranks of national members of parliament in the 1950s and early

1960s (Wieringa 2002).[10] Beyond Kupang's educated middle-class, the Communists also found supporters among smallholder farmers in the surrounding regions. Long subjected to the whims of landholding nobles, farmers in the Kupang area and the neighboring district of South Central Timor joined the PKI's militant Indonesian Farmers' Front (*Barisan Tani Indonesia*), which distributed food and rations after a series of failed harvests and delivered PKI's promise of agrarian reform (Campbell-Nelson, Kolimon, and Wetangterah 2015; van Klinken 2014). In Kupang as well as across Indonesia, the PKI seized farmland owned by large landowners and distributed plots to landless farmers (Campbell-Nelson, Kolimon, and Wetangterah 2015, 96). This was a promising reform, especially as Kupang's eastern outskirts and the southern part of the Timorese hinterlands contain well-irrigated farmlands in an otherwise arid region (Campbell-Nelson, Kolimon, and Wetangterah 2015, 96).

Although some GMIT ministers and GMIT-affiliated teachers were attracted to the PKI's liberatory vision for the rural poor, the church's political party affiliate, the Christian Party of Indonesia, competed with the PKI in mobilizing lower-class peasant followers (van Klinken 2014, 221). Thus, in 1960, the GMIT issued an ultimatum to local church councils to choose between PKI membership or membership in the church (van Klinken 2014, 222). Eventually, beginning in late 1965, as the military was ordered by the Soeharto leadership to kill and arrest PKI members as well as anyone suspected of Communist affiliation throughout Indonesia, the GMIT's youth wing participated in the waves of anti-Communist killings, torture, and imprisonment that shook the whole country (van Klinken 2014, 232). The rural areas

[10] Arguably, the highest profile woman politician from NTT during this era was Francisca C. Fanggidaej (1925–2013), who was a student activist, journalist, and member of the national parliament (1957–66) from the Indonesian Communist Party (Zhou 2022). She was abroad during Indonesia's anti-Communist purges, and lived in exile in China and the Netherlands.

surrounding Kupang, which witnessed mobilizations of farmers under the PKI's banner of agrarian reform, became sites of gruesome mass executions (*BBC News Indonesia* 2019; Campbell-Nelson, Kolimon, and Wetangterah 2015). While the number of deaths from the these purges continue to be inexact, at least 500,000 individuals out of a population of 100 to 110 million died in the nation-wide massacres of Communists and their suspected affiliates between 1965 and 1966 (Cribb 2001). The GMIT synod denounced Communism as antithetical to Christianity, and, until the 1980s, GMIT ministers forbade family members of suspected Communists from participating in church services (*BBC News Indonesia* 2019; Campbell-Nelson, Kolimon, and Wetangterah 2015).

This violent end of Indonesia's Communist party heralded the beginning of a political and religious transformation across the nation, as those who do not formally profess a state-recognized religion, including Christianity and Islam, were placed under suspicion as Communist symphatizers (see Chapter 1). During the authoritarian regime of Soeharto's New Order (1966–98), religious organizations, including the GMIT church, began to occupy a privileged position in Indonesia's political landscape, as affiliation with a state-sanctioned religion provided a protection against anti-Communist crackdowns. In the mountainous regions that mark Kupang's eastern and southern boundaries, the GMIT registered a large increase of followers among ethnic Timorese peasants, who, after witnessing violent military crackdowns on followers of local beliefs, were keen on shedding any suspicion that they were affiliated with the Indonesian Communist Party (Campbell-Nelson, Kolimon, and Wetangterah 2015, 141–44; Webb 1986). Although the church continues to remain as a crucial avenue for women's participation in civic institutions in Kupang, the New Order era witnessed a decline in women's participation in public political roles, as militant women's rights movements, such as the

Communist women's organization, were painted as morally and sexually deviant (see Wieringa 2002; 2003). Accompanying the rising influence of state-sanctioned religious organizations, such as the GMIT, the rise of the "family state" as an official ideology heralded an era of long-lasting policies and institutional practices that Julia Suryakusuma described as *ibuisme negara*, "state motherism"—the state's idealization of motherhood and obedience towards the "father" as moral ideals for Indonesian women (Suryakusuma 1996; 2011; see also Bourchier 2014; Shiraishi 1997).[11]

During the New Order regime of General Soeharto (1966–98), women's public political participation moved away from electoral politics, as the Indonesian government's watchful eyes over civil society meant that political participation, especially among women, took place under the paternalistic rubric of national development. Through the government's aggressive campaign of expanding public primary schooling across the nation, literacy rates in Indonesian greatly improved: in 1945, only 5 percent of the population could read or write, but in 1980, the literacy rate among Indonesians who are 15 years of age or older reached 70 percent (Lowenberg 2000). In 2019, literacy rates among women reached 94 percent in the rural district of Kupang and 99 percent in the municipality of Kupang—figures that are comparable to literacy rates among men (*Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Timur Dalam Angka 2019* 2019, 207–8) . Thus, women in Kupang have universally become speakers and users of standard Indonesian alongside men. Furthermore, in contrast to speakerhood in local, ethnolinguistically emblematic languages, standard Indonesian's impersonal qualities deemphasize a speaker's sociohistorical backgrounds and highlights the orientation of public speakers towards national development (see Chapter 2; J.J. Errington 2000; Keane 2003).

[11] The figure of the "father" also refers to General Soeharto himself, who is referred to as Indonesia's "father of development" (*bapak pembangunan*) in official state discourse of the New Order.

While the New Order regime left a legacy of linguistic practices that deemphasizes one's social backgrounds, the same regime rigidly enforced ideologies of gendered social roles that, as I describe in this dissertation, continue to be reproduced in the ideologies of the *rumah tangga*, the household (see Chapter 3). For example, the New Order's highest-ranking women's organization, the Dharma Wanita, an association of the wives of civil servants, articulated women's roles not only as companions of their husbands, but also as seekers of supplemental household income (Sunindyo 1996; Suryakusuma 2011). Thus, women are expected to not only manage public impressions of the dyadic heterosexual marriage as the foundation of a household, but also to seek sources of livelihood that are crucial to a household's financial well-being. In addition to the Dharma Wanita, the Family Welfare Program (*Program Kesejahteran Keluarga*, PKK), an association of housewives led by the spouses of local officials, reached every almost household in the country as the long arm of the centralized authoritarian state (Newberry 2007; Shiraishi 1997; Suryakusuma 2011). While the PKK normatively described their women members as housewives who are guardians of the Indonesian home and family, the PKK also provided crucial networks of exchange through which women obtain economic resources: among others, PKK-mediated networks also facilitated rotating credit associations (*arisan*) and small-scale entrepreneurial projects that involve multiple households (Newberry 2006).

While a regional economic crisis and series of student demonstrations led to the collapse of the New Order in 1998, the rigid gendering of these institutionally authorized social roles did not end. In fact, in one of the first major mass mobilization of anti-Soeharto activists, a group of women, some of them high-ranking intellectuals, rallied as *Suara Ibu Peduli* (lit., "the voice of concerned mothers"): by deploying the moral and political legitimacy of their own positions as mothers, the group decried the New Order regime's laissez-faire approach towards a regional

economic crisis that dramatically increased the price of food and everyday necessities (Blackburn 2004; Budianta 2006). Subsequently, Suara Ibu Peduli rallied in support of the mass protests that culminated in Soeharto's resignation (Blackburn 2004, 164; see also Lee 2016). The subsequent political and economic liberalization of the post-authoritarian era, however, does not simply liberate women's social movements from the moral anxieties of the authoritarian past. Rather, new anxieties surrounding gendered forms of moral propriety in the public sphere emerged as women's rights movements align themselves against the legacies of the Soeharto era, but for diverse political ends (Brenner 2011; Jones 2010; Rinaldo 2013; 2019; Smith-Hefner 2019). To expand the insights cultivated by this body of literature, which almost exclusively focuses on Muslim women's social movements in post-Soeharto Indonesia, my dissertation demonstrates that state ideologies of *agama* (religion), rather than inherent qualities of Islamic or Christian ideologies as such, play an increasingly crucial role in shaping gendered political and economic subjectivities in the post-authoritarian era.

Even as my interlocutors in women's rights NGOs and microcredit associations locate ideologies of rigid differences between men and women as belonging to the authoritarian past, this dissertation also emphasizes how erasures of gendered differences have emerged in the post-authoritarian present. For instance, according to microcredit association members who seek loans that will enable them to send both their daughters and sons to college, they voice their aspirations by claiming that "men and women are now equals" (*laki laki dengan perempuan sekarang sama*), because this demonstrates a change from past norms that dictate higher education as the prerogative of sons. While I do not take this claim to equality at face value, as men and women continue to be subjected to vastly different regimes of socioeconomic advancement and moral propriety (see Chapters 3 and 4), these remarks show how social actors themselves are acutely

aware of changing forms of gendered social differences. As prior research on gender and social change in Indonesia has shown, "women may be active economically, but this does not automatically confer power and status" (Tickamyer and Kusujiarti 2012, 32). Thus, rather than revealing a unitary perspective on gendered inequalities or gendered forms of domination, this dissertation contributes to studies of women's shifting social, political, and economic roles that emphasize the contradictory ideologies that institutions and cultural paradigms apply to the gendering of social domains.

Methodology

This dissertation is based on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Kupang, conducted in July 2017 and between November 2018 and September 2019. I draw ethnographic data from social interactions that I observed and participated in across two overlapping social domains: (1) the Nehemiah church, a congregations of the GMIT church located in the Kupang-area village of Tuabuna; and (2) a non-profit organization, the FCF Foundation, which is loosely affiliated with the GMIT church and runs cooperative microcredit associations (*koperasi*) for women in Tuabuna and other neighboring locales in the Kupang area. FCF began as a project run by Yayasan Alfa Omega, a non-profit organization established in 1985 and overseen by the GMIT synod.[12] With financial and organizational support from SKT, a Jakarta-based organization, the FCF Foundation has implemented projects such as Empowering Women (2012–2020), an Indonesia-wide project jointly funded by the Indonesian and Australian governments that focused on women's rights and women's economic empowerment. While the Empowering

[12] As Yayasan Alfa Omega was not involved in my field research, this organization's name is not a pseudonym.

Women project has since been concluded, the microcredit associations that the FCF Foundation initiated continue to operate as of February 2023.

As I have mentioned earlier, the domains of the church and of the microcredit association are not separate entities; rather, they are two interrelated institutional contexts where the same persons inhabit different social, economic, and political roles by deploying particular modalities of social interaction, such as linguistic registers and other enregistered signs of social value (e.g., monetary donations for a ritual feast). Following Peircean modes of semiotic analysis, I emphasize that these sign-mediated social interactions are not immutable or constant types that are portable across socio-spatiotemporal contexts (Gal and Irvine 2019). Thus, I analyze how these interactions are inseparable from historically situated ideological perspectives that are inhabited by my interlocutors and my own subject position as an ethnographer—a position that also requires navigating the politics of exchange. As I will demonstrate in this section, these sign-mediated interactions demonstrate contestations in exchange and reciprocal obligations that are inseparable from an ethnographer's relationship—including the relationships I cultivated during fieldwork—to their interlocutors.[13] To demonstrate how such relationships have shaped the methodological perspectives of my ethnographic fieldwork, this section outlines how I became embedded in local relationships of exchange that enact differences in religion, gender, ethnicity, and class within two overlapping institutional contexts: (1) the Nehemiah congregation of the GMIT church in the Kupang-area village of Tuabuna; and (2) the FCF Foundation's network of women's microcredit associations.

[13] The embeddedness of an ethnographer in local relationships of exchange has deep traditions in anthropology itself: for instance, both E. Evans-Pritchard and Bronislaw Malinowski gave gifts of tobacco to their interlocutors to facilitate conversations that helped open the door for ethnographic fieldwork (Evans-Pritchard 1969; Malinowski 1922; Kohrman and Benson 2011).

First, continuing a long historical trend that places the church as a mediator between Kupang-area communities with outsiders, my role as an ethnographer became known among Tuabuna villagers through my regular participation in the Nehemiah congregation's youth ministry worship meetings. Nevertheless, rather than presupposing Christianity as a shared common ground between a congregation and fellow Christians elsewhere, my position as a Muslim Indonesian enabled me to examine how the Indonesian state's notion of *agama* ("religion") emerges as a relational common ground that mediated the relationship between the congregation and Indonesians of a different agama (see discussion below, as well as Chapter 1). Although religion serves as an initial discursive common ground, my continued participation as an ethnographer depended on an exchange of resources: for instance, my position as a fellow participant who receives the "word of God" (*firman Tuhan*) relied on my continued donation of a small sum of money to the church's donation box as an offering (*persembahan*), which is expected out of every participant in a worship meeting.

Beyond these regular contributions, participation in church congregations also relies on other expectations of reciprocity: for instance, individual households host worship meetings and supply food and drinks for worship participants, but only insofar as they expect other households in the congregation to take turns in doing so. For me, a researcher living on my own and not in a household emblematized by a married heterosexual couple and their children, these expectations of reciprocity took different forms: for instance, after receiving the favor of getting free motorcycle rides to worship meetings from Nehemiah youth congregants, I paid for the cost of a charter bus for a beach outing at the end of my fieldwork. These gestures of reciprocity became key in how I conceptualize "religion" (*agama*) as a common ground that one inhabits in social life under the modern Indonesian state: one is recognized as a moral citizen only if one is

recognized as holding a legitimate claim to a state-authorized agama. As I will show in this dissertation, while these gestures of reciprocity facilitate collegiality and solidarity among the church congregants I encountered, these gestures of reciprocity are irreducibly political: for example, in the case of a microcredit association, these exchanges also structure forms of conflict and social inequality (see also Chapter 4).

Furthermore, these church worship meetings become a crucial site for examining how religion and gender are enacted as forms of social difference, especially as my interlocutors became familiar with my interests in analyzing gendered forms of inequality. Because of my relationship to my landlord and adopted family in Kupang, the Bessi family, I was categorized as an unmarried young man, which meant that I could not participate in homosocial domains where women interact among themselves. Thus, certain activities, such as worship meetings of the adult women's ministry, were off-limits to me. Nevertheless, through my involvement with the Nehemiah youth ministry, I observed how young congregants are socialized into roles of speaking in both standard Indonesian and bahasa Kupang—forms of speech that are also key in contestations over resources (see Chapter 4). Furthermore, throughout my inquiries into connections between gender and social domains of speakerhood, church congregations fulfill an important role as sites where young women (and men) are socialized into roles of speakerhood that incorporate both bahasa Kupang, a linguistic register that invokes local belonging, and standard Indonesian, even as prior notions of ritual speakerhood emphasize men's roles as authoritative speakers of ethnoregional language registers (see Kuipers 1986). In turn, fluency in these church-inflected genres of speaking become sources of moral authority for adult married women who pursue microcredit loans as a source of livelihood for their households.

Second, during parts of my fieldwork that involved participant-observation and interviews with microcredit association members and staffers, my position as a middle-class ethnic Javanese person with national-level NGO affiliations played a major role in shaping the assumptions held by my interlocutors through these interactions. Among Kupang residents, I am recognized and categorized as an ethnic Javanese Indonesian, which, locally, is a predominantly Muslim migrant ethnic group associated with the domain of business and high-ranking government agencies (see also Chapter 1). Everyday interactions between my interlocutors and ethnic Javanese migrants, furthermore, are characterized by social interactions that are categorized as small-scale trading (*dagang*), which involves the exchange of cash with food and household necessities.[14] For instance, almost every household in Kupang, even the lowest-income households, routinely buys groceries or food from a nearby Javanese-owned food stall (*warung*) or kiosk—forms of trade that are based on everyday exchanges of money. Thus, lower-income residents of Kupang who consider themselves as "native" (*asli*) to the area, who are usually farmers or fisherfolk, often compare their own modest livelihoods to the apparent success of Javanese traders, whose seemingly mundane forms of trading enable them to pay even for the formidable cost of routine travel the between Kupang and the island of Java.[15] As a result, local presuppositions about the economic success of Javanese persons extend to my initial conversations with microcredit association members, who often highlight their own financial aspirations in obtaining loans for

[14] High-ranking bureaucrats from Jakarta also make regular visits to Kupang, where they are treated as visiting dignitaries by local NGO staffers and civil servants, who hold public events with speeches and give gifts of woven cloths dedicated to these guests. However, as a relatively young researcher, my interactions with Kupang residents are quite different from their interactions with high-ranking bureaucrats.

[15] In 2019, the cost of a one-way economy class airplane ticket between Kupang and Jakarta, the largest city and a transportation hub on the island of Java, reached US$ 180 (Rp 2,500,000), which exceeds the locally mandated minimum monthly wage in Kupang. Thus, travel between Kupang and Java is largely restricted to middle- and upper-middle class households.

entrepreneurial projects. These aspirations, according to them, allow them to "move forward" (*maju*) like "those people over there in Java" (*seperti orang di Jawa sana*)—an aspiration that reflects the continuity of state ideologies of development during New Order era (1966–98), which privileged the idea of "Java" as an exemplary political and cultural model (see Anderson 1990; Errington 1998; Pemberton 1994a).

At the same time, as "Javanese-ness" is often synonymous with excessively calculating and miserly attitudes towards money, my interlocutors also highlight their own financial generosity towards ritual feasts—a practice known as *kumpul keluarga*—in their explication of how they differ from their imaginations of Java and Javanese-ness. Thus, these interactions illuminate the politics of encompassment under the Indonesian state: my interlocutors claim a mutual belonging to the Indonesian state as a common ground, while maintaining their own separateness from Javanese ways of belonging to Indonesia.

Similarly, as microcredit association staffers at the FCF Foundation became increasingly aware of my ties to women's rights organizations based in major Javanese cities, including Jakarta, they categorized me as someone who can potentially connect them to sources of additional funding. Thus, as an expected form of reciprocity to my hosts at the FCF Foundation in Kupang, I assisted FCF Foundation staffers with grant proposals and reports on the progress of their microcredit groups—both genres that that require mastery of bureaucratic linguistic forms in standard Indonesian.[16] In turn, my assistance was reciprocated by the FCF Foundation's facilitation of my presence as a researcher of women's microcredit association groups. This

[16] Indonesian academics in the social sciences and humanities often earn most of their incomes from planning and implementing NGO-based projects, rather than from their university salaries. Thus, at the FCF Foundation, I filled a normative role for academics who conduct research among populations with ties to NGOs.

facilitation was made possible by, among others, their generosity in introducing me to women's microcredit groups as a trusted interlocutor—that is, an interlocutor who can be trusted with information on their financial aspirations as microcredit association members and as managers of financial resources in their own households. Thus, my perspectives on the *politics of exchange* among my interlocutors are inseparable from my own participation in translocal relationships of exchange and indebtedness—relationships that, as I have illustrated, are indispensable to ethnographic research.

Outline of Dissertation

In the two constitutive parts of this dissertation, I describe how the church, the household, and microcredit associations are contexts where heterogeneous identities, including gender, are enacted in relation to one another and in relation to figurations of state power (see also Zentz 2017). As previous research on Indonesia's evolving sociolinguistic landscape has shown, social interactions involve acts of "adequation"—the performance of sameness—that invoke a shared common ground among interacting parties who claim mutual belonging to the Indonesian nation-state (Cole 2010; Goebel 2015; see also Bucholtz and Hall 2005). At the same time, these forms of adequation also facilitate processes of differentiation and of othering—claims that certain social identities lie outside of moral forms of relationality. For instance, relational common grounds, while facilitated through common semiotic modalities, such as bahasa Kupang and bahasa tinggi, are also based on mutual exclusion of others (see Chapters 1 and 2). Thus, I argue that these processes of adequation are simultaneously at work with processes of differentiation, or difference-making (Gal and Irvine 2019a). Exclusion from religious life under the Indonesian

state, in particular, puts one beyond the moral spheres of exchange—that is, beyond the reach of kebersamaan, togetherness, as a moral form of relationality.

In analyzing kebersamaan as a set of evaluative stances that my interlocutors deploy in social interactions, I emphasize that kebersamaan is not synonymous with solidarity, although kebersamaan is also deployed to invoke notions of solidarity. Rather, as I demonstrate in this dissertation, kebersamaan also enacts forms of social coercion, such as in pressuring kin to donate to ritual feasts (Chapter 3), or in pressuring members of a local microcredit association to pay their loan installments on time (Chapter 4). Thus, contestations that invoke notions of kebersamaan are particularly productive sites for examining how practices of exchange mediate local perspectives on social difference and inequality, including perspectives on gender. In particular, kebersamaan is invoked in institutionalized projects that invoke women's agency as participants in acts of exchange while simultaneously circumscribing proper morality through the ideology of the household, the *rumah tangga* (Chapter 3). Kebersamaan also invokes a common ground between Kupang residents who are Christians and other Indonesians, including myself, while excluding those who do not (or cannot) efficaciously claim an agama, a state-recognized religion (Chapter 1). In all these projects that involve contingent forms of solidarity, I underline the role of discursive co-participation through linguistic registers, such as standard Indonesian and bahasa Kupang, a local variety of Malay, that index solidarity as well as mutual exclusion.

Part 1: Language and the Moral Cosmologies of Religion in Indonesia

Although the legacy of the Dutch colonial mission continues to remain alive in Christian congregational life in Kupang, religion becomes a legal prerequisite for citizenship only since the Indonesian government mandated individuals to profess a state-recognized religion since the late

1960s—an ideology that I explain as the Indonesian category of *agama*, the Indonesian state's moral scheme of religious and national belonging (see Chapter 1). Echoing the important role of Christianity in mediating past encounters between Rotenese communities and Dutch colonial authorities, this chapter explains how religion plays an important role in how Kupang area communities situate themselves in relation to nation-wide moral cosmologies. In particular, I explain how the category of agama as a shared common ground situates myself, an ethnographer taken up to be a Muslim Indonesian, in relation to my Christian interlocutors.

In further explicating agama as a relational common ground in social interactions, Chapter 2 describes how different participation frameworks in Christian worship are indexed by the use of two linguistic registers: *bahasa Kupang*, a register that indexes local belonging across ethnic lines, and *bahasa tinggi*, a register of Indonesian that invokes state-authorized forms of Christian religious authority. In particular, forms of authoritative speaking in worship require elements of both bahasa Kupang and bahasa tinggi to index audience roles as listeners and active participants. Because the simultaneous deployment of both bahasa Kupang and bahasa tinggi enregisters a language of worship that is used in worship meetings at congregants' homes and at church, this emergent register constitutes semiotic modalities that allow congregants, particularly women, to assume roles of leadership.

Part 2: Gender, Households, and Relations of Indebtedness

In this section, I describe how women's roles as speakers of bahasa Kupang and bahasa tinggi enable them to become authoritative mediators of everyday practices of exchange across households and in microcredit associations. In Chapter 3, I demonstrate that women's roles in safeguarding the moral-ideological domain of the "household" (*rumah tangga*) do not simply

constrain their presence to the physical space of the home and of the family. Rather, as non-elite men are drawn to precarious forms of labor and migrant work, the ideological constraints of the household place non-elite Kupang women as economic agents who sustain and manage the livelihoods of their households (Chapter 3). Under the rubric of equality across genders that is touted by women's rights organizations and state agencies after the downfall of the Soeharto regime in 1998, the putative rejection of gendered differences places multiple moral forms of responsibility on women: while post-Soeharto moral regimes of self-autonomy and individualized aspirations place women as idealized agents of entrepreneurial projects, the ideological regimes of the household continue to place married women as those who are responsible for familial honor in the name of *berkat*, or "blessing" (see also Donzelli 2019). As I demonstrate in Chapter 3, women are responsible for managing household resources that contribute to morally consequential rituals of monetary exchange, *kumpul keluarga* (literally, "to gather the family"), which finances weddings, funerals, and other rites of passage among kin.

In Chapter 4, I analyze the exchange of resources in the form of debt across women's microcredit associations, the *koperasi*. In these domains, the moral ideal of *kebersamaan*, togetherness, is invoked both to showcase indebtedness as a common ground for social relationships and to establish mutual forms of exclusion. Through the example of an entrepreneurial scheme that was dismissed by association members as a self-enrichment scam, I examine how kebersamaan as a form of relationality also mediate conflicts that reinscribe forms of social inequality across Kupang-area microcredit associations. Although local discourses of *kebersamaan*, togetherness, valorize solidarity as an indispensable element of social relationships, attending to processes of mediation in these relationships allows us to consider how social collectives, such as congregations or microcredit associations, are constituted not

only through enactments of solidarity, but also through enactments of mutual exclusion and of conflict.

Overall, my findings suggest that kebersamaan—forms of relationality enacted through the exchange of words, money, and other resources—justify and motivate forms of exchange that undergird social difference and political agency. In the two parts of this dissertation, I ask how enactments of kebersamaan shape the politics of exchange in two interrelated domains of social interaction: (1) local belonging and the encompassing effects of the nation as invoked in linguistic forms deployed during worship meetings at a congregation of the GMIT church, and (2) gendered forms of inequality as instantiated in the exchange of resources among kin and in local networks of *koperasi*s, or cooperatively owned women's microcredit associations.

Part 1

Language and the Moral Cosmologies of Religion in Indonesia

Chapter 1

Agama: Religion and Relational Common Grounds in a Protestant Youth Ministry

On my very last day of fieldwork in Kupang, a locale in eastern Indonesia, I was asked by one of my interlocutors, Jon, a church youth leader, about why I, supposedly a Muslim, diligently attended church services for my research while never attending prayers at a local mosque. I evaded the question, and I said that Friday prayers at the mosque, an emblematic ritual for Muslim Indonesian men, always happen when I am out doing interviews or working at an NGO office. The conversation then turned quickly to other topics, especially because many others who wanted to talk to me were also present, but Jon's question stuck with me. After months of hearing my various questions to Jon, his family, and his friends about who they are and what they do, shouldn't they be curious about *who* I am too? For Jon, and many others I have encountered throughout my fieldwork in Indonesia, "religion" (Bahasa Indonesia: *agama*) is a fundamental element of social relationships: one is socially differentiable and recognizable to others according to one's professed *agama* (e.g. C. Geertz 1960; Anderson, Nakamura, and Slamet 1977). In other words, agama forms the very ground of relationality in Indonesia: one's capacity to assume roles in social interactions is mediated by the efficacy of one's moral claim to a particular agama.

As my earlier conversation with Jon illustrates, agama as a form of relationality entangles myself, an ethnographer, my interlocutors, and the social collectives that we mutually inhabit. At this moment of interaction, Jon questions my self-presentation in the field as a follower of an agama. In particular, Jon, a Christian, is puzzled by my lack of commitment to worshipping at a mosque, which he sees as a fundamental act of following Islam as an agama. As I will illustrate

in this chapter, these examples illuminate how agama is central not only to formal citizenship under the Indonesian nation-state, but also to one's inhabitation of social roles in everyday interactions. Hence, this chapter describes how agama both provides an affordance and a limit to the roles that one can morally inhabit in social relationships. To do so, I will analyze utterances in two interactional settings: (1) utterances addressed by a worshipper to fellow congregation members as people of the same agama, Christianity and to myself, whom they categorize as a Muslim Indonesian; and (2) a publicized interview conducted by the Christian Evangelical Church in Timor (GMIT) synod that demonstrates how a formerly suspected Communist is blocked from morally claiming an agama and, thus, from being recognized as a moral citizen under the Indonesian nation-state.[1]

Among the many roles that I have inhabited during fieldwork, *agama* is an indispensable feature of the social relationships I encountered and observed as an ethnographer in Kupang, an eastern Indonesian locale.[2] Among Kupang residents, I am recognized, often at sight, as a particular kind of non-local: an ethnic Javanese person who hails from a different part of Indonesia.[3] By extension, I am also presumed to be Muslim in terms of agama.[4] When I shop at the local market, for instance, vendors would address me as "Mas Fadi" (lit., "brother Fadi"), using a kin term, *mas*, that indexes the addressee's Javanese ethnicity. Additionally, during Ramadan, the month of fasting for observant Muslims, Christians who host social gatherings

[1] The *Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor* (Christian Evangelical Church in Timor) is a mainline Protestant denomination where approximately 80 percent of Kupang's population are congregants.
[2] Throughout this paper, I will use the term *agama* and not "religion" to emphasize the particularities of the term in its Indonesian context.
[3] The vast majority of Javanese are nominally Muslim, though there is a great diversity of Islamic religious practices among the Javanese themselves (e.g. Geertz 1960; Beatty 1999).
[4] Technically speaking, I am only half Javanese, because I have two grandparents who are from Madura and Sumatra, respectively, but these technicalities aside, my Javanese-ness is salient to my interlocutors in Kupang.

would almost always ask me if I were fasting before offering me something to eat or drink. These presuppositions about my identities as Muslim and as Javanese are made in contrast to how Kupang residents describe themselves: Kupang residents, according to my interlocutors, are mostly Christian in terms of agama and are predominantly Rotenese, Timorese, or Sabunese by ethnicity.[5] Although religion and ethnicity might seem to be categories that remain stable or immutable throughout an individual's lifetime, this chapter emphasizes that agama and its concomitant social descriptors, like ethnicity, are questioned and reorganized through everyday practices of social interactions. In particular, I will analyze agama as a discursively mediated form of relationality that both encompasses and differentiates Muslims and Christians in eastern Indonesia.

Although studies of individual religions, such as Christianity or Islam, have been extensively conducted in the Indonesian context, this chapter is neither a study of a particular religious tradition nor a study of interfaith relations. Rather, this chapter explains how such categorizations according to agama are made recognizable through semiotic processes of differentiation. By semiotic processes of differentiation, I refer to sign-mediated processes by which persons, institutions, and other social forms are made to be similar or different from one another in historically situated interactional contexts (see Gal and Irvine 2000; 2019a). In particular, I will analyze how the case of agama in Indonesia demonstrates a relational process of differentiation: that is, a particular agama (e.g., "Islam" or "Christianity") is defined and differentiated through its relation to other categories of agama. By using the semiotics of

[5] In the 20th century, Kupang's population grew substantially and has become increasingly diverse; people from the southeastern Indonesian islands of Sumba, Alor, and Flores have settled in the area, and small business owners from Sulawesi and Java reside in almost every neighborhood as well. However, local narratives of Kupang's history often showcase the three numerically and politically dominant ethnic groups of the area: the Timorese, Rotenese, and Sabunese.

differentiation as an analytical lens, my aim is to avoid a discussion of what the essence of a particular agama *is* (i.e., what it means to be a follower of Christianity, Islam, or other state-recognized religions). Instead, my aim is to illustrate how agama emerges in social interactions as a common ground from which differences and similarities among social actors are negotiated (e.g., Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Cole 2010; Goebel 2010; 2015). That is, how "the manipulation of common ground serves both interactional efficacy and social affiliation" (Enfield 2006, 422).[6] Thus, agama provides an affordance that I refer to as a *relational common ground*: a situated, semiotically mediated perspective on differences and similarities that allows one to establish and construe identities for one's own self and others across persons, institutions, and social collectives.

Relational common grounds, such as agama, are indispensable in defining the social roles that one inhabits when interacting with others. As the earlier vignette about my own agama illustrates, one's identity is nebulous and potentially fraught without a common ground, such as agama, that places one's own self in relation to others. The need to establish a relational common ground, however, is not unique to the Indonesian context. For instance, Diane Mines, an American ethnographer who worked in south India, describes how *jāti* (roughly speaking, caste and its sub-divisions) is one such prerequisite for social relations, because, in her field site, jāti makes a person recognizable, comparable, and differentiable from others. When Mines explained to one of her interlocutors that she has "no jāti," she described that they laughed out loud, because "to their ears such a statement meant something like 'I don't exist as a kind of anything—living or dead—in this universe'" (Mines 2005, 12). Hence, these relational common

[6] Earlier uses of the term "common ground" tend to focus on cognitive rather than social processes; in this body of literature, "common ground" refers to implicature and processes of inference in social interactions (Grice 1989; Levinson 2000).

grounds, such as agama or jāti, are indispensable in establishing a shared social domain that one mutually inhabits with others during social interactions. In earlier sociological literature on status, these fundamental social roles are referred to as master statuses: roles that cannot be easily elided in social interactions, such that they become a "determining trait… [that] tends to overpower… any other characteristics that run counter to it" (Hughes 1945, 357). These statuses, in turn, can become roles that become stigmas—marks of Otherness and exclusion (Goffman 1986). Nevertheless, stigmatized roles do not simply take those who possess them out of social interactions altogether; rather they also grounds for social and political projects that have diverse and contradictory ends, such as the governance of minoritized identities under liberal regimes (Hankins 2014; Povinelli 2002). As I will show in this chapter, while agama is highly consequential in determining one's moral standing in everyday social interactions, agama (or the stigmatized lack thereof) is interactionally mediated and negotiated as a common ground, rather than pre-determined.

While relational common grounds illuminate how similarities and differences are negotiated and contested across two or more social actors in a given interaction, relational common grounds also situate social interactions within their historical and political contexts. Thus, an analysis of relational common grounds is irreducibly triadic: to invoke a relational common ground, such as religion, social actors also require terms of comparison against which they evaluate similarities and differences between themselves and others (Gal 2016a; Gal and Irvine 2019a). Specifically, in this chapter, I argue that relational common grounds derive such terms of comparison by defining a constitutive Other. That is, when social actors mutually inhabit a relational common ground, they identify and compare one another based upon their mutual differences from a constitutive Other. For example, in Kupang, my field site, those seen

as *without* agama, namely foreigners and Communists, are recognized as constitutive Others, because these Others delineate agama as a relational common ground inhabited by both Muslim and Christian Indonesians. In one instance, at a Kupang-based NGO office, I chose to perform certain rituals of Islamic religiosity, such as fasting during Ramadan, and I was credited for following what others recognize as my agama. In response to my observance of Ramadan, Evelyn, an NGO staffer and a Christian, complimented me for observing Islamic practices and not turning into one of "those Americans without a clear agama" (BI: *orang Amerika sana yang agamanya tidak jelas*).[7] Thus, in this interaction, the figure of the irreligious American serves as a constitutive Other that secures agama as a relational common ground between Evelyn, a Christian Indonesian, and me, a Muslim Indonesian.

Agama and Modern Indonesian Nationalism

Beyond the immediacies of the social interactions I observed during fieldwork, analyzing agama as a relational common ground allows us to understand how such common grounds are mobilized to disqualify, exclude, and remove constitutive Others. In particular, those who were seen as "without agama" (BI: *tidak beragama*), are categorized as non-Indonesians, and, as such, became unassimilable Others against which Indonesians who claim an agama define themselves. Within the category of those without agama, two categories are particularly salient: (1) those who are categorized as non-Indonesian foreigners, and (2) those who are categorized as Communists, who could be Indonesian.[8] Although Indonesians often invoke foreign-ness to

[7] From here onwards, BI is short for "Bahasa Indonesia," Indonesia's official state language.
[8] Agama is also deployed to invoke a sense of "kinship" (*persaudaraan*) between Indonesians and non-Indonesians who are of the same religion. For instance, through narratives of shared ancestry, language, and of Islam as a shared religion, ethnic Malays in Peninsular Malaysia and in the Indonesian island of Sumatra consider each other to be *Melayu serumpun,* "Malays of one ilk" (see Walker, Banks, and Sakai 2009).

illustrate how agama differentiates kin from non-kin in the world outside of Indonesia, the category of Communists includes fellow Indonesians as well. In other words, while foreigners are external Others, Communists are internal Others, as the figure of the Communist is tied to those who were suspected with involvement in the Indonesian Communist Party (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*), the PKI. During Indonesia's far-reaching anti-Communist purges in 1965 and 1966, hundreds of thousands of suspected PKI members, including residents of Kupang, became victims of torture, imprisonment, and mass murder (Farram 2002; Webb 1986; van Klinken 2014).[9] Throughout General Soeharto's authoritarian New Order regime (1966–98), the state continued to ban survivors of anti-Communist violence from seeking employment and from participating in civic institutions, such as in churches (Hearman 2018; Kolimon, Wetangterah, and Campbell-Nelson 2015).

Since the late 1960s, when the New Order regime rose to power, the Indonesian state's ideology of agama became codified in the first principle of the Pancasila, the Five Principles, a constitutional doctrine that is based on "belief in the oneness of God" (*Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*). Although the Indonesian government initially deployed Pancasila as an anti-Communist doctrine, schools, and military apparatus, the Pancasila continues to undergird agama in two ways: (1) that all Indonesian citizens must profess a state-recognized agama, including on state-issued forms of identification; and (2) that the state regulates and authorizes the religious affairs of all state-recognized agamas (see Formichi 2021; Hefner 2017; Menchik 2016). Thus, in its contemporary manifestation, the Pancasila serves as an official doctrine that mandates every Indonesian citizen to profess one out of six agamas recognized by the state: Islam, Catholicism,

[9] There is a general agreement that the death toll of these anti-Communist purges reached at least 500,000, thereby amounting to genocide (Cribb 2001).

Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, or Confucianism.[10] Furthermore, these state-sanctioned categorizations of one's agama are highly consequential: these categorizations dictate, to varying degrees, whom one can legally marry, which schools to send one's children to, and where one can be buried after death.[11] Thus, even decades after Indonesia's anti-Communist purges, a morally efficacious claim to agama goes far beyond enabling individuals to gain formal recognition as citizens under the Indonesian state: a person's claim to an agama does not only determine their formal claim to citizenship, but also their very capacity in assuming social roles in relation to others.

In this chapter, I argue that taking agama as a relational category enables a form of analysis that does not only assume difference between each category of agama as a given. Further, taking agama as a form of relationality enables us to understand of an organizing principle of difference and relationality beyond forms of liberal secularism that idealizes and privileges separation between religious and political domains of social life (e.g., Agrama 2010; Asad 2003; Fernando 2014; Hirschkind 2011; Mahmood 2009). Such decentering of liberal models of difference have enabled anthropologists to critically evaluate state disciplinary regimes that also operate through models of agentive self-fashioning (Asad 2018; Mahmood 2015; 2005). Thus, I intend this chapter to illuminate the Indonesian case of agama as a set of ideologies that are parallel to secularism and yet is distinct from secular liberal models of religious governance. Specifically, I will show how the Indonesian ideology of agama encompasses a multitude of religious categories that are made comparable to one another while

[10] Since early 2019, one can also petition for a "traditional belief" (*aliran kepercayaan*) to be listed in one's government-issued ID.

[11] For instance, the Indonesian government does not recognize interfaith marriages. In order to be married by law, both spouses have to declare the same agama; thus, churches and other faith institutions have standardized procedures and processes for conversions that are necessitated by marriage.

juxtaposing them against deviant Others, such as Communists, who lie outside of the moral bounds of sociality and are thus blocked from claiming an agama. Furthermore, these forms of encompassment and juxtaposition are semiotic ideologies that are produced by historically situated regimes of political governance, thereby illuminating how agama enacts forms of power that are attributed to the Indonesian state (see Gal 2016; Irvine 2016).

Beyond analyzing the modern Indonesian state's ideological perspectives on religion and nationhood, this chapter also illustrates how such ideologies are reproduced and invoked in religious institutions and collectives that are key to Indonesia's political life (see Bowen 2003; Hefner 2000; 2019; Menchik 2018; 2014). Specifically, I build upon prior scholarship that explicates how the Indonesian state valorizes a form of "godly nationalism" that "is not necessarily moving towards either liberal secularism or theocracy" (Menchik 2014, 600). This brand of godly nationalism, furthermore, ensures that "the state is fully involved in the firm demarcation of religious orthodoxy" (Menchik 2014, 594). Thus, the Indonesian state and state-sanctioned religious institutions are deeply invested in the "proper attitudes, sensibilities… and practices that a modern believer is supposed to bring" (Mahmood 2015, 3). However, rather than focusing on the question of how states enforce regimes of secularism, which scholars of secularism have extensively analyzed, I ask how agama— an ideology that governs relationships within and between religious collectives—is enacted in social perspectives that everyday Indonesians deploy in social interaction (see also Brubaker 2004; 2015).

In the following sections, I will first situate the youth ministry of Nehemiah, a Kupang-area congregation, within the context of local and nation-wide relations that are mediated by agama. Subsequently, I will analyze enactments of agama as a relational common ground in two different settings: (1) among a church congregation in Tuabuna, a village in Kupang, an eastern

Indonesian locale where I conducted fieldwork; and (2) in an interview with Heni, a church elder in another village in Kupang, who was labeled as a Communist during her childhood. These two examples demonstrate how agama does not only figure in the negotiation of similarities and differences between Indonesians who claim an agama, but also in the exclusion of two figures who are deemed to be beyond the moral bounds of agama: non-Indonesians, who are considered as lacking agama, and Communists.[12]

Christianity, Islam, and Cosmologies of the World at the Nehemiah Church

For a total of nine months during my fieldwork, I regularly attended youth ministry services in the Nehemiah Church, a congregation of the Christian Evangelical Church in Timor (GMIT), a Protestant denomination with roots in the Dutch Reformed mission.[13] Nehemiah is located in the village of Tuabuna, an urbanizing quasi-rural locale at the periphery of the Kupang municipality (*Kota Kupang*).[14] In Tuabuna, as well as in the Kupang area more generally, Protestants, most of whom are GMIT congregants, represents approximately 80 to 90 percent of the local population, with the rest split evenly between Muslims and Catholics (*Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Timur Dalam Angka 2019* 2019). Through membership in the Nehemiah congregation as well as in other state-authorized place of worship, Tuabuna residents morally claim an agama as part of the Indonesian state's regime of citizenship. In this section, I will demonstrate how my interactions with the Nehemiah congregation in Tuabuna involve two forms of interactional

[12] While Communism as an ideology and a political movement has a global reach, the Indonesian state and its military considers Communism as an internal threat from within Indonesia, as both periodically circulate public reminders about "the latent threat of Communism," *bahaya laten komunisme*.
[13] The name of the congregation, as well as all personal names in this chapter, are pseudonyms.
[14] While Tuabuna is nominally located in an urban municipality (*kotamadya*), a large proportion of its population are farmers and fisherfolk. At the same time, it has witnessed the recent arrival of migrants from across the province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) who find work in more urbanized areas of Kupang.

negotiations: (1) how agama serves as a relational common ground between Christians at the Nehemiah church and myself, whom the congregants categorize as Muslim; and (2) agama serves as a relational common ground through which Nehemiah church congregants mutually align themselves with me and other Muslim Indonesians to differentiate themselves from constitutive Others, namely non-Indonesians who are uncommitted to an agama.

Although my analysis focuses on the social interactions that I observe during fieldwork, agama as a relational common ground between Christians and Muslims in Tuabuna has well-established precedents. For example, because the Nehemiah church sanctuary is the most spacious and well-equipped buildings in the village of Tuabuna, the church frequently hosts public meetings organized by local government agencies and non-profits for villagers of all faiths. Furthermore, in one particularly historic moment, the Nehemiah church sanctuary sheltered local Muslims during a wave of arson, looting, and violence conducted by Christian mobs against Muslims in the Kupang area in 1999.[15] Thus, in Tuabuna, villagers of all agama are aware of Nehemiah's interfaith significance as a hub of social interactions across lines of religious difference—a hub that is maintained through the commitment of Christians, Muslims, and others through their respective commitments to an agama. Such sentiments were replicated among Nehemiah youth ministry members, who recognized me not only as an observer and researcher, but also as a fellow participant in the co-production of agama as a relational common ground. By invoking agama as a common ground, the Nehemiah youth ministry accomplishes what its members refer to as *kebersamaan yang luar biasa*, an "extraordinary sense of togetherness"—a perspective that mediates and mitigates differences among their members as

[15] This episode followed widespread sectarian violence between Christians and Muslims in eastern Indonesia after the downfall of General Soeharto's regime in 1998. The Kupang area was spared from the worst waves of violence and killings, which happened extensively in the province of Maluku (van Klinken 2001).

they mutually inhabit agama as a set of shared social roles (see introductory chapter; see also Chapter 4).

To demonstrate their commitment to Christianity as an agama that mediates local forms of sociality, Nehemiah congregants attend not only Sunday worship, but also *ibadah* (worship meetings) at ministries that happen throughout the week. These ministries hold worship meetings that are dedicated for specific demographic categories, including youth (BI: *pemuda*), adult (married) men, adult (married) women, and seniors. Because these ministries encompass all stages of a congregant's lifespan, these worship meetings are key in establishing a congregant's social standing not only in their congregation, but also in their own village. In worship meetings, congregants who lead a worship meeting (*pimpin ibadah*) are expected to use linguistic registers that efficaciously situate themselves and their congregation both as Kupang residents and as part of the Indonesian nation (see also Chapter 2). Among members of the youth ministry, learning how to talk and participate in worship meetings helps them secure a crucial rite of passage: many of them are about to be confirmed (*peneguhan sidi*)—a series of sacraments that require a young congregant to demonstrate mastery of liturgical materials and seriousness in matters of worship.[16] Congregants who have been confirmed are then allowed to marry a fellow (Protestant) Christian—a key rite of passage that allows one to be regarded as a full-fledged adult who can establish an independent household (*rumah tangga*) in the village (see also Chapter 3).

Although participation in the youth ministry is a crucial part of social belonging among Christians in Tuabuna, my interlocutors' roles as worship participants and leaders were newly

[16] Confirmations (*sidi*), a key sacrament among GMIT congregants, are usually celebrated with a ritual feast (*feast*) at the house of the young congregant's family. Furthermore, GMIT congregants must be officially confirmed before they are allowed to marry.

redefined in relation to my presence as a particular kind of non-Christian, that is, as a Muslim who also happens to be a fellow Indonesian. Initially, my presence in worship meetings generated debate and discussion among Nehemiah congregants about how a person of a different agama should participate in church activities. For instances, because Indonesians normatively assume that Muslims would only eat food that is known to be *halal*, Jon and his fellow congregants were initially unsure about offering food to me during worship meetings—a key element of hospitality among Kupang residents.[17] After observing my own eagerness in listening to conversations at the youth ministry and in consuming the food offered by worship meeting hosts, Jon, the leader of the youth ministry, kept inviting me to participate in youth ministry meetings. Thus, throughout my fieldwork, Jon and his friends dutifully took me on the back of their motorcycles as we go to different households across the village of Tuabuna who take turn in hosting youth ministry worship meetings. Eventually, worshippers became comfortable enough with my presence, such that they did not shy away from discussions about differences across agama. In the examples that I analyze in the following section, agama emerges as a relational common ground that is mutually inhabited both by members of the youth ministry and me as an ethnographer.

A Christian Congregation in a Nation of Many Agamas

In the following worship meeting, youth congregants discussed the issue of conversion and differences across faiths among themselves in a particularly explicit manner. This was unusual, because there was no elder (*penatua*) or minister who would otherwise provide an authoritative

[17] Islamic dietary customs, or halal, vary across Indonesia. However, in Kupang, two common practices exist among Muslims: most Muslims would only avoid food that contain pork or alcohol, while some Muslims would only eat food that is prepared by fellow Muslims.

closing word for the sermon. In this series of interactions, a particularly eloquent worshipper, Norma Pah, describes how she positions herself, her own congregation, and me, a researcher, as those who differentially belong to collectives defined and outlined by agama. In describing the common grounds that frame relations between Christianity, agama, and the world, Norma is informed by her own relationship to the congregation: in the village where Nehemiah congregants reside, Norma is recognized as a knowledgeable, well-traveled, and financially independent young woman, because she recently spent a year in Malaysia as a domestic worker, during which she saved a substantial amount of her income. As such, she is particularly enthusiastic when it comes to conversations that involve explaining the world "out there" (*di luar sana*) to younger congregants who have not had traveled as extensively. Thus, Norma's commentary offers an insight into how she situates her Christian congregation in relation to national and transnational cosmologies that are mediated by agama.

Figure 1.1. A typical youth ministry worship meeting at a congregant's house. Here, the worship leader (standing) reads and interpret biblical passages before inviting responses from others. Photo by author.

In her commentary, Norma encourages her fellow congregants to stay true to their Christian faith as part of their orientation to nationhood. Although her utterances are addressed to fellow Christians in her congregation, she also points to how such forms of steadfastness relationally define agama as common ground that one shares with people of other faiths, including Muslims. After Norma referenced an apocryphal story about how an entire church supposedly converted into Islam, she directed an apology towards me, someone whom she recognizes as a Muslim. Thus, Norma places agama as a relational common ground not only among her congregation of Christians, but also across categories of agama:

Transcript 1.1. Norma's apology

[1] Beta pernah nonton YouTube itu yang eh
I-ONCE-WATCH-YOUTUBE-THAT-WHICH-UM
I once watched a YouTube video where um

[2] yang satu gereja katanya masuk Muslim
WHICH-ONE-CHURCH-SAID-ENTER-MUSLIM
an entire church apparently converted to Islam[18]

[3] maaf Mas Fadi
SORRY-BROTHER-FADI
sorry Mas Fadi[19]

[4] masuk Muslim hanya karena… ada seorang imam yang… muncul
ENTER-MUSLIM-ONLY-BECAUSE…THERE-AN-IMAM-WHICH… APPEARED
[they] converted to Islam only because… there was an imam who… showed up

[5] nah masak segampang itu segoyah itu katong pung iman
NOW-HOW-EASY-THAT-WEAK-THAT-WE-HAVE-FAITH
now how could it be [that their faith is] that easy, that unsteady, [that can't be] our faith

[18] This genre of apocryphal "conversion stories" circulates across, among others, Indonesian-language YouTube videos. In the video that Norma cited, an entire church congregation supposedly converted to Islam after hearing an *azan*, an Islamic call to prayer.
[19] *Mas* (lit. "brother") is a kin term used to address and refer to Javanese men.

[6] **di luar** sa ya jangan terjadi di kitong
THERE-OUT-JUST-YES-NOT-HAPPEN-IN-US
I hope that it only happens out there [abroad] not among us

[7] **kitong** harus percaya
WE-MUST-BELIEVE
We must believe [in our own agama]

On lines 2 and 4, the predicate Norma used for conversion is the Indonesian word *masuk,* literally, "to enter." Although masuk also refers to the act of physically entering an enclosed space, masuk in this context signifies one's entrance into a collective of persons who all belong to the same agama—in this case, Islam. Thus, Norma's use of the word masuk does not only point to an interior state of being, because her use of masuk also draws attention to shifts in one's relationality toward others. While masuk's semantic range also encompasses individual events of conversion, the use of masuk to describe conversion also requires one to indicate the particular agama that a person or a collective has newly adopted. In Kupang, for instance, one says *masuk Muslim* to denote one's conversion to Islam, or *masuk Kristen* to denote one's conversion to Christianity.[20] At the same time, according to Norma, these events of conversion also weaken one's ties to the agama that one leaves behind, because it shows that one's faith in a prior agama was *goyah*, or "unsteady" (line 5). Thus, events of conversion destabilize the common ground that one shares with the followers of an agama one leaves behind.

According to Norma, one's relational common ground with those who follow the same agama is only secure if one plans to follow the same agama for the remainder of one's life; that is, if one is steadfast enough in an agama to dismiss the possibility of ever converting to another

[20] A common instance of "entering" (*masuk*) a new religion is the conversion that needs to happen before a marriage, because, broadly speaking, the Indonesian government does not recognize interfaith marriages performed in its jurisdiction. For instance, someone who converts out of some other religion into Christianity before marrying a Christian is described as someone who "enters Christianity" (*masuk Kristen*).

agama. In particular, when she addresses her fellow Christians, Norma mentions that one must work to maintain the strength of one's *iman* ("faith"), so that they do not leave their own agama for another, like the apocryphal church congregation who spuriously left Christianity for Islam (lines 2–5).[21] She refers to this apocryphal story to call upon her congregation to differentiate themselves from the church congregation *di luar* ("out there")—an Indonesian phrase that often refers to places and contexts outside of Indonesia (line 2).[22] Thus, Norma calls upon her fellow worshippers at Nehemiah to maintain "belief" (*percaya*) in their own agama, Christianity (line 7).

However, before Norma calls upon her fellow youth ministry members to strengthen their Christian faith, she addressed me with the word *maaf*, which literally translates to "sorry" (line 3). In her utterance, Norma also addresses me with a kin term, *mas*, that indexes the addressee's Javanese (and thus presumably Muslim) identity. By uttering such an apology, Norma presupposes that I would negatively assess her disappointment at Christians converting into Islam, because she realized that, in terms of agama, I am Muslim. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Norma disavows Islam or Muslims as such. Rather, by calling upon her fellow youth ministry members to differentiate themselves from an apocryphal congregation that spuriously converted to Islam, Norma calls upon Christians in her congregation to demonstrate that they are faithful to their own agama, so that they can establish a common ground between themselves and others who are steadfast in their belief (*percay*a) in an agama. In this instance, by addressing me, a Muslim, before addressing her fellow congregation, Norma calls for her congregation to

[21] Although *iman* is a Malay word with etymologies that have been traced to Arabic, iman does not necessarily index specifically Islamic forms of religiosity or faithfulness in this context. Among my interlocutors, the word iman is classified as a standard Indonesian word.
[22] *Di luar* is often used as a shorthand for *di luar negeri* ("outside of the country"). While it is unclear whether Norma means "abroad" or simply "not here in our congregation," she uses the phrase di luar to contrast the here-and-us against the there-and-them.

establish a common ground with steadfast followers of other agamas, including followers of Islam. Norma's utterance of "sorry" (*maaf*), therefore, addresses how agama is not only a matter of following a particular religion, such as Christianity or Islam, but also a way of negotiating similarities and differences through relational common grounds. Through these interactional negotiations, plural ways of belonging to the nation are mediated through agama (see also Hefner 2019; Menchik 2014).

Here, faithfulness to an agama is also central to how Norma establishes her congregation's orientation towards the Indonesian nation, where one encounters Muslims and other who follow different agamas. Because Norma aspires to strengthen her congregation's hold onto Christianity as an agama, Norma describes spurious conversion as something that happens "out there" among church congregants somewhere abroad, and not "among us," an Indonesian church congregation (line 7). At the same time, strength in one's own agama can only be relationally defined through one's encounter with followers of other agamas, which includes encounters between Nehemiah congregants with myself, a Javanese Muslim. Nevertheless, as Norma explains, if an Indonesian person is steadfast in their own agama, then strength in one's own agama serves as a common ground between Indonesians who belong to different agamas. For instance, during public speeches in Kupang, when a speaker addresses people of different agamas, it is common to encounter the standard Indonesian phrase "all of us as people with agama*" (kita semua sebagai orang beragama*) as a form of collective self-reference. Thus, although one might come across Indonesians who belong to different agamas, agama serves as a relational common ground rather than as a marker of incommensurable difference.

By invoking a relational common ground among Christians and Muslims, Norma invokes a collective that encompasses multiple categories of agama: the Indonesian nation. Thus, after

invoking differences between those who are steadfast in their agama and those who are not, Norma links steadfastness in agama to a notion of belonging to the Indonesia nation in the following text (Transcript 1.2.), which immediately follows Norma's explication in Transcript 1.1. In Transcript 1.2., Norma draws multiple parallels to differentiate those who morally claim agama through faithfulness, and those who are weak in their faith. Norma's parallels invoke forms of relationality that serve as a common ground inhabited by her own Christian congregation and Indonesia's Muslim-majority:

Transcript 1.2. Indonesians and outsiders

Bold indicates contrast made between proximal social actors "here" and distal social actors "over there"

Note: lines 6 and 7 from Transcript 1.1. are reproduced here for context

[6] **di luar** sa ya jangan terjadi di **kitong**
THERE-OUT-JUST-YES-NOT-HAPPEN-IN-US
I hope that it only happens out there and not **among us**

[7] **kitong** harus percaya
WE-MUST-BELIEVE
We must believe [in our own agama]

[8] **kitong** pung bangsa bangsa negara terberkati walaupun
OUR-OWN-NATION-NATION-COUNTRY-BLESSED-ALTHOUGH
our nation, nation, and our country are blessed [by God], although

[9] **di Indonesia ni** dia punya mayoritas Islam ya teman teman tapi […]
IN-INDONESIA-HERE-IT-HAS-MAJORITY-ISLAM-YES-FRIENDS-BUT
Here in Indonesia [it's a] majority-Muslim [country] right, friends, but […]

[10] **di NTT sini** mungkin Kristen paling banyak su **di NTT sini**
IN-NTT-HERE-MAYBE-CHRISTIANITY-MOST-NUMEROUS-ALREADY-IN-NTT-HERE
here in our [province] NTT Christians are perhaps the most numerous **here in NTT**

[11] **kitong** tetap yakin **kitong** son boleh goyah
WE-STAY-BELIEVE-WE-NOT-ALLOW-UNSTEADY
We stay faithful, **we** cannot doubt [our faith]

In this text, Norma describes three sets of contrasts: (1) between Indonesian Christians and non-Indonesian Christians; (2) between non-Indonesians and Indonesians; and (3) between Indonesian Christians and Indonesian Muslims. To describe these three contrasts, Norma uses the plural first-person pronoun *kitong*, a word in bahasa Kupang, which is neither exclusive nor inclusive.[23] First, in contrast to the non-Indonesian Christians "out there" who are weak in their faith and spuriously converted to Islam 1 (line 6), she calls upon her own congregation to become Christians who are true to their belief in Christianity (line 7). Second, she describes "our nation" and "our country" as "blessed" by God, which, again, stands in contrast to the church congregation abroad who abandoned their faith (line 8). Third, she makes a claim to national belonging by describing a relational common ground between her fellow Christian Indonesians and the Muslim-majority (lines 8-10). Nevertheless, NTT, the province where her congregation is located, is overwhelmingly Christian, and this stands in contrast to most of Indonesia (line 10). In fact, as she describes NTT, she brackets her description of NTT as a Christian-majority locale within a repetition of "here in NTT" (*di NTT sini*), figurating her description of the province as bracketed within a larger, albeit different, national entity. To claim a common ground with the rest of Indonesia, therefore, Norma does not envision a Christian nation; rather, she again calls upon her congregation to stay faithful to their agama, Christianity (line 11). Thus, Norma's commentaries demonstrate that, by remaining faithful, Christian Indonesians like her own congregation co-align themselves with Muslims Indonesians in claiming the nation as a relationally defined common ground.

[23] Bahasa Kupang is a variant of Malay that is spoken by multiethnic communities in Kupang and its surrounding areas. Structurally adjacent to Indonesian, bahasa Kupang indexes local belonging to Kupang without invoking any particular ethnic group as its native speakers (see Chapter 2; see also Errington 2022).

Transcript	Categories	Here-and-Us	There-and-Them
1.1.	Faithful Christians vs Christians who are weak in their faith	Christians who stay true to their faith	The apocryphal church congregation who spuriously converted into Islam
1.2.	Indonesians vs others	Indonesian Christians and Muslims Indonesians who are faithful to their agama	People who are unsteady in their faith (e.g., the apocryphal church congregation)

Table 1.1. Norma's recursive oppositions

To further illustrate these recursive sets of contrast that relationally define agama in Transcripts 1.1. and 1.2., Table 1.1. demonstrates Norma's co-alignment of Christian Indonesians and Muslim Indonesians through the constitutive exclusion of others, who are characterized as weak in their faiths. Before she describes agama as a common ground among both Muslim Indonesians and Christian Indonesians (Transcript 1.2.), Norma describes a constitutive form of mutual Othering (Transcript 1.1.): Christians in Indonesia should be faithful, unlike the non-Indonesian apocryphal church congregation abroad who converted to Islam. Norma then encourages her own congregation to differentiate themselves from non-Indonesian Christians who lack faith: even though her own congregation is situated in Muslim-majority Indonesia, they must not convert out of Christianity. In fact, when Christian Indonesians are strong in their faith, such a commitment to their agama does not distance them from Muslim Indonesians. Rather, in Transcript 1.2., by describing weakness in faith as an attribute that Christian Indonesians must reject, Norma makes the case for Christian Indonesians to be recognized as equally belonging to the same nation as Muslim Indonesians—that is, by being steadfast to their faith, both Christian Indonesians and Muslims Indonesians share a common ground defined by agama.

In this interaction, Norma's co-production of a relational common ground with Muslim Indonesians is crucial not only because she places her own Christian congregation within the context of living in a Muslim-majority nation. Rather, in the immediate here-and-now of this interaction, she also addresses her utterances to me, a Muslim Javanese researcher, who is co-present at the worship meeting. Although Norma and her fellow congregants recognize me as someone who belongs to Islam, a different agama, my own role as a fellow Indonesian with an agama was recognized when Norma elaborates upon her visions of agama as a common ground that constitutes mutual belonging "over here" in Indonesia. Thus, according to her view, it does not matter whether an Indonesian is Muslim or Christian, but it is important for an Indonesian, who shares the nation (*bangsa*) and a country (*negara*), to be committed to their respective agama as a common ground (line 8). Therefore, as illustrated in Norma's use of agama as a common ground in a social interaction that invokes relationships across religious categories, agama mediates relationships of similarity difference within the Indonesian nation (see also Cole 2010; Goebel 2015; Zentz 2017). Even when one encounters Indonesians who follow an agama other than one's own, Indonesians recognize such a difference by mutually recognizing agama as a common ground.

Those Without Religion: Communists

In the previous section, Norma's commentaries demonstrates that Indonesians' recognition of each other as moral citizens relies on a mutual orientation of faithfulness towards agama. In particular, her commentaries describe how Muslim Indonesians and Christian Indonesians who share agama as a common ground define each other in relation to a third figure: non-Indonesians who lack agama. Such configurations illuminate how differences and

similarities between two social actors are grounded in triadic perspectival comparisons: a social actor that makes a comparison (e.g., a church congregant), the social actor being compared (e.g., a Muslim neighbor), and the terms by which the comparison is made, such as agama or the lack thereof. As these comparisons are socially situated, they are therefore subject to contestation and negotiation (Gal and Irvine 2019b; see also Simmel 1971). Thus, in understanding how claims to agama are grounded in contestable social perspectives, we might ask the following questions: is it possible for an Indonesian to claim to an agama and yet *not* be recognized as a legitimate follower of one? What blocks the efficacy of a person's claim to an agama? What are the consequences of a failed claim to an agama?

As I have suggested earlier, agama as an ideology requires one to efficaciously claim an agama before gaining recognition from others as moral co-participants in everyday life under the Indonesian nation. Thus, if one is blocked from being recognized as a proper follower of a state-authorized agama, the social and political consequences are severe. For instance, Communists, who are seen as those who "do not have religion" (*tidak beragama*), were killed, tortured, and imprisoned during the authoritarian New Order regime (1966–98) of General Soeharto (Farram 2002; Webb 1986). Thus, in Kupang and across the province of NTT, followers of indigenous beliefs converted to Christianity in large numbers, as those who follow indigenous beliefs were regarded by the military and other state apparatuses as potential Communist sympathizers (van Klinken 2014; Webb 1986; Kolimon, Wetangterah, and Campbell-Nelson 2015). Even after Indonesia formally embraced democratic rule in 1999, the state continues to sanction the persecution of those who fall outside of state-sanctioned religious orthodoxies: for instance, Ahmadis, Shi'ites, and other groups are deemed those who defy state-sanctioned Islam, thereby demonstrating the state's delineation of "godly nationalism" to exclude those who fall outside of

agama's moral bounds (Menchik 2014). Similarly, in the following section, I analyze how a person's claim to Christianity as an agama is blocked if they are categorized as a Communist—an internal Other who is blocked from morally claiming agama as a relational common ground shared with other Indonesians.[24]

As personal histories on how one and one's own family became associated with Communism continue to be highly sensitive in Indonesia, I did not personally conduct interviews on the question of Communism during fieldwork. Thus, I drew from interview-based studies conducted by a GMIT-affiliated research team—studied that were later publicized in national news media outlets and in books cowritten by leaders of the GMIT synod (e.g., *BBC News Indonesia* 2019; Kolimon, Wetangterah, and Campbell-Nelson 2015; Wahyuningroem 2018). These publications were initiated by Rev. Merry Kolimon, head of the GMIT synod since 2015, who spearheaded initiatives to document acknowledgements of the church's own complicity in violence against suspected Communists (Kolimon, Wetangterah, and Campbell-Nelson 2015, 4). From this body of literature, I showcase one publicized interview conducted by a research team of the GMIT church with Heni Leba-Dethan, a church elder in Kupang who was suspected of Communist involvement and was barred from participating in congregational life. Although Heni identifies as a Christian, the state's categorization of Heni and her family as Communists blocked them from participating in church worship and in everyday interactions with others. Hence, as an instance of semiotic blockage, Indonesia's ideological system of agama "forces participants to take up fixed, exclusionary categories" (Gal and Irvine 2019a, 84). That is, one can either be a person with an agama (e.g., Christianity) or a Communist, but not both.

[24] Because this interview was made public and became part of a publicized study conducted by the GMIT church, Heni's name is not a pseudonym.

While these semiotic blockages continue to be consequential in contemporary Indonesia, ideologies that make Communism and agama incompatible are not timeless. Before the anti-Communist purges that occurred between 1965 and 1967, affiliation with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), among one of the world's largest non-ruling Communist parties at that time, did not necessarily block one's claim to an agama. In fact, Soekarno, Indonesia's first president, proclaimed *Nasakom* ("Nationalism, Agama, and Communism") as the nation's three ideological pillars during his era of authoritarian rule, *Demokrasi Terpimpin* ("Guided Democracy"), between 1959 and 1966 (McVey 1965; Mortimer 1974). In Kupang, while some factions of the GMIT opposed Communism as being incompatible with Christianity, the PKI's vision of social reform gained followers from both the rural peasantry and members of the educated middle-class, including GMIT church board members and ordained ministers (Kolimon, Wetangterah, and Campbell-Nelson 2015; Wahyuningroem 2018).

However, beginning in October 1965, after the Indonesian military initiated the first waves of anti-Communist killings and imprisonment, the youth wing of the GMIT church participated in purges of suspected Communists in the Kupang area—part of a nationwide series of purges that caused at least 500,000 deaths across Indonesia (Cribb 2001; Kolimon, Wetangterah, and Campbell-Nelson 2015; van Klinken 2014). Nevertheless, even after bloodiest waves of anti-Communist violence ended, state laws continued to marginalize those who were suspected of Communist involvement. For instance, in the 1970s and 80s, family members of suspected Communists were blocked from working in government agencies and participating in state-recognized forms of worship (e.g., Kolimon et al. 2015). As a result, persons and entire families labeled as Communists were barred from participating in church worship—a crucial element of one's claim to Christianity as an agama.

In the following text, Heni, a church elder, describes her experiences in the aftermath of anti-Communist purges in the Kupang area.[25] During this time, her family's ties to Communism prevented her from morally claiming Christianity an agama. Because Heni's mother served as a secretary to Gerwani, a Communist women's group, her mother was barred from worshipping at church, while Heni and her siblings were excluded from everyday socializing with their neighbors and fellow villagers—a condition that lasted until the 1980s (*BBC News Indonesia* 2019). Although Heni now serves as a church elder (majelis), which is a position of leadership in her local congregation, memories of being ostracized and labeled as an *anak PKI* (lit., "Communist Party child") continue to haunt her. Using reported speech in bahasa Kupang, a register of communication that invokes her belonging to the Kupang area, she describes how others use the term anak PKI to exclude her from everyday interactions:

Transcript 1.3. Heni's exclusion

Bold indicates Heni's voicing of others who call her *Anak PKI* ("PKI Child") through reported speech

[1] *Waktu kecil ko katong mau jual kue sa*

When we were little, we wanted to sell snacks

[2] *orang bilang,* ***sonde boleh beli itu kue karena dia anak PKI***

[but] people said, **[you] can't buy those snacks because she is a PKI child**

[3] *Sudah itu kotong su besar kaka, kitong mau ambil air, kitong begini begini*

Afterwards, when we were older, sister,[26] [when] we need to get some water [from a communal well], [when] we do anything

[25] Beginning in the late 2000s, the GMIT synod began a process of "reconciliation" (*rekonsiliasi*) to acknowledge its own role in the persecution of suspected Communists (Kolimon, Wetangterah, and Campbell-Nelson 2015; Wahyuningroem 2018).

[26] Here, *kaka*, a kin term in bahasa Kupang for an older sibling of any gender, addresses the interviewer.

[4] *ko dong bilang **anak PKI***

they said **[**we are] **PKI kids**

[5] *Di mana mana saja kaka.*

Everywhere, sister

[6] *Anak anak PKI itu anak anak son ada harga, anak anak son berarti*

PKI children were children without worth, children without meaning

[7] *Anak anak yang son ada derajat son ada harga di ini muka bumi*

Children who are without standing, without worth on this earth

According to Heni's account, to be described as an *anak PKI* is to be blocked from virtually all social relationships outside of the household; that is, she was denied a relational common ground as she encountered others in everyday life. She begins by describing how she and other children of suspected Communists were blocked from participating in relationships of exchange, such as the selling and buying of *kue*, sweet homemade snacks that families regularly purchase from their neighbors and kin (lines 1–3). This inability to participate in exchange demonstrates a particularly severe form of exclusion: in the Kupang area, where wage-based employment continues to be out-of-reach for many, exchanges through small-scale trading of food and produce across households are key sources of income (see also Chapter 3). Furthermore, when Heni fetches water from a communal well, a daily activity that necessitates face-to-face interaction with neighbors, she again encounters the label of anak PKI (line 4). In this instance, Heni uses the impersonal third-person pronoun orang (lit., "people") to describe those who call her anak PKI, thereby indicating that others in general, and not just particular foes, categorize her as a Communist. Hence, the pains of being labeled as an anak PKI and being excluded from everyday social interactions were extreme: according to Heni, being recognized

as an anak PKI is akin to being someone without "worth," "meaning," or "standing" (lines 6–7)

After describing how the label of *anak PKI* prevented her from maintaining social ties with their kin and neighbors, Heni's narrative took an introspective turn: she described how the label blocks her from recognizing her own self as a Christian. At this point, Heni started sobbing as she describes her experiences to the interviewer:

Transcript 1.4. Heni at the church

[8] *Di sini kaka beta rasa minder*

Here [in the church], sister, I feel inferior

[9] *Beta berdiri di depan ni di depan mimbar ini kaka*

I stand in the front, here, in front of the pulpit, here, sister

[10] *beta berdiri di sini kaka beta malu beta son ada percaya diri*

I stand here, sister, I feel ashamed, I have no confidence in my own self

[11] *karena ini… ini nama anak PKI, kaka, melekat betul betul*

Because this… this name, [this name of] the PKI child, sister, it really stuck [with me]

[12] *Melekat di dalam sini dan sonde pernah lupa.*

[It's] stuck in here and [I] will never forget [it]

Here, Heni describes how the label of a Communist interferes with how she inhabits her roles as a Christian and a church congregant—an interference that causes her a lot of distress. Although Heni stands "in front of the pulpit" (*di depan mimbar*) as a church elder and worships together with her fellow congregants (line 8), she also feels "ashamed" and loses her own "confidence" (lines 10), because such encounters with Christianity reminds her of her past as an anak PKI

(lines 11–12). As state-sanctioned ideologies of agama block her from simultaneously inhabiting the roles of a former Communist and a Christian, Heni is prevented from fully reconciling her past role as an anak PKI with her present role as a Christian, even as she is now a church board member (*anggota majelis*) who leads her congregation.

Although legally mandated persecutions of suspected Communists ended after the demise of Soeharto's authoritarian New Order in 1998, Heni's narrative shows that the figure of the Communist continues to stand as a timeless figure of Otherness that excludes a person from efficaciously claiming an agama. Thus, like the non-Indonesians who lack faithfulness in an agama in the previous section, Heni is blocked from fully inhabiting moral forms of citizenship through agama. As Heni's narrative is itself addressed to a team of ordained ministers and researchers under the umbrella of the GMIT church, it showcases the centrality of the church as an arbiter of agama and moral citizenship: although the GMIT synod once declared Communism to be incompatible with agama and enabled violence against suspected Communists, it now embraces *rekonsiliasi melalui jalur agama*, that is, "reconciliation [with survivors of anti-Communists violence] through the path of agama" (*BBC News Indonesia* 2019). Such forms of reconciliation between the church and survivors of anti-Communist violence rely on agama as a shared common ground: as demonstrated by Heni, a committed church elder, as long as one efficaciously claims Christianity an agama, a reconciliation with the church and with the state remains as a possibility, albeit a difficult one. In the GMIT's study of anti-Communist violence in Kupang and its surrounding areas, reconciliation that reaffirms survivors of these waves of violence as congregants and citizens of the Indonesian state are referred to as "reconciliation… within the church fellowship" (Kolimon, Wetangterah, and Campbell-Nelson 2015, 212). Thus, through these processes of reinventing a common ground between the church and those who

were formerly suspected as Communists, agama itself remains indispensable as an element of one's moral and social standing.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how agama as a relational common ground mediates one's moral belonging to the Indonesian nation. As illustrated in the first section, agama, the Indonesian state's ideology of religion, encompasses discursively mediated common grounds that one mutually inhabits together with other Indonesians. Furthermore, agama as a relational common ground encompasses a multitude of religions that are sanctioned by the state, including Christianity and Islam, the two largest religions in Indonesia by number of followers. Thus, if one makes an efficacious claim to any state-authorized religion, an agama, one can inhabit social roles that emplace them as moral citizens of the Indonesian state, even as one encounters Indonesians who belong to different agamas. Subsequently, as the second section has shown, failure to be recognized as a proper follower of an agama could be catastrophic: for instance, as a suspected Communist who is blocked from morally claiming an agama, one lacks a common ground through which moral forms of relationality with other Indonesians can be invoked. As I explain elsewhere in the dissertation, these moral forms of relationality are invoked as *kebersamaan*, togetherness—a sense of collectivity that is mediated by relations of solidarity and conflict in social interactions (see introductory Chapter, see also Chapter 4).

As a moral common ground, the Indonesian category of agama enacts processes of differentiation and adequation across social categories that are parallel to what scholars has described to as secularism (e.g., Agrama 2012; Asad 2018; Mahmood 2015). However, rather than simply categorizing the Indonesian state as a secular or non-secular regime, this chapter

contributes to questions of how religion becomes enacted as an organizing principle of relationality and social morality: it asks how social actors become encompassed within moral categories of religious life or excluded from moral forms of relationality altogether. In particular, the ideology of agama makes it impossible for social actors to legitimately make claims of similarity or difference while standing entirely outside of religious categories. That is, one makes a claim to agama for oneself and others through situated, ideologically mediated perspectives that encompass and juxtapose social actors in relation to one another (Gal and Irvine 2019a). Thus, beyond attending to the genealogy of secular governance regimes, this chapter calls for future research on secularism to consider the multitude of interactional perspectives deployed by social actors as they categorize, compare, and inhabit religion in everyday life.

Chapter 2

The Word of God in *Bahasa Tinggi,* the Word of Worshippers in *Bahasa Kupang*

In Kupang, a multiethnic locale in eastern Indonesia, my interlocutors describe themselves as speaking two languages: *bahasa Kupang* (literally, "Kupang language"), which they describe as *bahasa sehari-hari* (lit., "everyday language"), and standard Indonesian, which they describe as *bahasa tinggi* (lit., "high language")—the language of state agencies, educational institutions, and formal church sermons. As congregants of the Nehemiah Church in Tuabuna, a quasi-rural locale located in the urbanizing outskirts of the Municipality of Kupang (*Kota Kupang),* my interlocutors include both those who have lived in Tuabuna for multiple generations as well as those who have more recently migrated to the area from the surrounding rural areas of the East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) province (see Tidey 2012; van Klinken 2014). Tuabuna residents mainly hail from the three ethnic groups that are regarded as emblematic of the rural hinterlands and islands surrounding Kupang: the Timorese, the Rotenese, and the Sabunese. In Tuabuna as well as throughout Kupang, however, the many varieties of Timorese, Rotenese, and Sabunese languages are often absent. Instead, my interlocutors at the Nehemiah church, a congregation of the *Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor* (GMIT) denomination, mostly speak what they refer to as bahasa Kupang—a language that, while structurally related to standard Indonesian as a variety of Malay, is sufficiently different from standard Indonesian such that visitors and newcomers from elsewhere in Indonesia will not immediately comprehend conversations in bahasa Kupang.[1] Even as a fellow Indonesian, my interlocutors would often turn towards me after speaking to one another in bahasa Kupang to ask if I "understood" (*mengerti*) what they just talked about.

[1] The *Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor* (GMIT), the "Christian Evangelical Church in Timor," is a mainline Protestant denomination where over 80 percent of KUpang's population are congregants.

Furthermore, newcomers to Kupang are expected to eventually gain fluency in bahasa Kupang such that the language becomes one that is used for everyday talk among intimates and non-intimates alike (J. J. Errington 2014; 2022)

Although studies of eastern Indonesia have explained shifting relationships between state-authorized standard Indonesian and the area's multitude of ethnoregional languages, which are often mutually unintelligible, varieties of Malay are also spoken throughout the port cities of eastern Indonesia—a category that also includes bahasa Kupang and other forms of Malay that are closely related to and are often *compared* to standard Indonesian (C. E. Grimes et al. 1997; Jacob and Grimes 2006; Steinhauer 1994). For instance, I was often introduced to the bahasa Kupang adverb *su* ("already") and verb *pi* ("to go") as shortened forms of *sudah* and *pergi*, their standard Indonesian counterparts. Furthermore, although Kupang is located in the linguistically diverse province of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), which a well-traveled Kupang resident once described to me as a "miniature world" (*dunia mini*) where "every street corner has a different language" *(setiap pengkolan jalan ada bahasa sendiri*), they describe bahasa Kupang in relation to its similarities and differences to standard Indonesian—a language recognized as coming from outside of Kupang and NTT altogether (see Errington 2022). Thus, rather than analyzing standard Indonesian and bahasa Kupang as distinct categories, I analyze them as semiotic registers that are mutually constitutive: that is, they are semiotic registers, or categories of signs, that are defined in relation to one another (Agha 2005; 2007; Gal and Irvine 2019a; Silverstein 2003).

Throughout this chapter, I emphasize that standard Indonesian and bahasa Kupang are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are often co-present, particularly in church worship—a genre of speech that my interlocutors recognize as a site of authoritative linguistic conduct (see also

Keane 2007). For instance, Agustina, a community organizer and a church board member (*anggota majelis*), explained to me that once someone "is able to lead worship, they will be able to arrange words well" (*su bisa pimpin ibadat, su bisa atur kata deng bae*). According to her, someone who speaks in the manner of an ideal Christian worship leader can "tie words together" (*merangkai kata-kata*) in a purposeful manner, rather than simply "throwing words away" (*hambur kata*) in the manner of someone who talks with abandon. Thus, as I will illustrate in this chapter, one is expected to skillfully alternate between bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang not only to be recognized as an efficacious leader of worship meetings. As a contribution to anthropological scholarship on the relationship between Christianity and socially situated understandings of language, I ask how the efficacy of language as an expression of congregational life is relationally constituted as a set of contrasts between semiotic registers, including standards and non-standards alike (Handman 2015; Kuipers 1998; 2008). In particular, I analyze how congregants who worship at quasi-domestic spaces, namely at a private home with fellow members of a youth ministry, invoke their belonging and encompassment under the church congregation by deploying both bahasa Kupang and standard Indonesian as bahasa tinggi, a semiotic register associated with the Bible and formal services at a church sanctuary.

Following earlier scholarship that analyzes how a "standard language" is differentiated from putatively non-standard others, it is important to understand differences between bahasa Kupang and standard Indonesian not as a matter of categorizing two distinct languages, but as a matter of by-degree contrasts between semiotic registers that are made from socially situated perspectives (see Silverstein 2017). Such an approach allows us to understand standard languages (and putatively non-standard others) as historically situated political projects, rather than as absolute categories (Gal and Irvine 2000; Silverstein 1996; 2010; Woolard 2016). In particular, standard

languages and standardization projects are part of a broader cultural scheme of social differentiation through which semiotic registers are categorized, valued, and linked to sign-users (Gal 2016b; Silverstein 2017; Woolard 2016). Thus, in this chapter, I situate my intervention in the semiotic analysis of standardization not simply as a study of a standard register in relation to a multitude of non-standard registers. Instead, I analyze how the relationship between bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang constitutes a distinct, historically situated "culture of standard" (see Silverstein 1996; Gal 2006).

By situating standard Indonesian as bahasa tinggi, a semiotic register deployed in worship at a mainline Protestant denomination in Kupang, I argue that there is no standard-language-as-such, because standard registers are evaluated as a "standard" in relation to others only according to institutionally and ideologically mediated perspectives. Furthermore, standards are recursively contrasted against others: that is, depending on the ideological perspectives held by social actors, standards are put in contrast to putative non-standards in multiple axes of differentiation (Gal and Irvine 2019c, 137). In studies of language in Indonesia, a dominant trend has been to contrast standard Indonesian, positioned as a superordinate national language, against a multitude of ethnoregional languages (*bahasa daerah*), which are emblematic of individual ethnolinguistic groups, such as "Javanese" or "Rotenese" (e.g., Goebel 2010; Cole 2010; Keane 2003; Pemberton 1994b; Zentz 2017). Such forms of analyses have given rise to scholarship that underlines the marginality of Indonesia's ethnoregional languages in relation to standard Indonesian's institutional strength as the language of governance, education, and national mass media productions (Donzelli 2020; Kuipers 1998; Zentz 2014). However, rather than focusing on Indonesian as a supraordinal entity that encompasses other languages that are bound to ethnoregional domains, this chapter analyzes how Indonesian is opposed to bahasa Kupang in an

emergent axis of differentiation. In this recursion of an earlier opposition that pits Indonesian as a "national" language against "local" languages, standard Indonesian as bahasa tinggi is instead contrasted against bahasa Kupang—a language that is seen as non-standard, yet it also invokes social belonging to Kupang's interethnic populace.

In contrast to the relationship between standard Indonesian and Indonesia's multitude of ethnoregional languages, which are often mutually unintelligible, standard Indonesian as bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang are semiotic registers that have frequent lexical overlaps, thereby requiring grammatical features that are shibboleths or markers, such as pronominal references or question tags, to distinguish the two. For instance, the following are sample constructions in bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang that I have taken from church worship meetings at the Nehemiah church in Tuabuna:

Transcript 2.1. Sample constructions in *bahasa tinggi* and *bahasa Kupang*

	Bahasa tinggi	**Bahasa Kupang**
[1]	Betulkah?[2] RIGHT-Q "Is that right?"	Betul ko sonde? RIGHT-OR-NOT "Is that right?"
[2]	Anak kekasih kami CHILD-DEAR-US "Our beloved child"	Katong pung anak WE-HAVE-CHILD "Our child"

In the above sentences, the words *betul* ("right") and *anak* ("child") are shared by both constructions in bahasa Kupang and bahasa tinggi. However, the two registers are distinguished by different constructions for and question markers (line 1), pronouns (line 2), and possessive constructions (line 2). On line 2, the bahasa tinggi utterance "*anak kekasih kami*" ("our beloved

[2] The suffix *-kah* in Indonesian serves as a question marker.

child") is a set phrase used to refer to an unmarried young person during sermons and formal speeches, thereby allowing such an utterance to mark a social context that is associated with congregational life. Even as my examples draw from worship meetings at the homes of congregants, such shiboleths or markers of bahasa tinggi efficaciously invoke one's inclusion under the church—an institution that is associated with authoritative uses of bahasa tinggi.

Furthermore, both bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang are often co-present in a single utterance: even a single sentence, for instance, can incorporate elements of both registers. In church worship meetings, for instance, one often encounters sentence constructions that include elements of both bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang:

Transcript 2.2. Sample constructions incorporating both *bahasa tinggi* and b*ahasa Kupang*

Unmarked text is in bahasa tinggi
Boldface text is in bahasa Kupang

[3] Jangan katakan **kitong sonde** bisa

Don't say [that] **we cannot** [do it]

[4] Dia menjadi **kitong pung** orang terbaik, teladan dalam **kitong pung** hidup

He [Jesus Christ] became **our** best person, a role model in **our** life

In Transcript 2.2., the bahasa Kupang first-person plural *kitong* appears in a commentary to Biblical scriptures uttered by Roberta, a church board member who serves as a mentor to the Nehemiah congregation's youth ministry. On line 3, bahasa tinggi frames a reported speech event in bahasa Kupang: Roberta voices a congregant who might be on the verge of giving up by saying "we cannot [do something]." On line 4, the pronoun *dia* in bahasa tinggi refers to Jesus Christ—an entity that is other than Roberta herself and her fellow congregants but is equally accessible to any of them. As I will show later in this chapter, such simultaneous uses of bahasa

tinggi and bahasa Kupang inform how speakers perceive bahasa tinggi as having equalizing rather than socially particularizing effects—a quality that scholars of standardization and language politics have described as *anonymity* (J. J. Errington 1998; Gal and Woolard 2001a; Woolard 2016). At the same time, speakers evaluate bahasa Kupang as an authentic register of social belonging that speakers who are Kupang residents use to "just talk" (*baomong*) without having to learn —a quality that the same body of scholarship refers to as *authenticity*, the co-constitutive opposite of anonymity (Coupland 2003; Gal and Woolard 2001b; Woolard 2016).

Through this chapter, I argue that co-constitutive nature of authenticity and anonymity as forms of linguistic authority informs how Kupang residents situate themselves in relation to sociolinguistic transformations in Indonesian congregational life. As I will show later, even as the GMIT synod begins to favor "languages of the heart" that indexes authentic social belonging and moves away from the potentially alienating effects of bahasa tinggi, their congregants still draw heavily from bahasa tinggi as a language that invokes the equality of all in relation of God. Thus, tensions and contradictions between institutional agendas and everyday discursive practices are crucial in analyzing the workings of sociolinguistic transformations: as Indonesia's provincial cities, like Kupang, continue to urbanize and draw migrants from diverse ethnic backgrounds, forms of speaking that are *neither* standard Indonesian *nor* ethnolocal, like bahasa Kupang, are crucial in mobilizing forms of regional solidarity within Indonesia, even as bahasa tinggi remains indispensable (J. J. Errington 2022). Furthermore, in this chapter, I emphasize that semiotic processes standardization are not modular: that is, they are not simply "national" or "regional" or "local." Rather, semiotic processes of standardization are mediated by institutional contexts that give rise to axes of opposition that differentially contrast standard registers against others. Thus, in this chapter, I will use the term bahasa tinggi instead of standard Indonesian, as

congregants use the term *bahasa tinggi*, rather than *bahasa baku* ("standard language") or *bahasa Indonesia*, to refer to elements of standard Indonesian they encounter at church. By using the term bahasa tinggi, my aim is to underline the particularities of Christianity and the church in my analysis of semiotic processes, as these are also institutions that mediate one's moral and political belonging to the Indonesian nation (see also Chapter 1)

Anonymity, Authenticity, and Participation Frameworks

To provide a new perspective on how standardization operates as a semiotic process in congregational life, I will describe how the relationship between bahasa Kupang and bahasa tinggi emerges through the analytic of *authenticity* and *anonymity*, which are co-constitutive forms of linguistic authority (Gal and Woolard 2001a; Woolard 2016). In her analysis of the politics of linguistic movements in 20th century Catalonia, Kathryn Woolard describes authenticity and anonymity as co-constitutive semiotic ideologies that mediate the authoritativeness of language:

> An ideology of authenticity… holds that a language variety is rooted in and directly expresses the essential nature of a community or a speaker…. An ideology of anonymity… holds that a given language is a neutral vehicle of communication, belonging to no one in particular and thus equally available to all (Woolard 2016, 7).

While the eastern Indonesia's sociolinguistic and political trends differ significantly from those of western Europe, I emphasize that authenticity and anonymity are useful analogies in understanding how semiotic registers are situated in terms of their indexical relationship to a particular (or no particular) group of users, including Christian congregations in the Kupang area. For instance, in a manner that is resonant to Woolard's analysis of anonymity, standard Indonesian has been described as a language that is "in principle available to anyone" (Keane 2003, 506). Among Kupang-area congregants, standard Indonesian as bahasa tinggi enacts

another element of anonymity: it allows those who pray to enact the equality of all congregants in front of God. Bahasa Kupang, on the other hand, invokes situated notions of authenticity: it enacts a form of local belonging by indexing social relationships among congregants in the here-and-now.

Furthermore, I emphasize that authenticity and anonymity are not simply static qualities; rather, they are enacted through *participation frameworks*, or ideological frameworks that position social actors in relation to socio-spatiotemporally situated forms of discourse (Agha 2011; 2007; Irvine 1996; see also Goffman 1981). In this chapter, I emphasize how participation frameworks mediate how audience members should respond to a particular utterance. For instance, although speakers might deploy bahasa tinggi throughout a sermon, the presence of a single question tag or a kin term in bahasa Kupang indexes a shift in participation framework: that is, by using an element of bahasa Kupang after speaking in bahasa tinggi, speakers signal to their addressees that they should respond differently to their utterances In particular, during worship meetings, the question tag *ko* in bahasa Kupang indicates that audience members should respond to a worship leaders' question, rather than staying in the role of a listener. These frameworks, as I will show in this chapter, are dynamic and are reconfigured by participants throughout the duration of an interaction (see Irvine 1996). Furthermore, these participation frameworks contribute to the efficacy of skillfully alternating between bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang—a skill that is required for a worship leader to be seen as a successful mediator who "delivers the word of God" (*bawa firman Tuhan*) to the congregation. As I draw examples from meetings of a youth ministry at homes that are momentarily transformed into a worship spaces, these forms of mediation are crucial in bringing about the authoritativeness of bahasa tinggi as a register of worship in a social space otherwise marked by the everyday use of bahasa Kupang.

Although bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang are co-present in virtually all worship meetings at the Nehemiah congregation, the increasingly public presence of bahasa Kupang as a language of everyday communication has introduced new perspectives on the role of standard Indonesian, which is heard and deployed by Kupang residents as bahasa tinggi (see Errington 2022).[3] As I will show later, bahasa tinggi operates as a register that indexes acts of listening to a speaker who enacts an *anonymous* form of linguistic authority—a form of authority that is decoupled from socio-spatiotemporal specificities. Thus, to their users, registers that are linked to anonymous forms of authority "seem to be socially neutral [and] universally available" (Woolard 2016, 25). Furthermore, anonymity also operates as an equalizing force: because utterances in bahasa tinggi do not invoke differential forms of ethnolinguistic belonging, social status, or kinship, bahasa tinggi plays a crucial role in enacting the equality of all congregants in front of God—an ideology often expressed by my interlocutors as *kita semua sama di depan Tuhan* ("we are all the same in front of God"). Hence, using a language that indexes local ethnolinguistic belonging, such as Rotenese or Sabunese, would be problematic for such claims of equality (*kesetaraan*) and togetherness (*kebersamaan*) that the Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor (GMIT)—a mainline Protestant denomination— aspires to enact for its ethnically and linguistically diverse congregants ("Tata Dasar GMIT" 2015). Thus, in the excerpts of sermons and prayers that I analyze in this chapter, participation in worship require the use of semiotic registers, such as bahasa tinggi, that enacts the equality of all in front of God.

At the same time, although bahasa tinggi is indispensable to congregational life and its aspirations to equality, congregants also expect worship leaders to use bahasa Kupang to address their fellow congregants in the here-and-now of the worship meeting. When a worship meeting

[3] At the Nehemiah church, certain sermons given by visiting pastors, usually the head of a classis or a higher-ranking constituent unit of the GMIT synod, are conducted entirely in bahasa tinggi.

sufficiently incorporates bahasa Kupang, congregants have described to me that such uses of bahasa Kupang allows them to immediately "understand the word of God" (*mengerti firman Tuhan*). Hence, although Christian missionary activities have conventionally privileged ethnolinguistically emblematic local languages in eastern Indonesia and elsewhere, the church's incorporation of bahasa Kupang represents a pivotal turn: bahasa Kupang is not seen as the heritage of any particular ethnolinguistic group, yet it is regarded by Kupang residents as a "mother tongue," *bahasa ibu,* a language that one learns through one's upbringing in the Kupang area (Jacob and Grimes 2006). Furthermore, as Errington described in his study of bahasa Kupang among university students, bahasa Kupang has emerged a "mode of interethnic communication… with capacities to engender regionally based senses of interactional solidarity" (J. J. Errington 2022, 23). Thus, bahasa Kupang derives social value from a position of authenticity—its "relationship to a particular community" (Woolard 2016, 22). By drawing from these intersecting bodies of scholarship, this chapter contributes to scholarship that analyzes how Indonesia's emergent urban locales become sites where state-authorized registers of speech are revalued in contrast to emergent ways of speaking across ethnic boundaries (see also Errington 2022; Goebel 2010; 2015). In turn, such an analysis can help us situate how axes of difference between "anonymous" and "authentic" ways of speaking are recreated according to shifting semiotic ideologies of *sociolinguistic naturalism*—ideologies that evaluate how one speaks a language *as if* it is natural to them (Woolard 2016; Joseph 2000).

By taking these theories of sociolinguistic transformation and differentiation into account, I will analyze the following textual and ethnographic materials as to describe the co-constitutive roles of bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang in worship in the rest of this chapter: (1) a short overview of the GMIT church's shifting perspectives on bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang

as registers that respectively invoke anonymity and authenticity; (2) an ordained minister's prototypical use of bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang during a formal service at the Nehemiah church; and (3) examples of worship openings and prayers from a youth ministry meetings that invokes differential participation frameworks through the simultaneous use of bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang.

Bahasa Kupang and *Bahasa Hati*, "Heart Language"

While bahasa Kupang indexes ways of speaking that are distinctly vernacular to Kupang's multiethnic populace, the co-presence of esoteric, "high" form of Malay and a "low," everyday form Malay in congregational life has had a long history in Kupang and throughout eastern Indonesia (e.g., Fox 2014; Rutherford 2012).[4] For instance, Biblical Malay, which was documented in sermons among Rotenese-speaking communities in Timor and Rote, dates to the beginnings of Dutch colonial missionary work in the first half of the 18th century, when Bible translations in "high Malay" were used among congregations that speak a multitude of other languages (Fox 2014).[5] Rotenese preachers, for instance, deploy parallel constructions by using Biblical Malay in tandem with everyday registers of Rotenese—parallel constructions that deploy local cultural metaphors to recontextualize Biblical imagery (Fox 2014, 358). Nevertheless, preachers and churchgoing communities recognize Biblical Malay and other

[4] Bahasa Kupang as a contemporary enactment of regional solidarity emerges as the Kupang area urbanizes and a class of well-traveled, educated middle-class residents cultivate everyday ways of speaking that is seen as interethnic yet distinctly non-standard and provincial (J. J. Errington 2022).
[5] Kupang is located on the western end of Timor. In the middle of the 18th century, Rotenese communities were recruited, sometimes by force, by the Dutch to inhabit settlements around Kupang's natural harbor to protect their trade from incursions by the Timorese, who were allies of the Portuguese (see Fox 1977).

esoteric forms of high-register Malay as distinct from bahasa Kupang—a register of Malay used in everyday interactions across ethnolinguistic groups in what is now Kupang (Fox 2014, 133).[6]

Thus, given Kupang's long history as a multiethnic settlement, bahasa Kupang is not ideologically linked to a particular ethnicity—that is, unlike other ethnoregional or ethnolinguistically emblematic languages in Indonesia such as "Rotenese" or "Javanese," it is not attributed to an ethnic group (J. J. Errington 2014; 2022; Jacob and Grimes 2006). Rather, bahasa Kupang's use is indexically linked to the Kupang area as an irreducibly multiethnic locale. In the following example, a Kupang-area schoolteacher composed a story in Bahasa Kupang during a seminar on "mother tongues" (*bahasa ibu*) organized by the Department of Education and Culture in 2003:

> My name is Legowo, but they call me Ook. I was born in Kupang. My parents are Javanese. I have four friends, who are: Udin, Richard, Bagus and Edi. Udin's parents are from Ende; Richard is [ethnically] from Rote; Bagus is Balinese; and Edi is from Sabu. I can't speak Javanese; Udin can't speak Ende; Richard can't speak Rote, Bagus can't speak Balinese; and Edi can't speak Sabu. We just talk to each other using Kupang Malay.[7]
> (Jacob and Grimes 2006, 15)

Following the perspective that Ook, the narrator, showcases in this story, the seminar organizers concluded that Bahasa Kupang is "everyone's language, but no one's cultural heritage" (Jacob and Grimes 2006, 17). Even when the group of five friends claims belonging to distinct ethnolinguistically emblematic locales elsewhere (Java, Ende, Rote, Bali, and Sabu), bahasa Kupang is a language shared among all of them. According to Ook's perspective in this story, anyone who grew up in the Kupang area would, in theory, pick up Bahasa Kupang without any problems and be able communicate across ethnic lines. For Ook, talking (*baomong*) to others in

[6] The Rotenese were later joined by Sabunese and Timorese groups—the three predominantly Christian ethnic groups that are still seen today as emblematic of the Kupang area (Fox 1977; Hägerdal 2012).
[7] Some scholars refer to Bahasa Kupang as Kupang Malay, or *Melayu Kupang*.

bahasa Kupang is immediate: it does not require schooling or training, and they can "just talk to one another in Kupang Malay" (*baomong pake Basa Kupang sa*). This story, therefore, demonstrates bahasa Kupang's emplacement as a register of authenticity: bahasa Kupang is spoken *as if* it is a natural way to talk to fellow Kupang residents.

As bahasa Kupang becomes increasingly associated with interethnic solidarity and local belonging to the Kupang area, sections of the GMIT synod begin to push bahasa Kupang as a primary language of worship at church—a strong contrast to the prominent role of bahasa tinggi in the early years of the GMIT church in the 1940s and 1950s (van Klinken 2014, 144). In particular, the GMIT synod's *Unit Bahasa dan Budaya* (UBB; "Language and Culture Unit")—a unit with ties to the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL)—strongly encourages the use of bahasa Kupang as a vehicle for authentic, unmediated enactments of a congregant's relationship to God (see Handman 2007). In contrast to its position on bahasa Kupang, the GMIT's Language and Culture Unit conceives of standard Indonesian—bahasa tinggi— as a potentially alienating language: it is only accessible to those who have had formal schooling. In other words, the GMIT's Language and Culture Unit questions the anonymous form of linguistic authority that bahasa tinggi supposedly brings. According to this perspective, scriptural readings, exegesis, and prayer in bahasa tinggi can unwittingly alienate congregants who might associate the domain of worship with the esoteric domain of scholarly learning.

In the following extract from a pamphlet published by the GMIT church's Language and Culture Unit, the church's perspective is expressed through its representation of a congregant who found a sense of connection to the "word of God" (*firman Tuhan* or *firman Allah*) not in Indonesian or bahasa tinggi, but in their local language, Tetun—an ethnolinguistically

emblematic language spoken in Belu, the central part of Timor. The represented speech of the congregant, however, is expressed in bahasa Kupang:

Transcript 2.3. A Tetun speaker speaking in *bahasa Kupang*

Unmarked text is in bahasa tinggi
Boldface text is in Bahasa Kupang

[1]	Waktu satu orang dari Belu mendengar Firman Allah dalam bahasa Tetun pada pertama kali, dia heran.	When a person from Belu [a Tetun-speaking region] listened to the word of God in Tetun for the first time, they were surprised.
[2]	"Hei! Tuhan tahu bahasa Tetun, **ko?"**	"Oh! God speaks in Tetun**, doesn't he?"**[8]
[3]	Pada sa'at itu, pikirannya tentang Tuhan berubah total. Kalau dia bisa berkomunikasi dengan Tuhan melalui bahasa Tetun, itu berarti Tuhan bukan asing lagi. Gereja juga jadi relevan buat dia – bukan hanya buat "orang sekolah" yang tahu bahasa Indonesia.	At that very moment, their thinking about God changed totally. If they could communicate with God in Tetun, it means that God is no longer foreign. The church is also relevant for them—not only for "schooled people" who know Indonesian.

(B. D. Grimes 2010)

Although the congregant, who is directly quoted in line 2, is described as a Tetun speaker from the Tetun-speaking region of Belu, they are not quoted as speaking in Tetun. Rather, they are quoted as using the question tag *ko*, a shibboleth or marker of bahasa Kupang. The insertion of the question tag in bahasa Kupang, which punctuates a pamphlet otherwise written in bahasa tinggi, indicates that bahasa Kupang represents the speech of congregants to the church: that is, the church envisions bahasa Kupang as a language that is immediately accessible to their congregants, and not as a language that is mediated by schooling and education. Furthermore, in this vision, the congregants' quoted speech represents a moment of transformation: God as

[8] Here, the bahasa Kupang particle *ko* functions as a question tag.

mediated through "Indonesian" (*Bahasa Indonesia*) or bahasa tinggi is "foreign" (*asing*), but God as mediated through Tetun is "relevant" (*relevan*) to the Tetun speaker. Thus, one's role as a speaker of Tetun, even when voiced in bahasa Kupang, continues to be "valued as natural and authentic" (Woolard 2016, 23). Although Tetun remains as a label that emblematizes the congregant's ethnolinguistic identity, bahasa Kupang is used to represent the congregant's speech to readers, *as if* it is natural for the congregant to speak in bahasa Kupang.

In another pamphlet also written by Barbara Grimes, an ordained minister of the GMIT church and an Australian-trained linguist, standard Indonesian is explicitly labeled as "*bahasa tinggi*": a language that potentially alienates the church from its congregants who are not "schooled people," *orang sekolah*.[9] Beyond reframing the relationship between bahasa tinggi and ethnoregional languages such as Tetun, Grimes and the GMIT's Language and Culture Unit positively valorize what they describes as the "heart language" (*bahasa hati*)—a register that brings God to the everyday lives of church congregants:

> Others who for the first time heard the word of God in the language of their heart (*bahasa hati*) also said, "[when] we listen to the Bible in our own language, we feel as if Jesus is our own family." Through the language of our heart, we can get to know God intimately and live close to Him, as if He is our own family (*keluarga*). We no longer interact with Him like a foreign guest (*tamu asing*) whom we greet (*sapa*) with *bahasa tinggi* every Sunday. Through our own languages of the heart, we know God as a close friend (*teman satu kaki*) who is with us all day long, every day (B. D. Grimes 2010).

Here, Grimes calls for *bahasa hati* (lit., "heart language") to be used in delivering the word of God instead of *bahasa tinggi* (lit., "high language"). Bahasa tinggi is regarded as a language appropriate for "guests" (*tamu*)—an anonymous social figure that can come from anywhere—but not for intimates to whom talks to regularly. For Grimes, using bahasa tinggi with God risks

[9] Grimes is affiliated with Bible translation projects that are conducted jointly under the auspices of the GMIT synod and the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). Under Indonesian law, foreign members of the clergy can only work under the umbrella of a state-recognized Indonesian religious organization, such as the GMIT synod. Thus, the SIL does not operate as an autonomous entity in Indonesia.

alienating one's own self from God, as it places value on how one "greets" (*sapa*) God every Sunday at church rather on how one incorporates God within one's daily life. Furthermore, Grimes' perspective idealizes a "heart language" (*bahasa hati*) that invokes God as a social intimate who is "family" (*keluarga*) and a "close friend" (*teman satu kaki*) to the congregation—a form of authenticity that is grounded in the socio-spatiotemporal specificities of how congregants communicate with God. Thus, this perspective attributes efficacious social relations between God and a congregant to the mediating role of the "heart language": semiotic registers that are regarded as authentically belonging to congregants and their social world at birth (see Handman 2007; 2009).

As I will show in the following sections, the GMIT church's positive valorization of *bahasa hati* ("heart language") does not mean that the church is unilaterally moving towards conducting worship entirely using bahasa Kupang or other languages that it evaluates as authentic to its congregants. Rather, at the Nehemiah church as well as throughout Kupang-area congregations, bahasa Kupang's authenticity is construed in relation to its anonymous other, bahasa tinggi. Thus, congregants expect worship leaders to alternate between bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang to invoke both anonymous and authentic forms of linguistic authority (Gal and Woolard 2001b; Woolard 2016). Specifically, in the examples that I will analyze in the following sections, bahasa tinggi serves to index the generality and universality of God's words and deeds, while bahasa Kupang indexes the particularities of social relationships among congregants in the here-and-now. I will describe the following examples: (1) a prototypical sermon delivered by Reverend Lisa Nallé, an ordained minister at the Nehemiah congregation, who extensively uses bahasa tinggi at church to invoke the universal applicability of a scriptural quotation to all congregants; (3) a description of how worship meetings at congregants' homes selectively

incorporates elements of church worship; (4) the opening of a worship meeting through prayer by Welem, a congregant who deploys bahasa Kupang and bahasa tinggi to index different participation frameworks; and (5) a comparison of prayers delivered by Amelia, a proponent of bahasa Kupang as a language of worship, and Roberta, a church board member who extensively uses bahasa tinggi. These examples demonstrate how the GMIT church's positive revalorization of bahasa Kupang as a register of authenticity also relies on the efficacious deployment of bahasa Kupang's anonymous other, bahasa tinggi.

Authenticity and Anonymity in a Prototypical Sermon

As I have suggested earlier, bahasa tinggi's anonymity help pastors and worship leaders invoke the generality and universality of "God's words" (*firman Tuhan*)—words that, in theory, can be "brought" (*bawa*) to any congregation through scriptural quotations and interpretations. At the Nehemiah church, congregants regularly encounter bahasa tinggi as a prominent aspect of sermons (*khotbah*) delivered during Sunday worship and at sermons delivered during sacraments, such as weddings and baptisms. These sermons are delivered by Nehemiah's minister, Reverend Lisa Nallé, who, like all GMIT ministers, leads services while standing behind a pulpit in front of her seated congregation (see Figure 2). As an ordained minister of the GMIT church and a graduate of a theology school, Reverend Nallé is expected by her congregants and her peers to deliver sermons that extensively use bahasa tinggi, the language of the Bible translation used by Kupang-area congregants.[10] Thus, throughout her sermons, Reverend Nallé extensively uses bahasa tinggi throughout her sermons to deliver scriptural interpretation and general forms of advice— both forms of anonymous discourse that could

[10] There is an ongoing project at the GMIT that translates the Bible to bahasa Kupang. However, the Bible in bahasa Kupang has not been widely adopted, and GMIT congregations in the Kupang area, including Nehemiah, read from and use Bibles that are in bahasa tinggi.

theoretically be delivered to any congregation, and not just to the Nehemiah congregation. However, Reverend Nallé occasionally switches to bahasa Kupang for two purposes: (1) to address her congregants in the here-and-now of the sermon, and (2) to deploy reported speech constructions that voice a congregant's perspective on everyday social life. Thus, bahasa Kupang enacts a form of authenticity—it indexes social relationships in the that are grounded in the particularities of the Nehemiah congregation.

Figure 2.1. A visiting minister joins the congregation in reciting the Apostles' Creed (*Pengakuan Iman Rasuli*) during Easter service at the Nehemiah church. Photo by author.

In the following sermon, which she delivered during a wedding ceremony, Reverend Nallé switches from bahasa tinggi to bahasa Kupang to address the newly married couple, Herman and Tina, and to voice a possible disagreement that married couples might find themselves in. She delivers her sermon after quoting and explicating verses from the Book of Proverbs 4:23 (*Kitab Amsal*) on "guarding your heart" (*menjaga hati*):

Transcript 2.4. Reverend Nallé's sermon at a church wedding

Underlined text indicates bahasa tinggi
Bold text indicates bahasa Kupang

The scriptural quotation on line 0 is taken from the Book of Proverbs (*Kitab Amsal*) 4:23

[0]	"Jagalah hatimu dengan segala kewaspadaan, karena dari situlah terpancar kehidupan" […]	"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it" […]
[1]	Kalau sudah jatuh hati sepertinya sulit untuk berpaling ke lain hati […] Karena dia sudah menawan hati. Betul **e**?	Once [one's] heart has fallen in love, it seems difficult to turn towards another […] Because they [your spouse] have charmed your heart. **Right**?[11]
[2]	[…] Diharapkan saudara berdua bisa menjaga hati masing-masing […]	[…] It is then hoped that the two of you can guard [your] respective hearts […]
[3]	Misalnya kalau pasangan kita capek dan hati dia lagi…tidak baik	For instance, when our spouse is tired and their mood is… not good
[4]	Maka tentu kita juga tidak akan mengeluarkan kata-kata yang akan merusak akan hati pasangan kita…	Then definitely we would not utter words that will disrupt our spouse's feelings…[12]
[5]	Misalnya saja mungkin waktu yang tidak tepat, Tina minta uang.	Just for example, perhaps during a time that is not appropriate, Tina asks for money.
[6]	Ya, pasti kalau lagi ada **son** soal tapi kalau **sond**e ada	Well, certainly if there happens to be [money then it's] **not** a problem but if there's **no** [money]
[7]	Pasti Herman akan bilang **ko lu ator doi karmana ko belum apa apa su abis**…	Certainly, Herman would say, **huh, how have you been managing the money? [We] haven't done anything yet [and we're] already out of money**…[13]

[11] Here, the bahasa Kupang particle *e* indicates a question.
[12] The semantic range of the word *hati*, found in both bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang, encompasses the English words "heart" (as in, the "heart" where emotions are felt) and "feeling."
[13] See Chapter 3 for normative discourses on gender and household finances.

[8]	Tapi tidak demikian ya… Karena itu dengan nasihat firman Tuhan hari ini, jagalah hati agar kita tidak kehilangan damai sejahtera…	But that [way of speaking] should not be the case… Because with the advice [we heard] today through the word of God, [we need to] manage [our] feelings so that we don't lose [our] peace [and] welfare…

After quoting a Biblical scripture in bahasa tinggi, Reverend Nallé looked at the newly married couple in front of her, Herman and Tina, and used the bahasa Kupang particle *e* (IPA: /e/) to address them, thereby addressing co-present audience members in the here-and-now (line 1). Afterwards, Reverend Nallé uses bahasa tinggi to deliver general forms of advice for married couples who could be from any congregation and not just the Nehemiah church, because all couples presumably experience love as well as day-to-day changes in their emotions (lines 1–5). At this moment, when she delivers advice that could be true for Christians in any socio-spatiotemporal context, and not just in her congregation, she uses the inclusive first-person plural pronoun *kita* in bahasa tinggi, which emphasizes the generality of her advice (lines 1–4). After delivering these general forms of normative advice, Reverend Nallé uses bahasa Kupang in reported speech constructions to voice a couple's dispute over money (lines 6–7). She uses bahasa Kupang to express a possible form of anger that Herman, a husband who is normatively expected to be an earner, would conceivably express to Tina, a wife who is normatively expected to be a manager of household finances (see also Chapter 3).[14] Among other features, Reverend Nallé uses the following grammatical constructions in bahasa Kupang instead of their referential equivalents in bahasa tinggi: (1) *son* ("no") instead of *tidak*; (2) *lu*, an informal singular second-person pronoun, instead of *kamu*; and (3) *karmana* ("how") instead of *bagaimana*. After voicing this dispute through reported speech, Reverend Nallé returns to bahasa tinggi to call her

[14] See Chapter 3 for an analysis of normative discourses of gendered social roles and forms of livelihood that pertain to household finances.

congregation to again pay attention to the word of God (*firman Tuhan*) that she quoted earlier from the Book of Proverbs (line 8). The verse calls for everyone to "guard their hearts" (*jagalah hati*)—words of divine advice that, following Reverend Nallé's use of bahasa tinggi, are figurated as true and efficacious for all Christians regardless of event or context.

After closing her sermon, Reverend Nallé leads a prayer in bahasa tinggi. As the prayer is addressed to God (*Tuhan*) and contains descriptions of divine intervention in human life, rather than the actions of human persons, Reverend Nallé uses bahasa tinggi to invoke the anonymity of God—a divine presence that, according to her, should be accessible to any congregant, including the newly married couple, in any context. Throughout this prayer, Reverend Nallé stays in bahasa tinggi, including in her references to the married couple and the congregation:

Transcript 2.5. Reverend Nallé's prayers for a newly married couple in *bahasa tinggi*

[9]	Hari ini engkau telah memberkati cinta kedua anak kekasih kami, Herman dan Tina	On this day, you have blessed the love [between] two of our beloved children, Herman and Tina
[10]	Tolong mereka ya Tuhan, di dalam mengarungi bahtera rumah tangga mereka dengan mendasari pada kasih Kristus	Help them o Lord, [as] they navigate the journey of building their household with a foundation of Christ's love
[11]	Agar mereka selalu menawan hati Tuhan dan berkah-berkah Tuhan melimpahi kehidupan keluarga mereka	[We hope] that they always please God's heart, and [may] God's blessings be abundant in their familial life
[12]	Bapa, kami sangat bersyukur bahwa mereka boleh mengalami kebahagiaan.	Father, we are very grateful that they might experience such joy.

Throughout this prayer, Reverend Nallé uses pronominal references in bahasa tinggi instead of their equivalents in bahasa Kupang: (1) the first-person plural pronoun *kami* instead of *katong*; and (2) the third-person plural pronoun *mereka* instead of *dong*. Furthermore, Reverend Nallé

addresses God using the second-person pronoun *engkau* and the vocative particle *ya*, both of which are shibboleths or markers of bahasa tinggi (lines 9–10). As Reverend Nallé prays for the married couple to lead a life marked by "Christ's love" (*kasih Kristus*) and "God's blessings" (*berkah Tuhan*), her use of bahasa tinggi figurates divine intervention in the form of "love" and "blessings" as timeless and all-encompassing.

According to Nehemiah congregants, Reverend Nallé's skillfulness in conducting worship, which require alternations between bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang, is part of her duty as an ordained minister to "serve the congregation" (*melayani jemaat*) by leading different forms of worship. Reverend Nallé, however, does not preside over all services (*ibadah*) that are conducted in the Nehemiah congregation, as the Nehemiah congregation also conduct multitude worship meetings each week that are led by lay persons. These worship meetings that are led by lay congregants are hosted by four ministries dedicated for different age groups: the youth ministry (*pemuda*), adult men's ministry (*kaum bapak*), adult women's ministry (*kaum ibu*), and seniors' ministry (*lansia*). [15] At these ministries, worship meetings are conducted twice a week at the homes of congregants with lay persons, instead of an ordained minister, as worship leaders (*pemimpin ibadah*)—a role that is assumed on a rotating basis among all members of the ministry. At the youth ministry, where I conducted my fieldwork, congregants emphasize their own leadership of worship meetings as a form of service (*pelayanan*) that they must also provide for the church, even when they are outside of the church sanctuary. As Jessica, a former youth ministry leader, mentioned to me, worship in the form of a service "does not only happen at the church" (*pelayanan itu tidak hanya di dalam gereja*).[16] However, as I will illustrate in this

[15] The ministries for adult men and adult women are reserved for married congregants; the youth ministry includes all unmarried persons, both men and women, in the Nehemiah congregation.
[16] The word *pelayanan* (lit., "service") does not map onto the phrase "church service" in English, as "church service" refers to a formalized, regularly occurring form of worship at a church sanctuary. For

section, while leading a worship meeting that they characterize as service (*pelayana*n) to the church, congregants do not simply attempt to replicate Reverend Nallé's use of bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang.

While ordained ministers are expected to be ready to "deliver the word of God" (*bawa firman Tuhan*) to any GMIT congregation, lay persons' service to the congregation are tied to the particularities of their social relationship to other congregants. In other words, while Reverend Nallé's linguistic authority is derived from a position of relative anonymity in relation to Nehemiah congregants, lay persons derive their linguistic authority by enacting forms of authenticity—enactments that include, among others, using bahasa Kupang more than extensively than ordained ministers do in worship. As I will show in the following section, authenticity and anonymity as co-constitutive qualities are not simply present in two different semiotic registers; rather, authenticity and anonymity are enacted through the differential participation frameworks indexed by lay worship leaders' use of bahasa tinggi (listening) and of bahasa Kupang (audience response). In other words, authenticity and anonymity are "enactable effects" performed through discursively mediated forms of social action (Agha 2007, 145).

The Structure of an *Ibadah* (Worship Meeting) at a Congregant's Home

Nehemiah congregants, pelayanan encompasses all forms of Christian worship, including worship meetings conducted at the homes of congregants.

Figure 2.2. A member of the youth ministry (standing) reads from and interprets a Biblical scripture during a worship meeting at a congregant's home.

Among Nehemiah congregants, hosting worship meetings for a church ministry is key in building and maintaining a household's relationship to the congregation and to the village of Tuabuna as a whole. In this section, I explain how members of the youth ministry deploy bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang as semiotic registers that invoke their *hierarchic inclusion* under the umbrella of the church (Kuipers 1998, 23): that is, they index and valorize the church's linguistic authority in delivering the "word of God" (firman Tuhan) as an authoritative model without fully replicating the norms of worship that is conducted by ordained ministers at the church sanctuary. As these ministry-specific worship meetings are situated in an in-between context that is neither a formalized service at the church sanctuary nor a private service held only by and for members of a household (*ibadah rumah tangga*), I emphasize that these worship meetings invoke contrasts between anonymous and authentic forms of linguistic authority (Gal and Woolard 2001b; Woolard 2016): these worship meetings are open to any member of the church youth ministry, but they are expected to invoke the particularities of the congregants' social ties to each other,

rather than the replicating ordained minister's anonymous authority as an speaker who can deliver the word of God to any congregation.

Like other Nehemiah ministries, the youth ministry meets twice weekly at a congregant's residence, which is invariably a house where their extended family lives, as young people who are born and raised in Kupang normally live with their parents and kin. A congregant, therefore, prepares one's house to host such a meeting by preparing refreshments and cleaning their yard: one can notice a house in which a worship meeting is being hosted because of all the scooters and motorcycles parked in someone's front yard. To invoke the presence of the congregation in the household, worship meeting hosts selectively recreate parts of church worship at their homes: plastic chairs are arranged in front of the house to accommodate worshippers who will sit throughout the service, and the host prepares an offering box (*kotak persembahan*), often in the form of a wooden tissue box, so that congregants can donate cash for the church congregation.[17] However, since the worship meeting is led by a lay person, there is no pulpit, and a lay worship leader stand next to their seated peers rather than standing in front of them (see figure 3). Most importantly, while these worship meetings deploy elements of bahasa tinggi in scriptural quotations and in prayers addressed to God, they differ from monological church sermons that extensively use bahasa tinggi. In particular, these worship meetings at home involve audience participation and responses in bahasa Kupang—a register that invokes the particularities of one's social belonging to the congregation.

At these youth worship meetings, a worship leader (*pemimpin ibadah*) delivers an opening monologue that is an exegesis of Biblical scripture (*pengabaran firman*) and, with the occasional help of a host or an "MC," invites responses (*tanggapan*) from other worshippers. In

[17] These makeshift offering boxes are analogous to official offering bags that are passed around during formal church services.

these youth ministry worship meetings, a prototypical worship session unfolds in the following order of shifting participation frameworks:

1. *Ibadah* ("worship")*:* a worship leader opens the worship session by delivering an opening prayer, reading a scriptural quotation, and explicating the chosen scriptural quotation. The leader of a worship meeting also chooses hymns for the worship meeting, and they rarely spend more than 15 minutes talking before inviting others to respond to the biblical passage. Out of all parts of the worship meetings, the ibadah uses bahasa tinggi most extensively, as scriptural quotations and hymns are both recited and discursively framed in bahasa tinggi. As bahasa tinggi indexes a participation framework of listening for audience members, the ibadah is delivered entirely by the worship leader.
2. *Tanggapan* ("responses")*:* responses to the worship leader's scriptural quotation and explications in which attendees of a worship meetings add and provide further commentaries on scriptural quotations. As bahasa Kupang indexes a participation framework of discursive co-participation through calls and responses, worship leaders ask questions in bahasa Kupang, and responses from attendees to the questions of a worship leader are delivered in bahasa Kupang as well.
3. *Doa Syafa'at:* a prayer that closes the worship meeting. The prayer session is led by the leader of the worship meeting, and they incorporate requests for prayer from all the participants of the worship meeting. As I will show in the following examples, the prayer incorporates variable proportions of bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang.

Among members of the youth ministry, mastering these three elements of worship helps them secure a key rite of passage: many of them are about to confirmed (*sidi*) or are newly confirmed

as members of the congregation.[18] To be confirmed as an adult member of the congregation, young congregants are expected to demonstrate competence in all parts of worship—capabilities that my interlocutors also refer to as "delivering the word of God" (*bawa firman*) and "adding to the word of God" (*tambah firman*). Therefore, leading and participating in worship meeting is a ritualized form of linguistic performance: one must learn how to be a speaker who speaks fluently and convincingly without pauses, hesitations, or verbal infelicities (see Kuipers 1990; 1998). Furthermore, although different congregants have different stated preferences for bahasa Kupang or bahasa tinggi for the three different parts of worship, they always draw elements from both bahasa Kupang and bahasa tinggi, thereby invoking contrasts between anonymous and authentic forms of linguistic authority. In the following sections, I will illustrate how bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang co-constitute each other as semiotic registers through metapragmatic commentaries and instances of prayers conducted at worship meetings: (1) an opening prayer delivered by Welem, a youth ministry member; (2) commentaries by Amelia, a youth ministry member who is also a proponent of bahasa Kupang as a language of worship; and (3) a comparison of closing prayers delivered by Roberta, a church elder who mostly uses bahasa tinggi, and Amelia, who mostly uses bahasa Kupang.

The Word of God in a Worship Meeting

In the following transcript, a worship leader (*pemimpin ibadat*), Welem, began a worship meeting by praying and selecting quotations from the Bible. Welem, a college-bound high school student from a relatively affluent family, addresses his fellow congregants in the here-and-now of

[18] One must be formally confirmed as a member of the congregation before one is allowed to marry and establisha an independent household separate from one's parents—another rite of passage that is almost universal among Nehemiah congregants.

the meeting in bahasa Kupang before opening the worship meeting with a prayer that is mostly conducted in bahasa tinggi:

Transcript 2.6. Welem's opening prayers

Bold text indicates Bahasa Kupang
Underlined text indicates bahasa tinggi

W: Welem, the worship leader
P: Other worship participants

W	[1]	Sebelum **kitong** membaca dan merenungkan firman Tuhan,	Before **we** read and contemplate the word of God
	[2]	mari kita berdoa…	let us pray…
	[3]	Terima kasih Bapa engkau telah memberkati kami hingga malam ini Bapa Sebelum kami akan membaca dan merenungkan firmanmu Tuhan, berkatilah kami sehingga kami baca dan perlakukan dari awal hari hingga lepas hari. Dalam nama Yesus. Amin. Shalom	Thank you Father you have blessed us to this evening, Father. Before we begin to read and contemplate upon your words, God, bless us so that we read and enact [your words] from the beginning of the day until the end of the day. In Jesus's name. Amen. Shalom.
P	[4]	Shalom.	Shalom
W	[5]	**Kitong ini malam**	**We, this evening**
	[6]	kita baca Efesus pasal 1… pasal 1 ayat 13 sampai 23	we [will] read the Ephesians, chapter 1… chapter 1 verse 13 to 23
P	[7]	**15 ko?**	**[You meant] 15, right?**
W	[8]	Iya kita baca sama-sama. Satu, dua, tiga	Yes, we [will] read it together. One, two, three

P	[9]	Doa untuk pengertian tentang kemuliaan Kristus. Karena itu, setelah aku mendengar tentang imanmu dalam Tuhan Yesus dan tentang kasihmu terhadap semua orang kudus…	Thanksgiving and prayer. For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people…

Initially, Welem addressed fellow worshippers using the inclusive first-person plural pronoun in bahasa Kupang, *kitong* (line 1). However, as he was about to recite a prayer that opens the worship, Welem switched to the equivalent pronoun *kita* in bahasa tinggi (line 2). Throughout the following prayer that is addressed to Father (*Bapa*) and God (*Tuhan*) on line 3, Welem stays within the register of bahasa tinggi by using the following features: (1) the exclusive first-person plural pronoun *kami*; (2) *me-* verbal prefixes; and (3) the adverbial construction *malam ini* (lit. "night this"; demonstrative after noun) for "tonight." On line 4, as he addressed fellow worshippers, Welem switched back to bahasa Kupang by using two features: (1) the inclusive first-person plural pronoun *kitong*; and (2) the adverbial construction *ini malam* (lit. "this night"; noun after demonstrative) for "tonight" (line 5). However, before quoting Biblical verses from the Ephesians, Welem returned to the bahasa tinggi pronoun kita (line 6). Subsequently, a worship participant used bahasa Kupang to correct Welem's reference to verse numbers before the entire group of worshippers recited Biblical verses from the Ephesians (lines 7–9).

Throughout this passage, alternations between bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang demonstrate how Welem, a worship leader, direct his utterances to two addressees: (1) fellow worshippers as co-present addressees in the here-and-now and (2) God (*Tuhan)*, who is invoked as a universally available divine presence (see MacLochlainn 2015). These two addresses are in line with local (meta)discourses of worship as a form of mediation: as many congregants have told me, the task of a worship leader is to "deliver the word of God" (*bawa firman Tuhan*) from the Bible to a gathering of fellow congregants (*anggota jemaat*). Such a task, in turn, requires a

worship leader to work as a mediator between two types of semiotic resources seen, respectively, as anonymous and authentic: (1) the Bible, a text-artifact in bahasa tinggi seen as a timeless and universally accessible form of divine presence to all Christians; and (2) responses from fellow congregants, who talk to one another in bahasa Kupang and are connected to each other by the socio-spatiotemporal particularities of their relationship to the congregation. Thus, Welem and other worship leaders invoke contrasts between anonymous forms of linguistic authority (the Bible in bahasa tinggi) and authentic forms of linguistic authority (responses from worship participants in bahasa Kupang)—contrasts that are indexed through differential participation frameworks. Specifically, Welem's alternations between bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang indexes two different participation frameworks for worship participants: his fellow worshippers are expected to be silent listeners when the word of God is invoked and quoted in bahasa tinggi, but they are expected to participate by anticipating and forming responses when Welem turns to them and addresses them in bahasa Kupang. Hence, for instance, after worship participants stayed silent throughout Welem's prayer in bahasa tinggi (lines 1–3), a correction to Welem's scriptural reference was uttered only after Welem briefly turned to the audience and uttered the bahasa Kupang first-person plural pronoun kitong (line 7).

Furthermore, unlike an ordained minister's sermon (*khotbah*) during Sunday service and other formalized rituals, Welem's opening and prayer demonstrates that worship meetings among lay persons are not a monological genre of discourse where a single speaker, such as an ordained minister, addresses a non-responding audience in bahasa tinggi (see Errington 1998; Goebel 2015). As appropriate audience participation through listening and responding is crucial in these ministry-specific worship meetings, Welem's alternations between bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang does not only index the form of timeless, universally accessible authority that the Bible

is supposed to brings to the congregation; rather, it also undergirds the efficaciousness of scriptural quotations—anonymous semiotic forms in bahasa tinggi— among congregants who are situated in the worship meeting's socio-spatiotemporal immediacy, the here-and-now. As I will explain in the following section, when worship leaders fail to elicit responses from worship participants, that is, when they fail to mediate the anonymous linguistic authority of the Bible with the authenticity of a congregant's participation in worship meeting, they describe the worship meeting as "us feeling bored" (*katong bosan*)—a failure on the worship leader's part to engage worship participants in an efficacious manner.

To Understand and To Respond: Worship Leaders and Their Interlocutors

At the Nehemiah church, congregants expect worship leaders to efficaciously alternate between bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang such that they enable their addressees to "understand the word of God" (*mengerti firman Tuhan*) without feeling "bored" (*bosan*). Mengerti ("to understand"), however, is not simply a matter of denotation, or the referential function of semiosis that maps language onto things and situations, even as aspects of Protestant semiotic ideologies privilege language as a vehicle for reference (Keane 2002, 83). Rather, I analyze mengerti as the consequence of a worship leader's effective engagement of their fellow congregants through discursive co-participation. As I have shown above through Welem's prayer, bahasa Kupang remains crucial in indexing participation frameworks that call for worship participants to "respond" (*tanggapi*) or "add" (*tambah*) to the worship leader's interpretations of the word of God. Thus, these ministry-specific meetings that happen at the homes of congregants also become crucial sites of ideological contestation: through these worship meetings where they

respond to the verbal performances of their own peers, congregants enact their valuations of bahasa Kupang and bahasa tinggi as mutually constitutive semiotic forms.

Although Welem's opening prayer in the previous passage is typical of worship sessions I witnessed at Nehemiah, younger congregants who have worked with the GMIT Church's Language and Culture Unit (UBB) and its Bible translation projects have become strong advocates for bahasa Kupang as a primary language of worship. For instance, Amelia, a member of Nehemiah's youth ministry, participated in the UBB's ongoing Bible translation project to bahasa Kupang. Since then, she has consistently used bahasa Kupang in worship to a greater extent than her peers, even when her fellow youth ministry members, who are mostly either high school or college students, are fluent in bahasa tinggi.[19] At the same time, her enthusiasm for bahasa Kupang does not contradict her cosmopolitan background: Amelia comes from a relatively affluent Rotenese family, and she regularly travels with them to Jakarta and other major cities in Indonesia. She is fluent in standard Indonesian and English and is an avid consumer of subtitled Korean-language pop songs and TV series. Nevertheless, Amelia has expressed dislike whenever she encountered church worship sessions that are conducted solely in bahasa tinggi or even in the Jakarta-inflected gaul register of Indonesian—a colloquial register that indexes Indonesia-wide cosmopolitan youth culture (see Smith-Hefner 2007). In fact, during a worship meeting for youth ministries that we attended at a nearby congregation, Amelia said that she did not enjoy the sermon, which was replete with the words *enggak* ("no") and *gimana* ("how")—two shibboleths or markers of Jakarta Indonesian. To me, someone whom she

[19] Most members of the Nehemiah youth ministry come from middle-class or affluent backgrounds, as many working-class youth congregants often work long hours that do not allow them to participate in evening youth ministry worship meetings. Furthermore, middle-class Nehemiah congregants pay for their children's education through college, such that their children are well-exposed to reading and speaking in standard Indonesian as bahasa tinggi.

categorized as coming from Jakarta, Amelia said that those words were unsuitable for a church worship in Kupang, because, according to her, "this is not Jakarta" (*ini bukan Jakarta*). For Amelia, worship leaders who successfully "deliver the word of God" (*bawa firman Tuhan*) recognize their addressees as fellow congregants using a register that indexes a shared form of authentic social belonging in the here-and-now: bahasa Kupang.

According to Amelia, bahasa Kupang enables a worship leader to "deliver the word of God (*bawa firman Tuhan*) to worship participants in a manner that is also "easy" (*mudah*) and "simple" (*sederhana*)—something that cannot be accomplished in bahasa tinggi or in other registers that would prevent her fellow congregants from responding to the worship leader:

> We are entrusted not by a person… but by God himself…So [we] must really prepare to deliver the word of God… Easy to understand (*mengerti*), easy for others to understand. Not using bahasa tinggi, if that's me… I like it better when I can simplify it. For me personally, [I] don't like [it] when someone delivers the word of God (*bawa firman*)…[with] too much *bahasa tinggi*, which… [is] boring. Because this can just be thought of us as telling the story of God (*bercerita kisah Tuhan*) and… if we deliver the word of God, [and] we don't package [the word of God] nicely, us young people, like children, will get bored (*bosan*) quickly. [It's] better to use simple language (*bahasa sederhana*) that others can understand and, for me, [I'm] happier… [when I] package the word of God [such that] it's not just us speaking by ourselves, but others who are present at that moment can talk as well.

For Amelia, a worship leader needs to efficaciously index two participation frameworks: (1) the "telling of the story of God" (*bercerita kisah Tuhan*) to a listening audience of worship participants; and (2) the elicitation of responses from "others who are present at that moment" (*orang-orang hadir pada saat itu*). Although utterances in bahasa tinggi are inevitable during worship, it should not be used "too much," as worship leaders need to engage their audience members by asking them to respond by "following [and] talking" (*ikut berbicara*). These forms of engagement, in turn, would prevent others from getting "bored" (*bosan*)—a consequence of a

worship leader who "speak [only by] themselves" (*berbicara sendiri*). Thus, even when a worship leader successfully invokes the word of God through bahasa tinggi, they could still fail to engage fellow worshippers, particularly if they do not indexically anchor their explications of the word of God in the social particularities of the here-and-now.

Anonymity and Equality: The Workings of Bahasa Tinggi in Prayer

While Amelia positively valorizes bahasa Kupang as a register that helps her "understand" (*mengerti*) the word of God and participate in worship together with other congregants, bahasa tinggi remains indispensable. In addition to scriptural quotations and hymns, which are always recited or sung in bahasa tinggi, prayers at the beginning and at the end of worship are normatively conducted in bahasa tinggi, as prayers are utterances that worshippers collectively address to God. In the following extracts of a closing prayer (*doa syafa'at*) among youth congregants, I argue that the presence of bahasa tinggi in prayers and scriptural quotations establishes a common ground that performs anonymity through social leveling: it orients the congregation's mutual alignment in relation to God. The Christian speech genre of praying, after all, is not only a dyadic interaction between the utterer of the prayer and God as the addressee: it is a triadic relationship that mediates the utterer of the prayer, other worshippers who are co-present interlocutors, and God (Ochs and Capps 2001; Corwin 2014). Thus, I also demonstrate that bahasa tinggi accomplishes interactional functions beyond its role as a register of anonymity that could be spoken by any Indonesian regardless of social position (J. J. Errington 2006; Keane 2003). Rather, in worship, bahasa tinggi also performs a leveling that mitigates differences between a speaker and worship participants as they collectively figurate and address God.

Although Welem, the worship leader in a previous section, recited opening prayers as part of his duty as a worship leader, Roberta, a college-educated woman in her 40s, delivered closing prayers, as she is a church board member (*penatua*) assigned to the youth ministry as a mentor. The role of the church board member is crucial among members of the youth ministry, as they serve as a liaison between the ministry and the church board (*majelis*)–an elected council that governs the church congregation. Thus, in discursively encompassing the youth ministry as a constituent unit of the church, Roberta, the church board member, models and comments upon forms of speech, including semiotic forms in bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang, that youth ministry members are expected to emulate in worship. Roberta, in particular, responds to worship leaders and leads prayers using forms of bahasa tinggi to a greater extent than youth ministry members. [20] Although she usually stays quiet in the beginning parts of the worship meeting, she occasionally delivers commentaries at the end to remind young worshippers to be "brave" (*berani*) and to be "confident" (*percaya diri*) when they deliver the monological parts of worship in bahasa tinggi—a register that young worshippers only start learning once they are in school. At times, Roberta also reminds worshippers to stay within the participation frameworks indexed by the worship leader: whenever worshippers giggle or start unauthorized side conversations during the monological parts of worship in bahasa tinggi, she would remind them later that listening to the word of God during worship is not "a joke" (*maen gila*), thereby enforcing moral boundaries for participation in church worship activities.

As someone who is seen as a role model for how to speak during worship meetings, Roberta uses bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang to index the appropriate participation frameworks in different parts of worship. In the following example, before she commenced her prayers in

[20] Because church board members at Nehemiah tend to be holders or obtained high school diplomas or college degrees, they tend to be fluent in bahasa tinggi.

bahasa tinggi, Roberta and other worship participants asked their fellow congregants for prayer requests. During this moment, the use of bahasa Kupang in question tags and pronominal references invokes a form of authenticity: it indexically anchors the prayer in the social relationships that link her to other worship participants. As the requests for prayer were discussed right after a recitation of a church hymn accompanied by a solo guitar, the questions and answers in the following transcript were uttered in a relatively relaxed setting—the guitarist casually strummed his instrument while other worshippers chatted in the background to discuss the prayer requests they would like to make:

Transcript 2.7. Requests for prayers

Bold text indicates bahasa Kupang
Underlined text indicates bahasa tinggi

B: Roberta, a church elder assigned as a mentor to the youth ministry
J: John, the leader of the youth ministry
S, T, U: Worship participants

[ambient chatter and guitar strumming in the background]

R	[1]	Ada beban doa yang mau disampaikan **ko**?	Are there prayer requests that [you] would like to be delivered**?**
J	[2]	Masih ada ujian **to**?	There are still final examinations, **right?**
R	[3]	Yang SMA hari Senin, SMK yang baru selesai […]	The high school exams [are] on Monday, the vocational school exams were just done
S	[4]	Minggu depan kayaknya ada ujian seminar proposal [..]	Next week [it] seems like there will be a proposal examination seminar […]
R	[5]	Teman-teman lain ada **ko**? Mungkin yang sakit, yang teman-teman dengar masih dalam proses penyembuhan…	Friends, are there other requests**?** Maybe [for] those who are sick, [those whom you have heard] are still in the process of recovering […]

T	[6]	Minggu depan **na** kalau bisa **su** ujian skripsi […]	Next week, **well**, if possible, I will **already** have my thesis defense examination [scheduled]
S	[7]	**Ka Elly pung** masa depan, **Ka Elly pung** jodoh [..]	**Ka Elly's** future, **Ka Elly's** [love] match […]
U	[8]	Baik, mari kita satu di dalam doa. Mari kita berdoa.	Very well, let us be one in prayer. Let us pray.
		[background chatter and guitar strumming stopped]	
	[9]	Kasih dan cintaMu Tuhan tidak pernah meninggalkan kehidupan kami sebagai orang-orang muda	Your love and compassion, God, never left our lives as young people
	[10]	Kami terus dituntun oleh kasihMu ya Bapa	We are always guided by your compassion o Father

Throughout this stretch of interaction, Roberta's alternation between bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang indexes differential participation frameworks, which are frameworks that index how other worshippers should respond to her utterances (Irvine 1996). For instance, in her initial question on line 1, Roberta deployed elements of bahasa tinggi, as she uses the prefix *di-* and the suffix *-kan* for the passive verb "to be conveyed" (*disampaikan*). However, at the end of the same question, she used the bahasa Kupang question tag *ko* to invite worship participants to come up with prayer requests (line 1). Afterwards, despite bahasa tinggi's continuing presence, Roberta and other worshippers consistently deployed two elements of bahasa Kupang to socially situate worship terms participants and invite responses from them. First, the kin term *Kaka* (literally, "elder sibling") and its short form *Ka* are used to refer to Elly, a young congregant who hosted the worship meeting at her family's house (line 7). Among youth congregants, the term kaka indexes familiarity and mutual belonging, as they use the term kaka to address fellow

members of the youth ministry.[21] Second, the question tags *ko* and *to* are used to turn utterances into questions (lines 1, 2, and 5). Because these question tags elicit responses from other worshippers, they index a framework of discursive co-participation among worship participants, even when elements of bahasa tinggi are present throughout this interaction. These forms of co-participation allow Roberta's prayer to be grounded in the social particularities of the youth ministry: her prayers are fashioned as a response to individual requests uttered by worshippers, such as requests for academic success.

After prayer requests that incorporated elements of bahasa Kupang were completed, Roberta's closing prayer then became sufficiently grounded in the here-and-now of the worship meeting for her to commence her prayer in bahasa tinggi—a register that allows worshippers to collectively address their utterances to God (*Tuhan*). On line 8, Roberta indicated a shift her interactional stance by using the inclusive plural first-person pronoun *kita* in bahasa tinggi, rather than *kitong* in bahasa Kupang, to indicate that she is about to commence her prayers. She called upon worshippers in the youth ministry to "be one in prayer" (*satu dalam doa*), thereby hailing them as those who collectively desired God's intervention through requests made for the closing prayer (line 8). Afterwards, worship participants immediately responded to Roberta's shift in stance: they stopped chatting and the guitarist stopped strumming, as they were about to pray together as a collective. Roberta referred to the collective of worshippers in the youth ministry using the exclusive first-person plural pronoun *kami* in bahasa tinggi—a form that does not exist in bahasa Kupang. The pronoun kami thus indicates that her utterances are directed towards God, an addressee other than herself and her fellow congregants. Furthermore, Roberta's use of the first-person plural pronoun kami enables her to voice the youth ministry as a collective: "we as

[21] Regardless of their exact age relative to one another, all members of the youth ministry address and refer to each other using the kin term *kaka*. On occasion, I have also been addressed as Kaka Fadi.

young people… are always guided by [God's] compassion" (*kami sebagai orang-orang muda… selalu dituntun oleh kasihMu*, lines 9-10). Thus, rather than anonymizing her own utterances as a prayer uttered by a "voice from nowhere," Roberta's use of bahasa tinggi performs a sense of anonymity that acts as a form of social leveling: it momentarily deemphasized differences between her and other worshippers in the youth ministry (see Woolard 2016).

Because bahasa tinggi's anonymous qualities discursively index equality and deemphasize difference among congregants who collectively address God, even those who are strong advocates of bahasa Kupang as a language worship still use forms in bahasa tinggi. In the following closing prayer delivered by Amelia, a youth ministry leader and a participant in GMIT's Bible translation project to bahasa Kupang, bahasa Kupang is used to socially situate the beneficiaries of the prayer through kin terms, while bahasa tinggi is used to describe the congregations' desired forms of divine intervention in their lives:

Transcript 2.8. Amelia's Prayer

Bold text indicates bahasa Kupang
Underlined text indicates bahasa tinggi

[1]	Masa depan yang terbaik **katong** percaya Tuhan akan beri untuk **Kaka** Mia.	The future that is best, **we** believe [that you] God will give to **Kaka** Mia
[2]	Tuhan Yesus **yang bae**, **katong** berdoa untuk **Kaka Mia pung orang tua**	**Good** Lord Jesus, **we** pray for **Kaka Mia's parents**
[3]	**Katong** tahu itu dalam **Tuhan pung tangan**	**We know** [that] it is in **God's hands**
[4]	**Te** dalam pekerjaan Tuhan Yesus berkati	**And** at work, Lord Jesus, bless [her]
[5]	Berikan berkat yang berlimpah untuk **katong pung orang tua dong**	Give plenty of blessings for **our parents**
[6]	**Kasi dorang** umur panjang	**Give them [our parents]** a long life

[7]	**Kasi dorang** sehat sehat	**Give them** health
[8]	Biar di masa tua masih Tuhan **kasi dong pung** terus bahagia dengan apa pun yang Tuhan beri untuk **dong**	So that in their old age, God, **give them** happiness through whatever it is that you, God, give **them**

Here, Amelia deploys three features of bahasa Kupang: (1) the use of the bahasa Kupang element *pung* rather than *-nya* suffixes in bahasa tinggi to indicate possessives; (2) the use of bahasa Kupang personal pronouns *katong* (first-person plural), *dong* (third-person plural), and *dorang* (third-person plural). These two features of bahasa Kupang are used to situate the beneficiaries of the prayer and their relationship to worship meeting participants: (1) Mia, the host of the worship meeting, who is referred to using the kin term *Kaka* ("older sibling"); (2) Mia's parents (*kaka Mia pung orang tua*); and (3) the parents of all worship participants (*katong pung orang tua*; "our parents"). Nevertheless, Amelia continues to use bahasa tinggi to describe the forms of intervention that she and other worshippers request from God: (1) "the future that is best" (*masa depan yang terbaik*) on line 1; (2) "plenty of blessings" (*berkat yang berlimpah*) on line 5; and (3) "whatever it is that you [God] give" (*apa pun yang Tuhan beri*) on line 8. Thus, although Amelia refers to beneficiaries of the prayer through kin terms in bahasa Kupang, she uses bahasa tinggi to describe God's actions as anonymized—that is, God's actions have the same and equal efficacy to all beneficiaries of the prayer. Hence, to address others as fellow worshippers who collectively address God in prayer and in worship, a worship leader must efficaciously invoke contrasts between bahasa tinggi anda bahasa Kupang. These contrasts, in turn, situate the prayer alongside an axis that differentiates anonymity from authenticity: while the prayer deemphasizes forms of social difference among congregants who collectively address God as equals, it also indexes forms of mutual belonging through metaphors of kinship.

Conclusion

Overall, this chapter addresses how one's recruitment to the role of a church congregant who "delivers the word of God" (*bawa firman Tuhan*) is contingent upon one's efficacious deployment of bahasa Kupang and bahasa tinggi as co-constitutive semiotic registers. As a register of standard Indonesian that is particular to congregational life in the GMIT and other mainline Protestant denominations in Indonesia, bahasa tinggi is part of a socially situated "culture of standard" that is constituted not only through how it is contrasted against to ethnolinguistically emblematic "local languages" (*bahasa daerah*), but also through how it is contrasted against "everyday languages" (*bahasa sehari-hari*), such as bahasa Kupang, that encompass multiple ethnolinguistic groups in an urbanizing locale (see also Silverstein 1996).

Furthermore, the relationship between bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang in congregational life can be described as a relationship that invokes an axis of differentiation: specifically, contrasts between bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang differentiates *anonymous* from *authentic* forms of linguistic authority (see Gal and Woolard 2001; Woolard 2016). Hence, bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang are mutually constitutive in their authoritativeness as semiotic registers deployed during worship: while bahasa tinggi performs a social leveling that deemphasizes social differences among congregants and allows them to address God as a collective of equals, bahasa Kupang invokes the socio-spatiotemporal particularities, such as kinship, that mediate social relationships among congregants. Thus, unlike certain regimes of standard languages elsewhere that valorize anonymity elsewhere, bahasa tinggi is not heard among congregants as a deracinated "voice from nowhere" that are contrasted against socially situated voices (Gal and Irvine 2019a; Woolard 2016). Rather, the co-consitutive relationship between bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang selectively performs the hierarchies of congregational

life that encompasses the youth ministry under a church congregation, which, in turn, is part of a denomination, the GMIT, that is an agent of sociolinguistic transformation (Kuipers 1998).

While authenticity and anonymity are co-constitutive qualities that characterize the (meta)pragmatics of church worship, this chapter has also underlined how authenticity and anonymity are enacted through differential participation frameworks—frameworks that orient how participants respond to socio-spatiotemporally situated forms of discourse (Agha 2007; 2011; Irvine 1996). As I have shown earlier, bahasa Kupang's authenticity is enacted through the discursive co-participation of congregants in responses (*tanggapan*) to the worship leader, while bahasa tinggi's anonymity is enacted through the equalizing framework of listening and praying as a collective. An efficacious worship leader, therefore, deploys these participation frameworks to engage their fellow worshippers, such that they "understand the word of God" (*mengerti firman Tuhan*): a form of understanding that is not simply denotational, but also performed in how worship participants are discursively engaged.

Part 2

Gender, Households, and Relations of Indebtedness

Chapter 3

In Search of *Berkat* ("Blessing"): Gender and the Moral Bounds of the Household

In meetings with members of Kupang-area women's microcredit associations, an ice-breaker question that I frequently asked, "what is your occupation" (*mama-mama dong pung pekerjaan apa*), often generated the same answer: "housewife" (*ibu rumah tangga*). On government-issued forms and identification cards, ibu rumah tangga (lit. "mother of the household"), a standard Indonesian phrase, frequently appears on the field that describes adult women's "occupation" (*pekerjaan*). Such responses are perhaps unsurprising when I, a Javanese urbanite, interact with members of Kupang-area households, who often interpret my own role as that of a staffer who works for a government agency or an NGO affiliated with microcredit associations—interactional roles that require them to answer with standardized demographic information.[1] Nevertheless, when I continue the conversation with the question of "what are your daily activities" (*mama mama dong pung kegiatan sehari hari seperti apa*), a variety of responses would emerge: for example, "raising pigs" (*ternak babi*), "selling pastries" (*jual kue*), or "running a kiosk" (*usaha kios*) are common responses. These everyday forms of trading and exchange, which are crucial to the livelihoods of Kupang-area communities, are often assumed by adult married women in their role as ibu rumah tangga—those whose roles are configured and valorized by Indonesian state authorities as guardians of the household, the *rumah tangga* (e.g.,

[1] Responses to "occupation" (*pekerjaan*), a standard field in Indonesian government forms, are usually limited to the following: university student (*mahasiswa*), government employee, non-government employee (*karyawan swasta*), farmer, factory worker (*buruh*), self-employed or business owner (*wiraswasta*), retiree, or "housewife" (*ibu rumah tangga*). Out of all these fields, only "housewife" is a gendered descriptor of one's occupation: that is, it is only applicable for women, as men cannot formally claim to be a stay-at-home parent.

Brenner 1998; Newberry 2006; Suryakusuma 2011). As I will demonstrate in this chapter, the same configuration of women's roles as guardians of households discursively elides and deemphasizes women's financial contributions—activities that generate crucial income for Kupang-area families as both men and women from non-elite backgrounds rely on precarious forms of livelihood to fulfill the daily needs of their households as well as expenses for rituals among their kin.

In this chapter, I focus on how new forms of subjectivities emerge as women from non-elite backgrounds in Kupang assume new roles as members of a specific type of microcredit association (*koperasi*): a network of cooperatively-owned microcredit associations for women initiated by the FCF Foundation, a Kupang-area feminist organization that served as part of Empowering Women (2012–20), a project jointly funded by the Indonesian and Australian government that focused on women's rights and women's economic empowerment (see introductory chapter; see also Chapter 4). These microcredit associations, furthermore, expect their members to use their loans not only for regular household expenses, such as children's school tuition, but also for a variety of entrepreneurial projects (*usaha*), such as setting up a produce kiosk or raising pigs—forms of livelihood that are normatively expected from non-elite adult women in Kupang as they patch together a living from multiple sources for their households. By taking this socioeconomic milieu into account, this chapter focuses on how female microcredit association members present themselves, enact, and evaluate the role of those who embark on entrepreneurial projects to "improve the economics of their household" (*mengembangkan ekonomi rumah tangga*). While I will explain the practices of rotating credit and the forms of relationality that these associations enact in Chapter 4, I dedicate this chapter as

an explanation of how non-elite women in Kupang situate themselves and their households in relation to two processes: (1) NGO-mediated forms of microcredit; and (2) kin relations.

In Kupang, an arid locale known for its relative lack of natural resources compared to other parts of the province of NTT, elite families derive their political and economic stature from employment in the civil service—a wide array of state-run institutions that employ college-educated men and women (van Klinken 2014; Tidey 2022). Towards Kupang's outskirts, where some well-irrigated areas exist, a limited number of well-to-do families who are large-scale landowners continue to derive a substantial amount of income from their farms. However, a large proportion of Kupang residents, like the microcredit association members with whom I worked, are different from these elites: they are members of small-scale landowning families who derive their income from a multitude of sources. For instance, Christina Bili, a member of a microcredit association whom I describe in a later section of this chapter, runs a produce kiosk together with her mother, fulfills occasional catering orders from the local village government, and folds ballot papers during national and local election seasons. These entrepreneurial projects are key for Christina and the women in her family in making their household finances viable, as most of their male kin work seasonally as a construction worker and as motorcycle taxi drivers (*ojek*)—both forms of occupation that are subject to large fluctuations in income and long stretches of unemployment. Furthermore, for Christina, as well as other members of microcredit associations, loans are a key source of funding for their entrepreneurial endeavors—endeavors that, as I will describe in this chapter, have become normative among Kupang-area women. To demonstrate the confluence of women's relations with microcredit associations and their kin, this chapter focuses on how women invoke the household, the *rumah tangga*, as a site of intersecting and overlapping obligations that morally authorize women's entrepreneurial pursuits (see also Cody 2013; 2016).

Although the women's microcredit associations I worked with often emphasize the liberatory possibilities of women earning their own incomes, this chapter also demonstrates that women's incomes are readily appropriated by two processes: (1) normative expectations that dictate how women should both seek earnings for the household and manage their household budgets; and (2) reciprocal donations for weddings and funerary feasts that are obligated by one's ties to an extended family. Taken together, these two processes constitute the moral bounds of the household—normative boundaries that simultaneously valorizes women's financial contributions to the household while circumscribing moral forms of work, education, and entrepreneurship for women. The household, therefore, constitutes "interdependent relations," a term that Julia Kowalski developed in her analysis of the work of family counselors in north Indian women's organizations: these counselors, according to Kowalski's research, "sought to improve the ties of interdependence that connected kin, helping women depend on others on their own terms, rather than pursue independence" (Kowalski 2021, 336).

Following Kowalki's notion of interdependent relations, I emphasize how kin relations are constituted and enacted through the exchange and circulation of resources, including cash, across households. This relational approach follows feminist scholarship in anthropology that demonstrates how the household is not a social domain that can be neatly separated from other domains of social life (e.g., Guyer 1981; Yanagisako 1979). Furthermore, I also contribute to existing literature on eastern Indonesia that has analyzed the relationship between house-based forms of social belonging and kinship—relations that are understood through the lens of marriage and ritual exchange as forms of alliance (S. Errington 1987; Fox 1980; Needham 1974; Lévi-Strauss 1969; McKinnon 1991; Traube 1986). In contrast to this body of scholarship, however, I do not propose a model that permanently assigns persons to particular social

groupings. Rather, I emphasize how social relatedness and belonging, such as belonging to the household, is invoked and contested through multiple semiotic modalities, including money, food, linguistic utterances, and other resources that are exchanged and circulated within and across households (Carsten 1997; Zelizer 1994; 2009). Thus, in this chapter, I do not confine my analysis of exchange to Maussian frameworks that assign value to ritualized acts of gifting, nor do I limit my analysis of exchange to anonymous exchanges of commodities in formalized markets (see Parry 1986; Zuckerman 2020). Rather, what I refer to as *exchange* encompasses the quotidian exchange of money, utterances, and other semiotic resources that contribute to forms of relatedness (Carsten 2004; McKinnon and Cannell 2013). In particular, I analyze the moral standing of a household according to normative expectations of reciprocity among neighbors and kin groups.

In this chapter, I demonstrates that the Indonesian rumah tangga (household) can be productively analyzed as sites that mediate the circulation of resources as women navigate relations with microcredit association as well as their own male and female kin. The circulation and flow of resources and other signs of value, as earlier anthropological scholarship has demonstrated, is vital in the constitution and recognition of social collectives by those who participate in the exchange of resources (Munn 1992; Weiner 1976; 1992). Borrowing an insight from Jan Newberry's research on Javanese housewives in Indonesia's urbanizing economy of the 1990s, I describe how the "reciprocal, mutually reinforcing flow of resources and aid defines houses less as discrete structures than as nodes and conduits in a network of neighborly exchange and connection" (Newberry 2007, 1314). However, in this chapter, I argue that households are not simply "conduits" or "channels" that relay resources from one context to another: rather,

practices associated with the household transform the social significance of resources, such as money, for those who participate in the exchange and mediation of these forms of resources.

Through this chapter, I demonstrate how gendered mediations of resources are crucial for the men and women of households that participate in the reciprocal donation of money for ritual feasts, especially for weddings and funerals. Furthermore, women's microcredit associations in Kupang expect that their members can sustain reciprocal relationships of indebtedness that these associations rely on to remain financially viable and morally tenable as collectives that emblematize togetherness, *kebersamaan* (see also Chapter 4). In my field site, as is common across the Global South, microcredit associations similarly derive their collateral from the perceived durability of women's social networks, which radiate across multiple households and span a multitude of precariously balanced entrepreneurial projects (Schuster 2014; 2015; Kar and Schuster 2016). Hence, in this chapter, I argue that practices of lending and borrowing through microcredit associations are situated in the gendered mediation of resources that both contribute to the household and exceeds the putative boundaries of the household as a social unit. These practices of mediation, furthermore, are also forms of moral impression management that women engage in as they seek loans and conduct everyday forms of exchange beyond the household (see Goffman 1959).

Gender, the Household, and the Indonesian State

Throughout General Soeharto's authoritarian New Order regime (1966–98), adult women's roles as "mothers" (*ibu*) and guardians of the household are often contrasted with the role of men as fathers (*bapak*)—a source of financial provision and authority that is often equated with General Soeharto himself as the "father of the nation" (Bourchier 2014; Shiraishi

1997; Suryakusuma 1996). During the Soeharto era, the Dharma Wanita, a nation-wide organization that consists of the wives of all male Indonesian male civil servants, posted a list of its five principles in every government office building: among others, these principles stated that women's roles include "[supporting] her husband's career and duties" and "[being] a good housekeeper" (Sunindyo 1996, 125). While these principles reflect the New Order's ideology of gender, such official statements do not reflect the diversity of socioeconomic roles that Indonesian women (and men) assume within and beyond the putative boundaries of the household. Across Indonesia, women's role as agents of trading and exchange has a long history: for instance, among urban mercantile classes in Java that first emerged in the 19th century, women are seen as reliable mediators between textile-producing family firms and the unruly world of commerce, while men are thought to be unable to control their desires when they encounter forces associated with money and the market (Brenner 1998). After a major economic crisis in 1997 and the ensuing downfall of Soeharto's military regime, these roles that position women as moral economic agents returned to Indonesian state policy discourses (e.g., Blackburn 2004; Tickamyer and Kusujiarti 2012). Although these changes do not entirely erase the legacy of Soeharto era ideologies that circumscribe gendered differences, they enabled the alignment of women's rights NGOs and Indonesian state agencies as close collaborators.

With the help of multinational development aid mediated by NGOs, the post-Soeharto Indonesian state initiated an era of local democracy that reconfigured how men and women become subjects of state-led economic development projects. Since the early 2000s, the Indonesian state has dramatically decentralized its policymaking apparatus and channeled further resources for economic and political development in provincial centers, such as Kupang (van Klinken and Berenschot 2014; Tidey 2022; Vel 2008). At the same time, the Indonesian state

began to shift its policy discourses on gender towards notions of equality among men and women within and beyond the household—discourses that have been labeled in presidential decrees and national legislative bills as a form of "gender mainstreaming," *pengarusutamaan gender* (Affiah 2014, 21–22). These shifts in the state's stances, resulted in, among others, the opening of multinational development aid for Indonesian state agencies and Indonesian NGOs, including women's rights NGOs, to work as collaborators (Aspinall 2013; Dibley and Ford 2019). Thus, throughout Indonesia, organizations dedicated towards women's rights became close collaborators of state agencies dedicated towards matters of "women's empowerment" (*Dinas Pemberdayaan Perempuan*), which are located in every municipality and rural district, including in Kupang.

In the post-Soeharto era, these transformations in the state's official discourses on gender were accompanied by neoliberal political and economic shifts: rising commodity prices as well as the removal of long-standing market subsidies, for example, dramatically increased levels of socioeconomic inequality across Indonesia since the early 2000s (e.g., Tadjoeddin 2020). In navigating these social and economic changes, non-elite households have been relentlessly pushed by the Indonesian government and its NGO collaborators to embark on entrepreneurial projects that are idealized as producers of self-reliant subjects (Donzelli 2023; Welker 2012). A group of women's rights NGOs, in particular, participated as implementors of a World Bank-sponsored program referred to as PNPM Mandiri (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam 2014). In Kupang as well as across Indonesia, the PNPM Mandiri program embarked on a nation-wide mission to setup microcredit associations (*Simpan Pinjam Kelompok Perempuan*) for women who aspire to set up small-scale businesses from their households—a mission that was ostensibly conceived as a remedy for longstanding gendered inequalities. While the breadth of entrepreneurial activities

that are facilitated by Indonesian women's rights NGOs and their collaborators is outside of the scope of this chapter, these organizations have emerged as an indirect source of livelihood for non-elite residents of Kupang. Specifically, women's rights NGOs, including the FCF Foundation, with whom I collaborated throughout the duration of my fieldwork, have established cooperatively owned microcredit associations (*koperasi*) that distribute loans on a rotating basis to its members as part of their economic empowerment programs (see also Chapter 4). These rotating credit associations, also known as *arisan*, have found increasingly prominent roles as sources of income for adult women and their households in the post-Soeharto era, where costs of daily necessities, such as food and fuel, and education continue to increase (Rinaldo 2019; Tickamyer and Kusujiarti 2012).

Methodology and Chapter Layout

Throughout the duration of my fieldwork, I was introduced to members of microcredit associations through community organizers (*pendamping*) of the FCF Foundation, a non-profit foundation loosely affiliated with the GMIT church, a mainline Protestant denomination where more than 80 percent of Kupang's population are congregants (see Chapter 1).[2] Among their duties, these community organizers work as supervisors and counselors of associations that are located throughout the Kupang area. One community organizer, Sophia Adoe, is an eloquent and well-networked figure who introduced me to numerous members of microcredit associations (*koperasi*) in the rural peripheries of Kupang. Both Sophia and I paid several visits per week to

[2] The GMIT synod has long sponsored state-authorized rural economic development projects and the involvement of women as ministers and lay leaders in church congregations—two processes that have converged in my field sites as women assume additional responsibilities as entrepreneurial and moral agents of state development.

the homes of association members, where regular meetings of the associations are held. Through these meetings, I gained valuable opportunities in observing the activities of and, later, interviewing association members, many of whom operate small-scale businesses, such as kiosks selling produce and other household necessities, from their homes.

As I was seen as part of the FCF Foundation and a close collaborator of Sophia, association members tend to display their eagerness in pursuing entrepreneurial projects—projects that constitute the primary aim of the FCF Foundation's activities in providing credit to women association members. Eventually, as I continued to build a working relationship with Sophia and members of the microcredit associations that she supervises, I cultivated sufficient rapport for my interlocutors to talk to me about the gendered relationships in their households—a sensitive topic that is often left unmentioned and unexplicated outside of the family. As a result, the two conversations I had that offer the most details on the differences between men's and women's roles in the household were with widows, who are no longer responsible for their husband's moral standing as a member of the household. While these conversations offer only a partial view into the complex relations that constitute notions of the household in contemporary Indonesia, these conversations situate women's moral participation within and beyond the household as agents of everyday exchange, which undergirds their participation in transnational microcredit economies (Kar and Schuster 2016; 2021).

To explain how these political and economic processes constitute the household, I will discuss my analysis of ethnographic data that I gathered through fieldwork in the following sections: (1) the establishment of a household through wedding rituals that involve the pooling together of financial resources among kin; (2) the differential roles of men and women in financially contributing and managing a household according to Agnes, a microcredit association

member; (3) normative expectations that outline women's idealized roles as entrepreneurial agents according to Paulina, a successful entrepreneur; (4) the moral ideologies of *berkat*, good fortune, that delineate and circumscribe women's roles in everyday forms of exchange within and beyond the household; and (5) the combining of men's and women's incomes as a household donation in *kumpul keluarga*, a ritual of reciprocal exchange among kin who collectively finance weddings and funerals. Through these examples, I demonstrate how women anticipate, respond to, and voice the concerns of the state, the church, and the NGO-affiliated microcredit associations—all of which are institutions that idealize and circumscribe women's roles as entrepreneurial subjects who work for the moral and economic betterment of their households.

The *Belis* ("Bride-Price"): Establishing the Household

Although men and women in Kupang are both expected to financially contribute to the household that they jointly establish through marriage, the household (*rumah tangga*) that consists of a heterosexual married couple at its center is formed only after an extensive process of fundraising among kin. The province of NTT, where Kupang is located, is often typified by its own residents as well as by other Indonesians as a site where local marriage customs require costly rituals that involve the payment of a bride-price, *belis* (e.g., Keane 1997; Carnegie 2013). According to normative customs, the bride-price, belis, is paid by the groom's family to the bride's family (but not to the bride herself) as a prerequisite for marriage—a payment that requires extended families to pool together financial resources. In the past, the bride's family played the role of the one who "receives" (*tadah*) gifts, but, more recently, the bride's family contributes cash and other resources (e.g., livestock) for the wedding feast. Although belis payments in the past included items such as jewelry, handwoven cloth (*kain tenun*), and

livestock, the belis now most frequently assumes the form of a cash payment—a payment that increases proportionally to the social status of the bride.

Figure 3.1. A procession of children carrying gifts for a Rotenese wedding ceremony. Photo taken by author.

While the monetary value of belis payments varies greatly, Kupang residents invariably describe them as incredibly expensive: in the relatively prosperous farming village of Oesao, a Kupang area locale, belis payments for a college-educated bride have been reported to reach 40 million rupiahs (approximately US $ 2,500), although I have also heard of a young female doctor whose parents demanded 100 million rupiahs (approximately US$ 6,700)—both figures that are spectacular in comparison to the legally mandated local minimum wage that is equivalent to about 24 million rupiahs (approximately US$ 1,800) per year. Thus, even when a couple has already lived together and had children, marriage is at times delayed until after negotiations for

belis payments are concluded, which can take months or even years.[3] After belis payments are completed and a couple is married through a series of customary ritual feasts, the couple is seen as forming a social unit that is the basis of reciprocity: the *rumah tangga*, or household. Subsequently, once a couple has received payments from their kin to get married and establish a household, they are expected to reciprocate by financially contributing to the weddings and funerals of their kin. As I will explain in the last section of this chapter, such a framework of reciprocity across households is called *kumpul keluarga*, "gathering the family" (Carnegie 2013; Tidey 2022).

While the financing of kumpul keluarga lumps together contributions made by men and women under the category of the household, my interlocutors describe the management of "household finances" (*keuangan rumah tangga*) as a responsibility held by married women. Because kumpul keluarga constitutes a reciprocal form of obligation for practically all households in Kupang, women are then expected to ensure that a household has enough funds to contribute to kumpul keluarga events—ritual events that pool together donations from related households to cover the expenses of weddings and funerals. Kumpul keluarga, therefore, has practical as well as moral consequences. As I will describe in the following sections, kumpul keluarga is characterized by women's microcredit association members as a large and urgent household expense that cannot be avoided, thereby adding to their burden of managing both the financial viability and the moral standing of their households. Thus, in the following section, I will describe how women differentially value the contributions of their husbands and their own selves towards household financial obligations. As previous scholars of kinship and markets have

[3] Without a wedding that marks the completion of these nuptial payments, a couple with children is not considered to have established a rumah tangga, a household, and the couple's children are classified as "members of the mothers' family" (*masuk marga mama*)—children who, while cared for by kin on their mother's side, are not eligible to inherit their father's wealth (see Schrauwers 1999).

shown, social relationships that are characterized by intimacy, such as the household, are also mediated by everyday forms of exchanges—exchanges that also include monetary payments (McKinnon and Cannell 2013; Zelizer 1994; 2009).

Women, Men, and Household Budgets

Among working-class families in Kupang who seek livelihoods through small-scale farming and seasonal work, the idea of making do with limited means is often expressed using the trope of women who struggle to make a household's budget work with their husband's limited income. In contrast to married men, for whom it is morally sufficient to simply "provide" (*menafkahi*) in some fashion for their household, married women are expected to manage household finances and cover shortcomings, particularly when earnings from their male kin are insufficient to cover household expenses. In the following interview I conducted with Agnes, a working-class farmer who belongs to a local microcredit association, she describes how men and women differentially contribute to the household:

Transcript 3.1. Women, men, and household budgets

A: Agnes, a Kupang area farmer
F: Rafadi Hakim, the author

[1] A Everywhere, it's women who think about [how to make] a (*pikir hidup*) living… whereas the men (*laki-laki*), if they work, and give us [money], for instance, five hundred thousand [Rupiahs]… [then out of that money we still need to] pay for rice, sugar, vegetables, and [then the men would still need money for] cigarettes too. Indeed, there's money that [the men give to us] but that's not enough. Sometimes we also need to go [and donate money] to *kumpul keluarga*….

[2] F [kumpul keluarga, that is] when there's a funeral, or when someone's getting married…[4]

[4] I will describe the workings of kumpul keluarga in the following section of this chapter.

[3] A [Right] when there's funeral, for that we need to [go and donate money], because that's *adat* (tradition)

[4] F When a man… finds some work, he gives five hundred thousand [Rupiahs to his wife], but he doesn't *kelola* (manage) it.

[5] A He doesn't manage [the money]. When we [the wives] manage [the money], we're *pusing* (overwhelmed). [Say,] this much money, five hundred [thousand Rupiahs], this must be [enough for] one month… One month, imagine, that much money… with that money [you'd get] no food, no vegetables, no meat… [When a man] gives [us] five hundred [thousand], he [still] wants to eat every day

((Agnes laughs))

[6] F The men are the ones who give money to the family, but the *mama-mama* (mothers) are the ones thinking about [money] constantly…

[7] A [We] borrow money, [we] sell things, so that [we] always have something to eat

[8] When my son's wife gets upset, I tell [my son] to kindly talk to her… My son, *saya marah dia terus* (I always get angry at him)… The [money that you, my son,] give [to us] is not proportional to what [us] women need to work with in the household. Eventually, he left [Kupang] to work [in Borneo]…. That's what happens with [our] children… They're married but their minds are like little children… Especially if their parents are still around. When they work, they're unserious… because the parents feed their wives and kids.

Agnes, whose husband recently died, explained to me about how she struggles to make ends meet through a combination of growing rice, cultivating crops that are harvested as vegetables (*tanam sayur*), and raising pigs. As with many other families who reside in her part of Kupang, the small-scale rice farms that they own are labor-intensive; nevertheless, earning a steady income of cash from such a small-scale rice farm is challenging. Agnes's challenge is compounded by her growing household: her son is married with one child, and her daughter-in-law and well as grandchild live together with Agnes. Although her daughter-in-law earns a modest income by running an online clothing store, this sporadic source of income has not been sufficient to cover regular household expenses for Agnes's multigenerational family. Thus, Agnes

continues to bear the responsibility to earn enough to feed her household: herself, her son, her daughter-in-law, and their grandchild. Because of these financial difficulties that have fomented discord among her family members, Agnes describes how her son reluctantly temporarily found work as a porter (*antar-antar barang*) in the island of Borneo, where many young men from the Kupang area have found work in the booming palm-oil plantation industry and in related services. Two months before my interview with Agnes in July 2019, however, her son lost his job and again relied on his mother for financial support as he continued to look for work in Borneo, thereby adding to the financial pressures that Agnes experienced.

In addition to the expenses that are incurred by raising a multigenerational family, one of Agnes's major complaints in the interview addresses men's indifference towards the management of household incomes: according to her, men continue to be indifferent even as a household must cover not only daily necessities such as food and cigarettes (line 1), but also routine donations towards kumpul keluarga, which are fundraising rituals for weddings and funerals among one's extended family (lines 2-3). Agnes then describes how men do not usually try to find additional sources of income; rather, men expect their wives or mothers to ensure that all those expenses are covered. On a daily basis, Agnes is concerned about how to ensure that, despite a limited income, a family does not resort to eating rice without vegetables, fish, or meat—*nasi kosong* (lit., "empty rice")—a mark of grueling poverty in a coastal locale where the relatively plentiful water supply also nourishes vegetables and hog farms (line 5). Furthermore, even when sons are married and are supposed to find a livelihood of their own, Agnes laments that they often turn to their mothers (line 8). Here, the figure of the mother, *mama*, emerges as the one who engages in a variety of exchange practices, including borrowing money and selling goods, to make ends meet (line 7). According to Agnes, men should ideally provide enough money that is proportional

to "what women work with in the house" (*apa yang perempuan kerjakan dalam rumah*; line 8). As Agnes is recently widowed and her son is unemployed, Agnes is left to fill the financial shortcomings in her household that her son has failed to address.

Beyond providing the daily necessities of life, such as food, Agnes has also described to me that, in their role as married women and mothers, women are preoccupied with the work of impression management that a household performs for neighbors and visitors (see Goffman 1959). Sugar, for instance, is a crucial component for a household's management of interactions with guests, as visitors to a house are almost always served a cup of (very) sweet tea or coffee by women, while men are expected to accompany the guest in verbal interactions conducted in a verandah or a living room. The daily feeding of pigs, another task that Agnes performs for her household, is also crucial, because, according to her, pigs that squeal loudly from lack of food could signal to neighbors that a household has neglected its duties to feed its livestock—a form of potential embarrassment, as pigs hold both monetary and ritual value.[5]

According to Agnes's description, men's duty for the sustenance of household finances end once they have handed their earnings to women: once Agnes received a monthly sum of five hundred thousand Rupiahs from her late husband, he did not contribute any further to the management of household finances (line 4). Such forms of action among men are normative: for instance, according to a sermon given by a Kupang-area minister who belongs to the GMIT church, Reverend Yandi Manobe, a husband's responsibility is "to earn" (*menafkahi*) and "to feed" (*memberi makan*), two phrases that are synonymous with the giving, but not the managing, of money for the household:

[5] Because pork dishes are always served at weddings, funerals, and other ritual feast, pigs are often sold when a household requires a large amount of cash, such as for school tuition payments. A pig can fetch a price of up to 2 million rupiahs (US$. 133) once they are large enough to be slaughtered.

> A husband's duty (*suami punya tugas*) is to provide [for their family] with sincerity (*menafkahi dengan tulus*), to feed (*memberi makan*), [and] to give attention (*memberi perhatian*). [Husbands must] give with sincerity, don't come home and say [to your wife], well this is what [you've] ordered [me to do], hope you're satisfied (*ini yang pesan ini, ambil ko lu puas su*)! […] Don't [say] that. [Do it] sincerely (*tulus*)! […] A husband's duty is to be gentle (*lembut*) to his wife. No rudeness (*kasar*). No loudness (*keras*). (*Khotbah Kristen Pdt Yandi Manobe S.Th. Rumah Tangga Kristen* 2020)

Here, Reverend Manobe describes how husbands should ideally provide for their family with sincerity (*tulus*), a quality enacted not only by giving their earnings to their wives, but also by speaking gently (*lembut*) rather than rudely (*kasar*). In the same sermon, Reverend Manobe also explained that "wives… should not add to a husband's burden to fulfill expenses" (*istri istri… jangan memberatkan beban belanja suami*), thereby placing the burden of managing a household budget on women, rather than on men.

In Kupang, non-elite women's burden in managing regular household expenses is also caused by the precarity of men's livelihoods: non-elite men who do not leave the Kupang area as migrant workers often rely on earnings derived from farming, fishing, driving, and construction, all of which do not offer predictable incomes for their households. Construction, farming, and fishing are highly dependent on seasonal conditions, thereby causing long periods of unemployment (*nganggur*), which my interlocutors, both men and women, have described to me as periods of distress (*susah*).[6] Among men, a popular year-round option is driving a motorcycle taxi (*ojek*), an occupation that is notorious for unpredictable earnings and long hours. Among motorcycle taxi drivers who work in Tuabuna, on Kupang's eastern periphery, common short trips between a local market and local houses could bring a fare of about Rp 10,000 (US$ .67), equivalent to a meal. In addition to these shorter trips, motorcycle drivers would sometimes wait

[6] The period between January and April, characterized by heavy rains, often mark a period of financial difficulty for non-affluent households, as daily fishing journeys and construction projects are often put on hold.

for the occasional passenger who would pay longer trips to the city center of Kupang could bring the fare up to Rp 30,000 (US$ 2). Thus, men who work as motorcycle taxi drivers must sit and wait for passengers along Kupang's major thoroughfare for hours at a time, thereby requiring them to be away from home for long stretches of the day and often at night. Another livelihood pursued by men in Kupang's urbanizing areas, that of driving a minibus (*bemo*), is also subject to large fluctuations in earnings, as bemo drivers derive their earnings not from a salary, but from a share of the collected fare as determined by the vehicle's owner. Thus, following earlier scholarship on gender and households in Indonesia, even as men's earnings from these precarious forms of livelihood are given to women, women shoulder the burden of navigating periods of financial distress by managing and adjusting their household budgets accordingly (Brenner 1998; Newberry 2006). In the following section, I will show how local norms expect women to not only manage their household budgets, but also to engage in entrepreneurial activities that bring additional sources of income—expectations that carry moral consequences in an era of heightened precarity (see also Inoue 2006; Muehlebach 2012).

"For the Household": Moralizing Women's Economic Aspirations

Among both non-affluent and affluent households, women's financial aspirations are deemed as morally righteous when they are recognized as part of an endeavor to better the *rumah tangga*, the household. As reflected in Reverend Manobe's sermon above, while men are regarded as those who "provide" (*menafkahi*) for women and children regardless of whether their incomes can cover household expenses, women are the ones who are expected to ensure that the household remains sustainable as a financial entity. Thus, married women are expected to pursue activities that bring financial betterment for the household, even when their husbands experience

prolonged unemployment or are simply absent. According to my interlocutors, almost all of whom are women members of microcredit associations, women's entrepreneurial pursuits are key in maintaining moral relations in the household, as it greatly reduces the risks of marital discord (*pertengkaran*) and even domestic violence (*kekerasan dalam rumah tangga*) among heterosexual married couples. While I personally did not document or observe instances of marital arguments or domestic violence, my interlocutors, who aspire to be regarded as proper beneficiaries of loans from these associations, often cite the necessity of women's income in maintaining moral relations in the household. For instance, Sophia, one of my key interlocutors who works for a microcredit association, often encourage women to seek their own sources of income to maintain moral relations with their husbands: she would humorously ask women about "whether they would ask [their] husbands at home for money to buy *Softex* (menstrual pads)" (*masak mau beli Softex minta uang sama bapak di rumah*)—a statement that encourages wives to seek and maintain sources of income that are separate from those of their husbands.

One strong advocate of women's role as an earner of household income in Ba'a, a Kupang-area village, is Paulina, a close friend of Sophia's and a successful businesswoman who owns a large kiosk and lends money to small businesses in her neighborhood. A widow since her kids were young, she struggled with the income she initially derived from farming, which she pursued with her husband. Later, as a single mother, Paulina prospered through her businesses, and she is well-known in her village for raising enough money to send her two children to college. Paulina is also known as a church board member who speaks eloquently in public, and she is a regular presence in village town-hall meetings, where she has lobbied for the Ba'a village council to disburse loans for women's entrepreneurial projects. She owns a large kiosk near a busy street in her village, where she sells a wide variety of food, dry goods, and produce,

but her entrepreneurial endeavors extend beyond her own shop: Paulina runs a moneylending operation herself, and she is known for being generous but firm when requesting debtors to pay loan installments on time. While Paulina has always been an entrepreneur in her own right, she describes her own endeavors as "helping the economic [status] of her household" (*membantu ekonomi dalam rumah tangga*)—an expression that situates her own entrepreneurial endeavors as something that is done to improve her household's moral and financial standing, and not simply for the pursuit of wealth.

In an interview I conducted in the presence of Sophia, a microcredit association staffer, Paulina describes women's entrepreneurial projects as going beyond earning enough money for their households. According to her, women's pursuit of a separate stream of income can mitigate disagreements and even violence associated with wives who rely solely on their husbands for an income. Paulina began by describing how she would creatively use all parts of a plantain (*pisang*) to make commodities that she can sell for cash:

> My target is such that all those plantains can get cooked [and sold]. The ones that are ripe, I'll turn them into cakes. But the ones that are not yet ripe, I'll make chips out of them… Some of them I'll sell at someone else's kiosk, some of them I'll sell myself… Because, when I think about it…. Rather than [us women] sitting around (duduk duduk)… doing nothing (*sonde buat apa apa*), only counting on (*harapkan*) [one's] husband to come home from work and to bring money… [The wife would say] why did you bring only this much? Ultimately, the husband, because he's tired, [he'd say] you just receive (*tada*) this [money], isn't that easy? [The husband would say] I bring something, you don't even find it acceptable (*tarima*)... So, this [situation] causes arguments in a household (*pertengkaran dalam rumah tangga*), [and even] violence (*kekerasan*)…. Violence in a household, only because of [the expectation that] only one person works, right?

For Paulina, married women who do not earn incomes of their own are responsible for marital discord, as they have "sat around" (*duduk-duduk*) and "did nothing" (*sonde buat apa-apa*) while they "count on" (*harapka*n) their husband's incomes to cover all household expenses. Using reported speech constructions, Paulina then voiced arguments that would happen in a household

that depends on one man as an earner. In contrast to such a household, Paulina characterizes her own pathway to financial success as one that is characterized by a constant involvement in trading: whenever she obtains plantains (*pisang*) from a harvest, she will ensure that all parts of the harvest can be sold for cash, thereby demonstrating her role as a woman who contributes to the moral and economic stature of a household.

In the same interview, Paulina expressed that women should not solely be in the position of someone who "counts on" (*harapkan*) money given to them by others—a category that encompasses not only their husbands, but also the government, state social service agencies (*Dinas Sosial*), and non-profits (*yayasan*). Rather, in her position as someone who encourages women to take up loans to set up small-scale businesses, she calls on women to rely on themselves to "strive forward" (*berjuang*) in moral and economic terms:

> I want to strive forward (*berjuang*) so others don't see me as a weak woman (orang *jangan anggap beta perempuan lemah*)… When my husband died, my first child was in ninth grade (*SMP kelas tiga*), now [they're a] college professor (*dosen*)… I didn't want to count on (*mengharapkan*) the government (*pemerintah*), count on [something] from [state] social [service agencies] or non-profits (*yayasan-yayasan*)… I don't want to be a weak woman myself (*sonde mau beta jadi perempuan lemah*). I don't want to. I know that on my own shoulders I have two responsibilities, [that of a] father and [that of a] mother. So, on these two shoulders… how do [I] find a way to not be weak, [but] to move forward (*maju*)… We must strive forward (*berjuang*) to contribute to the economic [standing] of our households (*membantu ekonomi dalam rumah tangga*).

Here, Paulina compares her own journey as a woman who finds ways to "strive forward" (*maju*) against women whom she and others deem as "weak" (*lemah*): those who would count on the government or social service agencies rather than on themselves to sustain their households. Even as her husband died when her one of children was in ninth grade, she describes her own path as that of someone who continues to "contribute to the economic [standing] of her household" (*membantu ekonomi dalam rumah tangga*). Rather than expecting men or the state to contribute, she describes her own journey as simultaneously bearing two responsibilities: "that of

a father and that of a mother" for her household. Later, she explained to me that, even as her two children have obtained well-paying jobs as a college professor and a civil servant, she refuses to be financially dependent on them, and instead continues to find new entrepreneurial pursuits. According to Paulina, her own aspiration to "strive forward" (*maju*) enabled her to take out loans that later became the basis of her current moneylending business.

Following Paulina's emphasis on "striving forward" (*berjuang*) for the financial betterment of the household, the *rumah tangga*, women's entrepreneurial endeavors are morally evaluated according to how these financial endeavors contribute to their households. Thus, women who use money for pursuits outside of the household are deemed morally improper. For instance, the story of the former chief of a microcredit association, Martha, is often cited as a warning to microcredit association members who are tempted to use the newfound money that the association offers to abandon their households. According to her neighbors, Martha, who was formerly married to a wealthy son of a local landowning family and a well-respected board member in her church, started having an extramarital affair. She abandoned her husband and children and ran away with the money that belonged to the microcredit association—once one of the most successful women's microcredit associations in her area of Kupang. Her actions caused the association to shut down, and women in Martha's neighborhood frequently cited her subsequent misfortune as a warning to others. The houses she and her former husband used to rent to tenants have been sold for a cheap price, and Martha is said to be toiling away for meagre daily wages in rice fields located far away from her former family members and neighbors. Even more embarrassing, according to her neighbors, is the fact that the church has unilaterally dismissed Martha from their board (*majelis*)—a leadership position that elite Kupang residents often aspire to attain. Martha's ill-fated journey, therefore, shows the dire moral consequences of

women's abandonment of their household, the *rumah tangga*—consequences that include permanent exclusion from kin ties.

The Bili Family: Mothers and the Moral Authority of *Berkat*

As the examples above have shown, women are normatively expected to become financial contributors to the household, and not to rely on men's incomes. Furthermore, women who do not contribute sufficiently to their households, or who abandon their households altogether, are blamed as sources of discord and disharmony. While these forms of moral discourse are crucial in the differentiation of roles between men and women within the household, this chapter also emphasizes that women's roles extend beyond the putative boundaries of the household. Specifically, this section addresses how women are also expected to participate in everyday forms of exchange that demonstrate the moral standing of the household. These everyday acts of exchange, I argue, constitute a moral framework that my interlocutors refer to as *berkat* (lit., "blessing)—a moral framework that emerges from the circulation of signs of value through overlapping social domains (Munn 1992; Weiner 1976; 1992). These moral frameworks, as I will show in this section, do not only reproduce the household as a social entity; rather, they also circumscribe the pathways that women pursue as agents of exchange within and beyond the household.

In the following section, I describe how the women members of one extended family, the Bilis, secure the moral authority of *berkat* ("blessing")—a form of authority that is obtained through sharing and exchanging resources with others. While the adult men of the Bili family are often absent from the house in their journey as a migrant worker or in their pursuit of precarious livelihoods from construction projects and driving gigs, adult women of the Bili family manage a

variety of entrepreneurial projects— produce kiosks and food stalls—in close proximity to the Bili home.[7] These entrepreneurial projects go beyond addressing the immediate financial challenges of living in a time when the Bili's status as small-scale landowners no longer secures prosperity, as the Bili women also cultivate relationships of reciprocity with their fellow neighbors in the village of Takari by exchanging food and hosting village-wide gatherings. The enactment of everyday and larger-scale reciprocity, as I will show in this section, secures *berkat* as a form of moral authority for the household. This form of berkat is also ensured by how the Bili family circumscribe different educational and career pathways for their male and female children: while Christina Bili was prevented from working in the hospitality industry by her parents, Christina's son Arthur brings a different form of berkat by graduating from a vocational school and pursuing a relatively a well-paying career as a crew for a fishing company overseas.

During fieldwork, my acquaintance with the Bilis was shaped by how others linked them to moral notions of berkat: that is, the Bilis were recognized for the generosity of their sharing with neighbors and visitors. Generosity that is fueled by berkat, furthermore, initiates a relationship of reciprocity between the Bilis, myself, and my other interlocutors. Early on during fieldwork, I began visiting the Bilis' house, which features a spacious verandah and a front yard where meetings are organized for neighborhoods groups and, on a few occasions, village functions. I was first introduced to Christina, the eldest daughter of the Bilis who is in her early 40s, through Sophia, a community organizer (*pendamping*) who administers several neighborhood-level *koperasi*s, microcredit associations, that are run exclusively by and for women members (see also Chapter 4). As the Bili's household is a convenient and strategic place to meet for the microcredit association, Sophia and I were regular visitors throughout the

[7] Two men of the Bili family earn money by driving motorcycle taxis (*ojek*) and minibuses (*bemo*) throughout the Kupang area.

duration of my fieldwork—visits that Christina and her sister entertained with generous servings of sweet coffee and, sometimes, boiled corn or tubers. Furthermore, because Sophia's collaboration provides the Bili sisters with low-interest loans that are key to the survival of their entrepreneurial projects, the Bilis are always keen to host meetings that Sophia organizes. Sophia's mid-afternoon meetings are convenient for women who have childcare duties, as the meetings are conducted right next to a spacious yard where they can let younger children play under the supervision of the Bilis' school-aged grandchildren. Thus, while the Bili men, who work away from home as drivers and construction workers, hand over their earnings to the women as a form of berkat, the Bili women bring about berkat differently: by hosting Sophia, myself, and microcredit association meetings at their home, the Bilis women obtain loans for their small businesses—a form of reciprocity that brings about berkat through the Bili women's entrepreneurial endeavors.

Like many families in the Takari neighborhood in the eastern periphery of Kupang, the Bilis are long-time landowners. Close to the top of the hill that marks Takari, an old house with a corrugated sheet iron roof stands next to a well, marking the land that belongs to the Bili family. The Bilis, who own this plot of land, consists of four sisters who live in a cluster of houses that surround the ancestral house where the elderly matriarch, Anna, lives with one of her daughters, a son-in-law, and grandchildren. Unlike the Protestant Rotenese families that are numerically predominant in the area, the Catholic Timorese Bilis are matrilineal: the sisters live in close vicinity to their mother, unlike most local families that send their daughters away to live with their husband's family after marriage.[8] Although the Bilis have enough land such that they have sufficient food and are able to earn a limited cash income from one tenant farmer, their location

[8] Two of the Bili daughters are married to Catholic Belunese men, whose families are also matrilineal.

in the local socioeconomic ladder is well below that of middle-class Kupang families who earn regular wages from civil servant jobs (see Tidey 2022; 2012). Thus, in the neighborhood surrounding the Bili family home, similar small-scale landowning families have started selling their land to more affluent urban families who are keen on securing a plot of land in Takari, a quasi-rural locale that offers space and relative quiet while still offering easy access through well-maintained roads that lead to the city of Kupang.[9] For example, across from the Bilis' modest house with corrugated iron roofs, surrounded by a large yard and handmade wooden fences, new homes with shiny tiled roofs and metal fencing have been constructed—signs of urban affluence that were once uncommon in this part of the Kupang area.

Like many other families in their neighborhood, the Bilis are neither particularly affluent nor desperately poor. Although they have access to land that provides them with an income, the Bilis are also acutely aware that their land is insufficient in providing the three generations of their family with a livelihood. Thus, they also take part in entrepreneurial projects that involve small-scale trading while simultaneously placing themselves as rightful beneficiaries of state welfare initiatives for low-income citizens. With the help of Sophia, a community organizer, the Bilis have successfully applied for several welfare programs, including a government-funded health insurance program (*Kartu Indonesia Sehat*) and startup grants for low-income families to launch businesses—a grant that they obtained from the local Social Welfare Agency (*Dinas Sosial*).

For the women of the Bili family, entrepreneurial activities shape the rhythms of their daily life. Right next to the ancestral house, Anna, the elderly matriarch, sells produce in a

[9] In Takari, like many other urbanizing quasi-rural locales around Kupang, many descendants of landowning families have sold the subdivided plots they inherited to pay for, among others, the increasingly demanding financial costs of school tuition and ritual feasts that accompany weddings and funerals.

modest kiosk made from thatch—an activity that she carries out with the help of her daughter, Christina, who buys vegetables from a wholesale market every morning. Anna's three other daughters, who live right across the street, sell fried snacks at a stall located right by the primary school where they send their kids. Their husbands, like Christina's husband, rely on seasonal employment, such as motorcycle taxi driving (*ojek*) and construction, such that their families' incomes are subject to substantial fluctuations. Christina, however, is in better financial standing as she receives remittances from her son, Arthur. While most of the Bili's grandchildren are still school-aged, Christina's son, Arthur, who is abroad most of the year as a crew member for a fishing company, has started sending remittances to his mother. The financial resources that the Bili family obtain, however, does not stay exclusively within their household. For instance, the Bilis, who often boil corn and sweet potatoes as an afternoon snack, regularly exchange their food with the fried donuts and cakes that their ethnic Javanese tenants make. Although cash is not always easy to obtain, these everyday practices of exchange between the Bilis and their neighbors ensure the relative stability of their food supply.

Such forms of everyday sharing with neighbors, I argue, are key in local notions of *berkat* (lit. "blessing"): good fortune that becomes a moral form of wealth when a household shares their resources with others. Unlike money, one cannot preemptively seek berkat, as berkat is given, and not rewarded, to a household or a person. In Christian-inflected forms of prayer, therefore, one wishes for "God's blessings to be poured upon" (BI: *berkat melimpah* or BK: *berkat tapo'a*). The placing of berkat outside one's own volition, however, does not necessarily separate berkat from everyday interactions: for instance, someone who earns money through a bona fide business or through a successful harvest is said to have obtained berkat. At the same time, berkat is only recognized by others insofar as the wealth obtained by good fortune is shared

with others. For instance, among unmarried youth whose primary sources of income are entrepreneurial endeavors, such as driving a motorcycle taxi or selling toiletries at a kiosk, someone who received an unexpected amount of money in one day would take their friends out for dinner because they have "obtained berkat" (*ada berkat*). Among married adults, those who generously share food and resources, like the Bilis, are recognized as appropriately sharing their berkat, and not as miserly, or, in local terms, "excessively calculating" (*talalu bahitung*) or using "money as a measure for everything" (*semua dihitung dengan uang*).

In contrast to financial calculations that are seen as excessive, understandings of berkat valorize sharing and hospitality without overly discriminating the recipients of one's generosity. Therefore, the Bilis, a landowning family that has resided in the area for generations, have at times expressed skepticism towards Sophia's prioritization of microcredit association members over the Bili's neighbors, many of whom are involved with everyday relationships of exchange with the Bilis but are not association members. For instance, Christina, the Bili's eldest daughter, told me that she was disappointed when Sophia did not help enroll Anthony, a neighbor who drives Christina to the wholesale produce market daily, for a government health insurance program, even when Anthony drove them to a government office that processed the Bili's insurance paperwork. Nevertheless, Sophia and Christina remained close collaborators throughout the duration of my fieldwork. Furthermore, the local village chief and microcredit association leaders also acknowledge that the Bilis cannot be ignored in mobilizing local alliances—both David, the executive director of the FCF Foundation, and Elias, the local village chief, pay regular visits to the Bilis. Thus, when several members of parliament from Jakarta and Kupang contacted Elias to host a local town-hall meeting, they chose the Bilis' house as a location. During this high-level meeting, Anna, the Bili matriarch, sat on a festively decorated

chair next to two members of parliament. Although her daughters worked extremely hard to setup and clean before and after the event, Anna expressed to me that the town-hall meeting was a "blessing" (*berkat*) to her household that they could never refuse. In turn, the berkat of having dignitaries from Jakarta as a guest necessitated the sharing of that hospitality with others—a sharing that the Bilis accomplished by hosting their neighbors and fellow villagers for an elaborate meal that they ate together with the members of parliament.

Although the Bilis tend to be amenable to reciprocal ties of hospitality and generosity, their understanding of berkat also entails circumscribing women's domain of economic activity within the moral bounds of the household. The circumscribing of a moral household, the rumah tangga, have at times resulted in the Bilis' declaring certain occupations, such as working in the hospitality industry, to be off-limits for their female family members. While Christina and Anna, her mother, work together every day to ensure that the produce kiosk that they run continues to generate an income, Christina remarked to me that her parents were farmers who "did not work" (*tidak bekerja*), that is, they did not hold wage-based employment. For her parents, working on their own land was a pursuit that had already offered the potential to find berkat. A major shift, however, happened in Christina's own generation, who inevitably had to earn cash for a living as they encounter state-run institutions such as schools, where cash payment for tuition, books, uniforms, and school supplies is required. As a young woman, Christina attended a vocational secondary school for hospitality (*SMK Pariwisata*) in the city of Kupang, and she became excited about the prospect of earning her own salary. However, the prospect of her working for wages at a hotel was morally suspect for her parents, who thought of hotels as a site of prostitution—an activity that would complicate and potentially rule out a young woman's future marriage and establishment of a household. Eventually, because of her late father's skepticism

towards how suitable employment at a hotel would be for their unmarried daughter, Christina decided against pursuing a career in hospitality, even as her brother offered to drive her to and from the Palm Hotel in Kupang's urban center, where she was offered a job.[10] With a tone of sadness, Christina told me that one of her former classmates, another woman, is now an assistant manager at the hotel who speaks fluent English. Thus, in her past as a young, unmarried woman, Christina's inability to pursue employment at a hotel shows that certain pursuits are outside of the moral bounds of the rumah tangga: that is, such pursuits would not bring about berkat for her household.

Once the career pathway that was offered by her vocational schooling in hospitality disappeared, Christina's options were limited. Like many women of her generation, a college education with its tuition costs—a necessity for government jobs that guarantee employment security and a steady wage—was out of reach for Christina and her family. Christina then married her husband, who works as a part-time motorcycle taxi driver and for seasonal construction gigs, and raised three children through by running small-scale enterprises, particularly her produce kiosk, which were necessary given the unpredictable nature of her husband's income. As a married woman, Christina found encouragement from her family for her multitude of entrepreneurial projects, even when these projects require her to regularly travel outside of the home and outside of her village: the produce kiosk, for instance, requires her to go to a wholesale market in every morning. For Christina, who often describes herself as a "mother" (BK: *mama*) and an *ibu rumah tangga* ("housewife"), such encouragement stands in contrast to her family's earlier disapproval of her earlier foray into the world of wage-labor as a young woman.

[10] Christina's brother no longer lives in the neighborhood and is not involved in the day-to-day workings of the Bili women's entrepreneurial activities.

Outside of her daily activities in running a produce kiosk with her mother, Christina is always on the lookout for additional activities that provide additional sources of income: in the past, for instance, she has teamed up with her sisters to fulfill catering orders for the village government. Furthermore, through her connections to the local Catholic church, she obtained temporary work offers to fold ballot papers for Indonesia's 2019 national elections. The election-related gig, according to Christina, pays quite well, as it offered a compensation of Rp 100,000 (about US$ 7) per day. Through these various streams of income, as well as loans from the microcredit association, Christina has managed to sustain her produce kiosk through times of unprofitability.[11] Because of the presence of four similar kiosks within walking distance, Christina and her family navigate an ever-present risk of losing the money they have invested in the produce kiosk. When I asked her about why her family still runs a kiosk that sells produce despite competition from nearby businesses, Christina mentioned to me that "[one] shouldn't be focused solely on profits when one runs a business" (*jangan hanya berpikir soal keuntungan kalau berusaha*). Instead of making profits, Christina has repeatedly mentioned to me that her kiosk is meant to help her "send her kids to school" (*menyekolahkan anak-anak*), thereby invoking her own household as a moral schema that legitimizes her business activities, even if these activities do not generate consistent financial returns. Following what Paulina suggested earlier, the entrepreneurial pursuits of adult, married women who are "mothers" (*mama*) become moral pursuits if they are conducted for the benefit of the household (*rumah tangga*), and not simply for the pursuit of wealth.

By denying profit-seeking and invoking children's education as a reason for her to run a produce kiosk, Christina illustrates how married women and their family morally authorize

[11] See Chapter 4 for further information on the role of women's s microcredit associations.

women's entrepreneurial pursuits by invoking the welfare of the household as a primary aim. In turn, these moral pursuits under the banner of the household bring about berkat, a form of good fortune and respectability. While her own family denied her the opportunity to pursue a career at a hotel in Kupang, Christina has repeatedly mentioned to me that the revenue from her produce kiosk has allowed her to send her two sons to vocational secondary schools—another instance of berkat. Although her younger son has died in an accident, her older son, Arthur, has graduated from a vocational maritime school (*Sekolah Perikanan*) and now works as a crew member for a fishing company that sends their ships around the Pacific Ocean. In addition to Arthur's sending of remittances, which has improved the family's economic standing, Christina is particularly proud of Arthur's travels, as no other member of her family never has ventured overseas. Thus, by describing how her entrepreneurial projects has benefited members of her household, Christina demonstrated how the moral notion of the household, the rumah tangga, authorizes and circumscribes women's pursuits in trading and exchange in pursuit of *berkat*. Furthermore, as the Bilis' generosity to neighbors and visitors demonstrate, a household that shares their food and resources generously is likely to be recognized by others as a household in possession of a moral *berkat*.

Kumpul Keluarga: Funerary Feasts and Reciprocity Among Kin

In the previous sections of this chapter, I have described how women's participation in everyday forms of exchange and trading is authorized and circumscribed by the moral ideologies of the household, the *rumah tangga*. In this section, I will explain how the household becomes integrated within relationships of reciprocity that is mediated by a set of interactional rituals known as *kumpul keluarga* (lit., "to assemble the family"): the donation of cash by each

household for ritual "feasts" (*pesta*, lit. "party"), which primarily consist of weddings and funerals.[12] In the Kupang area as well as across the province of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), kumpul keluarga is indispensable for the financing of these rituals*:* because weddings, funerals, and other ritual feasts consume a considerable amount of resources, kumpul keluarga entails mutual obligation among kin to distribute the burden of mobilizing money, labor, and other resources necessary for these rituals. In particular, after marriage, a costly set of rituals that require extended family members to pool together monetary donations, one is recognized as having established a household, a rumah tangga, and thus assumes the obligation to attend a kumpul keluarga and donate money for matrimonial and funerary feasts for their kin (see also Carnegie 2013).

As I will describe in this section, kumpul keluarga individuates a household while marking it as a constituent unit of an extended family, *rumpun keluarga* (lit., "a cluster of families"). In particular, I outline how the customary practice of the kumpul keluarga produces three consequences for the household: (1) it deemphasizes distinctions between men's and women's financial contributions by lumping together their contributions as a contribution made by a single household; (2) it privileges the heterosexual married couple that forms a *rumah tangga* (household) as a unit of reciprocal exchange among kin; and (3) it is voiced by women as a kin-based form of *kewajiban* (obligation) that competes with the interests of the state and its NGO collaborators that idealize women's roles as entrepreneurial agents.

As I have suggested in earlier sections, both men and women are expected to seek forms of livelihood that allow them to cover not only the daily expenses of a household, but also

[12] Other feasts that are commonly celebrated include infant baptism, confirmation (*sidi*), and college graduations. For these feasts, however, the mobilization of extended family resources through a kumpul keluarga is far less common.

donations for kumpul keluarga events. While married women shoulder the additional burden of managing household budgets such that their own household has enough cash to donate to a kumpul keluarga, my interlocutors often describe women's donations to a kumpul keluarga in relation to their husband's position in the family: for example, Rachel, a resident of Takari and a neighbor of the Bili family, describes her financial contributions to a kumpul keluarga as "*membantu suami dengan urusan keluarga"* ("to help [my] husband with family matters")—a reflection of how women's contributions to a kumpul keluarga are lumped together with their husband's contributions. Such combining of men's and women's incomes demonstrates how the kumpul keluarga invokes a household, rather than an individual man or woman, as a contributing unit. To cover expenses related to kumpul keluarga events, households are expected to use their regular sources of income, such as salaries from a job or profits from an entrepreneurial project; however, for funerals, which are often preceded by the unexpected death of a family member, my interlocutors have also borrowed money from microcredit associations.

During kumpul keluarga, each household is required to contribute by dropping a sealed envelope containing cash into a box, writing down the amount that a household has contributed on a notebook (*tulis nama*), and, finally, participating in a ritual meal. Because of the kin relations and the reciprocal forms of exchange and at stake, kumpul keluarga events are serious occasions that require social interactions among the contributing parties to be carefully conducted. At first sight, a kumpul keluarga might look deceptively informal, as, every evening before sunset, Kupang area families frequently gather outside of their houses to socialize and relax before dinner. Unlike informal, spontaneous gatherings, however, when people would sit on the floor of a veranda or stand around, kumpul keluarga gatherings would frequently entail people sitting outside in plastic chairs neatly arranged in a circle. Furthermore, rather than

chatting and laughing, attendees of these sit-down gatherings often speak in hushed tones, indicating a seriousness to the occasion. Children, who would otherwise be free to play and roam around, are made to stay away from the circle of adults sitting in chairs. According to my interlocutors, these serious occasions are often kumpul keluarga events.

Although I was never invited to become a participant of a kumpul keluarga, my interlocutors' accounts of kumpul keluarga, which I discuss in this section, indicate that these events are key in relationships of reciprocal indebtedness across households. For instance, a Kupang-area accountant, Edward, remarked to me that "if I don't show up [at a kumpul keluarga], in the future they won't show up [at mine]" (*kalau beta son datang, nanti dong son datang*). In his comment, Edward expresses how he is in a state of reciprocal indebtedness to his own kin, as he has received assistance from them for past ritual feasts in his household through kumpul keluarga: among others, Edward has mobilized resources from his extended family for his mother's funeral and his son's wedding in the past. As a result, Edward is expected to contribute money to his kin through kumpul keluarga when they host similar ritual feasts. Furthermore, Edward is expected to attend kumpul keluarga events because, as a married adult male with a full-time job at an NGO, he is seen as the "head of a family" (*kepala keluarga*), a patrilineally defined position that makes Edward the head of a household unit, a rumah tangga, that includes his wife, their two sons, a daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren who are toddlers (see also Rinaldo 2019; Tickamyer and Kusujiarti 2012).[13] Therefore, a single donation made by

[13] The kepala keluarga ("head of [a] family") is a state-recognized category that also appears on official bureaucratic documents; every household, for instance, has a registration card (kartu keluarga) that appoints the father as the kepala keluarga. Even if children-in-law and grandchildren reside in the same household, the registration card designates the oldest male (the father) as the kepala keluarga. The kepala keluarga, however, is no longer a position held exclusively by men: since the early 2000s, a movement initiated by PEKKA, an Indonesian feminist NGO, have pushed for women who are single mothers to be recognized as kepala keluarga.

Edward in a kumpul keluarge is regarded by his kin to also represent his wife, sons, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren. As Edward expressed, however, kumpul keluarga is not simply a matter of expressing solidarity at a particular moment in time; rather, participating in a kumpul keluarga also enables one to expect and anticipate reciprocated donations from their kin. Mirrorring the kin-like relationship among shipyard workers in eastern India that Laura Bear studied, kumpul keluarga becomes "part of the series of expansive, permanent social debt associated with kinship and ritual" (Bear 2013, 158)

Although households are expected to contribute to kumpul keluarga events both for funerals and weddings, the kumpul keluarga takes slightly different forms for these two ritual feasts. For weddings, the kumpul keluarga happens before matrimonial rituals, including the payment of the belis from the family of the groom to the family of the bride. However, for funerals, as the tropical climate and local norms require burial soon after death, the kumpul keluarga happens only after one's deceased relative is buried, but before a tomb made of concrete—a source of considerable expense—is erected. Weddings, on the other hand, are often postponed so that extended families can mobilize sufficient resources for the payment of the bride-price (*belis*) and for a series of ritual feasts. Thus, although kumpul keluarga is necessary for virtually all weddings in the Kupang area, households are more frequently and urgently preoccupied with kumpul keluarga obligations for funerals. Although funerary rituals are not as notoriously expensive as weddings, funerals are still costly: the bereaved must string together resources to, among others, cook food for mourners for several days, install decorations for a wake, dress the dead in an appropriate attire, and, eventually, construct a concrete tomb. Such expenses often amount to upwards of 20 million rupiahs (US$ 1,400) — an amount almost equivalent to a year's worth of income for those working at the legally mandated minimum wage

in Kupang. Thus, for my interlocutors, the reciprocal obligations of funding matrimonial and funerary rituals through kumpul keluarga are key features of social relationships among kin (see Cody 2016).

In addition to mobilizing reciprocal donations among kin, the kumpul keluarga also requires each household to keep a log of previous donations given to them, so that a household can proportionally reciprocate these donations. Thus, although kumpul keluarga events for funerals and weddings both entail a gathering where a ritual meal of rice, meat, and vegetable side dishes is shared among kin, attendees are expected to first pay attention to a notebook and a box where cash donations in sealed envelopes are dropped. After putting their donations in the box, each household would write their names and the amount of their donations on the notebook —a practice my interlocutors refer to as *tulis nama* (lit., "to write [one's own] name"). As a result, each household has a notebook that contains the names of related households who have donated money during a kumpul keluarga. The notebook that contains kumpul keluarga records, therefore, is an important possession in every household, and is usually kept in a locked drawer together with other valuables. Because of the meticulous record-keeping practices that kumpul keluarga practices entail, failure to show up at a kumpul keluarga of close kin is highly frowned upon, and many Kupang residents express fear that neglecting a kumpul keluarga might result in others not helping them financially when it is their turn to host a wedding or a funeral. Furthermore, one is always expected to contribute money that is proportional to one's socioeconomic standing among kin, and one is expected to pay a sum that reflects a sense of gratitude towards kin who have contributed to previous feasts. Donating too little relative to one's means, in particular, could result in a loss of respect from one's kin.

While kumpul keluarga is a practice that virtually all Kupang area households participate in, the ubiquity of kumpul keluarga events has emerged a matter of concern for religious and political figures. As low-income households have become eligible for national state cash assistance schemes intended to pay for costs associated with education up to a high school diploma, officials in the Kupang area have voiced a concern that parents might use these resources for kumpul keluarga purposes instead for educational costs. The chair of a school council (*komite sekolah*) in Kupang was quoted in a local newspaper, *Pos Kupang*, as he urged parents to not use their children's scholarship funds, disbursed by state agencies, to fulfill kumpul keluarga obligations: "this money is meant to be a form of assistance for students (*bantuan siswa*), so, fathers and mothers, do not use this money for other purposes, such as for kumpul keluarga" (*Pos Kupang* 2020).[14] While this school council chair expresses skepticism towards the capabilities of households in separating their reciprocal obligations to kin from their duties as beneficiaries of a government program, kumpul keluarga remains key in the reciprocal forms of exchange that characterize Kupang's social fabric. Kumpul keluarga, as my interlocutors describe, is an "obligation" (*kewajiban*): a rule that one must obey as they navigate the politics of sharing and distributing financial resources among kin.

By claiming kumpul keluarga as an obligation, my interlocutors navigate the fine balance of meeting the expectations of both kin and state authorities: while their kin expect reciprocal donations that ensure the maintenance of familial relations, my interlocutors who belong to women's microcredit associations also voice the concerns of the state and its NGO collaborators—two institutional authorities that idealize women's role as entrepreneurial agents who can mobilize financial resources beyond what is needed by the customary demands of

[14] This particular cash assistance program for low-income families with school-aged children is the Program Indonesia Pintar (PIP), "Smart Indonesia Program."

family members and kin. As my interview with Paulina suggested earlier, women are not simply expected to fulfill regular household expenses. Rather, women are also expected by leaders of microcredit associations to engage in entrepreneurial activities that "improve the economics of the household" (*mengembangkan ekonomi rumah tangga*)—activities that, ideally, would lift households out of poverty. However, during an interview that I conducted in the absence of microcredit association staffers, two association members, Esther and Margaret, describe how the demands of the kumpul keluarga readily appropriate the financial resources that association members gather through loans and entrepreneurial activities. While they describe the difficulties of mobilizing enough funds for kumpul keluarga, they do not unilaterally condemn the ritual practice, as according to Esther, kumpul keluarga is an inevitability—an obligation that comes up regardless of one's financial situation.

Although it might be challenging to come up with enough money for a kumpul keluarga event, the potential consequence of neglecting kumpul keluarga obligations—being cut off from relationships of financial reciprocity—is too high of a cost. According to Esther, the kumpul keluarga "does not pay attention to whether or not you have money. It's already an obligation. That is the life of a family. If we don't participate, that's wrong. If we participate, that's wrong too" (*Kumpul keluarga son mau tau lu ada uang tidak ada uang. Itu sudah kewajiban. Itulah hidup keluarga. Kita tidak ikut ju salah, kita ikut ju salah*.) The two-sided "wrongness" of a kumpul keluarga, according to Esther, describes the consequences of attending (or not attending) a kumpul keluarga: by attending a kumpul keluarga, one might be coerced to give out a larger sum of money than what might be financially prudent for a household. At the same time, when one chooses to not attend a kumpul keluarga, one loses the ability to mobilize donations from kin for one's own ritual feast in the future.

Esther's complaint about the "wrongness" of the kumpul keluarga demonstrates how extended families and their customary ritual feasts have also come to rely on women's emerging ability to access financial resources. Margaret, a close friend of Esther's and a fellow member of the same microcredit association, echoes Esther's sentiment that participating in a kumpul keluarga is an inevitable obligation: Margaret told me that she would only rarely skip a kumpul keluarga, because, as a mother of six children, she anticipates that "our children too [will] need other people's help" (*Kita juga punya anak ko butuh bantuan orang*). According to Margaret, she would even borrow money, if necessary, to contribute to a funeral-related kumpul keluarga, because funerals are often a source of sudden financial burden for the bereaved. Thus, both Margaret and Esther have described how one is compelled to donate money to a kumpul keluarga even during tight financial circumstances, because an urgent financial need in the future, such as a funeral or a wedding in one's own household, is likely to require financial assistance from kin. In particular, Margaret's comment highlights how kumpul keluarga provides her family with potential rewards and obligations that extend far into the future: eventually, her own children will also need financial assistance from kin, who will collectively mobilize the necessary resources for weddings and funerals.

By considering Margaret's and Esther's commentaries, I have illustrated how women's new roles as borrowers of loans heightened expectations from kin that women should contribute to kumpul keluarga, even when women's contributions are deemphasized and erased under the category of the household, the rumah tangga. The kumpul keluarga, therefore, demonstrates how the household emerges as a unit of reciprocal obligation that constitutes not only local forms of kinship, but also as new "structures of expectations" that mediate and evaluate one's participation in such forms of kinship (Cattelino 2010). As earlier sections of this chapter have

shown, ideologies of the household are imposed on men and women as differential forms of moral propriety. Nevertheless, these gendered forms of social difference are deemphasized and erased in other interactional contexts, such as in the kumpul keluarga, where family members express a sense of "togetherness" (*kebersamaan*) by donating money that is labeled as the contributions of a single household. These forms of erasures, I argue, naturalize the appropriation and distribution of women's generation of economic and social value under the rubric of kinship (see also White 2004).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of how normative ideologies mediate how my interlocutors navigate the politics of exchanging resources within and across households. Thus, it is important to consider the household, the *rumah tangga*, not as a discrete social domain, but as situated perspectives deployed by social actors and institutions—that is, perspectives that generate distinctions between what falls under the category of the "household" and what falls outside. As I have shown in this chapter, while men's moral duty of providing for the household ends when they hand over their earnings to their wives or mothers, women are expected to manage their households budgets and pursue entrepreneurial projects that contribute both to the moral standing and economic viability of their households (see also Brenner 1998; Newberry 2006; Tickamyer and Kusujiarti 2012). Even as many women in Kupang have no other choice but to engage in a multitude of entrepreneurial projects to make a living for themselves and their families, such ideological notions of the *rumah tangga*, the household, also create a bind: women become moral participants in exchange only insofar as they do so within

the perceived bounds of *ekonomi rumah tangga* ("household economy"), the welfare of the household.

Even as Indonesia's post-authoritarian landscape of decentralized state agencies and women's right's NGOs aggressively promote microcredit loans and entrepreneurialism as policy solutions for longstanding issues of gendered inequalities, women's participation in these political and economic transformation continue to be shaped and constrained by moral ideologies of the household. As my description of the Bili family demonstrates, they are recognized as a household in possession of *berkat* ("blessing") not only because of their generosity in hosting visitors and village feasts allows, but also because their family members follow pathways in education, careers, and entrepreneurialism that are differentially circumscribed for men and women. Furthermore, as rituals that enact the very bonds of kinship, namely the kumpul keluarga, expect women to contribute even more resources, women in low-income households in the Kupang are under more pressure than ever. By illustrating how the notion of the household, the rumah tangga, operates in the everyday life of women in Kupang and their interlocutors, this chapter calls for future studies of gender and politico-economic transformation to analyze relationships between shifting enactments of kinship with gendered forms of inequality.

Chapter 4

Untuk Modal Bersama ("For Our Collective Funds"): The Politics of Exchange in an Indonesian Women's Microcredit Association

How does a banana jelly turn into a weapon for robbery? This sweet, gelatinous confectionery, known in Indonesia as *dodol pisang*, is usually not a product made for consumption by one's own household; rather, the banana jelly is often an *oleh-oleh,* a souvenir bought at kiosks and shops by traveling Indonesians for their family and friends back home. One problem, however, is that the banana jelly spoils only after one week in the tropical heat, hence, once it is made, it must be sold and eaten quickly. In, Nusé, a village in Kupang, an incident involving the banana jelly emblematizes how the politics of exchange and reciprocity congeal through interactions that cut across women's microcredit associations (*koperasi*), a form that I will refer to as "association" throughout the rest of this chapter.

During a particularly tense meeting organized by Lontar, a local women's microcredit association in Nusé, a handful of association members told me and Sophia, a community organizer, about Annie, a member of the village council (*Badan Permusyawaratan Desa*). A few days earlier, Annie brought cooking equipment and a vast quantity of banana jelly ingredients to association members. In the presence of a local hamlet chief (*kepala dusun*) who came with her, Annie told Lontar association members that they are requested to make banana jellies for sale on behalf of the village council.[1] To return the cost of the ingredients to the village council, Annie mandated that they must return 1.8 million Indonesian Rupiahs (approximately US$ 120) within one year. Two Lontar association members, Jane and Mariah, were upset by Annie's unilateral

[1] In Indonesia's administrative hierarchy, a "hamlet" (*dusun*) is a constituent unit of a "village" (*desa*).

imposition of a loan because of two reasons: (1) banana jellies spoil within a week; thus, raising 1.8 million Rupiahs from selling banana jellies would be an extraordinary feat; and (2) according to Mariah's estimate, 1.8 million Rupiahs for the amount of ingredients given to them is a vastly inflated figure, thereby indicating an ulterior motive in this banana jelly scheme. Because Annie served as a mediator between the Lontar association and the village council in this scheme, Jane and Mariah were convinced that Annie attempted to personally profit from a project that was ostensibly conducted for the association's welfare.

After recounting this incident to Sophia, a community organizer, and me, Mariah and a handful of other Lontar association members engaged in a lively debate about Annie's scheme, to which I said, "you're being robbed with the banana jelly" (*mama-mama ditodong dengan dodol pisang*). Sophia and other Lontar association members quickly adopted my phrase, and Sophia encouraged them to evaluate Annie's scheme not as a legitimate loan for the association, but, rather, as an attempt by Annie to "divide you up" (*memecah belah Mama Mama*). Although Annie's scheme could be interpreted as an illegitimate endeavor — such as a corruption scheme— it is worthy paying attention to Sophia's negative valuation of Annie's scheme as an attempt to undermine the association's unity. By emphasizing the association as a source of togetherness and unity, Sophia points towards an expectation that association members hold: they expect the association to accomplish and enact social relationships that go beyond disbursing loans and collecting loan installments. Thus, in this chapter, I demonstrate how members of these women's microcredit associations inhabit reciprocal relationships of indebtedness through forms of relationality that, in Kupang, are valorized as forms of "togetherness" (*kebersamaan*). As I have suggested earlier in this dissertation, kebersamaan invokes form of encompassment that mutually align participants of social interactions in relation

to constitutive others—alignments that imbue axes of social difference with moral valence (Gal and Irvine 2019a).

By interrogating how *kebersamaan* (togetherness) becomes a social value that association members use to evaluate and justify relationships mediated by debt, this chapter develops *reciprocal indebtedness* as an analytic. Through this analytic, I ask how institutional forms, such as the microcredit association, are constituted and contested through relationships of mutual indebtedness among its participants. Although this chapter focuses on ethnographic examples drawn from one field site, I develop this analytic of reciprocal indebtedness with respect to the microcredit association as an institutional form that is irreducibly linked to the socioeconomic inequalities perpetuated by global financial projects (e.g., Kar 2018; Karim 2011; Schuster 2015; Kar and Schuster 2016). At the same time, this chapter avoids a simple portrayal of debt and indebtedness as artifacts of global capitalism. Rather, my aim is to illustrate how relationships of debt are enacted and evaluated through sign-mediated social interactions, including the above interactions that I observed, and metapragmatic commentaries on social interactions that my interlocutors described to me. Beyond the reciprocal structures of exchange—a category that has been productively investigated by scholars of exchange and value (e.g., Graeber 2001; Sahlins 1972; Strathern 1988; Weiner 1992)—I ask how reciprocity is a moral framing indexed during social interactions among microcredit association members and community organizers (*pendamping*). Thus, in this chapter, I will analyze interactions that differentially value forms of relationality through the notion of *kebersamaan* ("togetherness")—a concept of relationality used by Kupang residents as they orient themselves towards moral economies of indebtedness.

Through examples drawn from interactions among community organizers and associations members in Kupang, I demonstrate how kebersamaan morally authorizes

relationships of debt insofar as these relationships ensure the continuity of reciprocal exchange. For example, after a borrower receives a sum of money from the association, they are expected to contribute to the welfare of other association members through timely payments of loan installments (*cicilan*) and mandatory monthly deposits (*simpanan wajib*). These loans, as I have suggested in the previous chapter, are crucial for the livelihoods of low-income households in the Kupang area—households that depend on loans for the multitude of entrepreneurial projects that they undertake (see Chapter 3). Furthermore, because loans are given on a rotating basis, association members and community organizers discursively invoke kebersamaan to deemphasize differences between borrowers—whether in good standing or delinquent—and justify their continuing contributions to the rotating fund. Thus, the reciprocity that I refer to in this chapter is not simply derived from the fact that association members take turns being indebted to one another: rather, reciprocity is also a moral framing for the acts of debt-taking and debt-giving. Building upon literature in the anthropology of credit and the semiotic anthropology of mediation, my use of reciprocal indebtedness as an analytic emphasizes that social groupings, including associations, are constituted through reciprocal obligations (see also Cody 2013; 2016; Lamb 2000). By the same token, the same collectives and institutions are also undone through failures in establishing reciprocity—failures that instantiated in Annie's failed scheme to make a profit through banana jellies.

By understanding how relations of indebtedness are mediated by the contingencies of social interaction, I analyze how social actors differentially participate in the distribution of political and economic resources, which are resources that are open to contestation among social actors themselves. In doing so, I pose two questions that I investigate through this chapter: (1) how kebersamaan (togetherness) is discursively invoked during social interactions that involve

elements of bahasa Kupang and standard Indonesian among community organizers and microcredit association members (see also Chapter 2), and (2) how kebersamaan morally justifies (or fails to morally justify) relations of indebtedness.

NGOs and the Morality of Debt

Through this chapter, I analyze indebtedness as a form of relationality that is enacted through linguistically and semiotically mediated social interactions. I ask how social actors recognize forms of debt as a type of *kebersamaan* (togetherness)—a process of recognition that takes place through social interactions that accompany debt-taking and debt-giving— and how they recognize other forms of debt as lacking in togetherness. My aim in analyzing the mediating role of social interactions is to avoid a reduction of the microcredit association form into conduits of a global capitalist order; rather, I follow how these microcredit associations, like the NGOS that facilitate them, become sites of emergent moral cosmologies.

By considering the "social and linguistic complexity of talk in NGOs," I analyze the effects of the wide variety of political and economic practices mediated by NGOs and their associated projects (Gal, Kowalski, and Moore 2015, 612). These morally salient forms of talk, furthermore, constitute relations of power that characterize regimes of socioeconomic development that are endorsed by microcredit associations and their NGO-based interlocutors (e.g., Bernal and Grewal 2014; Lashaw, Vannier, and Sampson 2017). Indonesia, like many other nations in the Global South, has emplaced women from non-elite backgrounds as moral agents of economic development through loan schemes for entrepreneurial activities—activities that often reproduce socioeconomic inequalities even as they generate new political subjectivities (Cody 2013; Kar 2018; Li 2007; Moore 2016; Sharma 2008; Tickamyer and Kusujiarti 2012; Welker 2012). Furthermore, recent scholarship has demonstrated that contemporary financial

instruments, such as student debt or household budgets, are given ethical purchase by imputing forms of moral authority beyond the accumulation of money itself (Cattelino 2008; Zelizer 2009; Zaloom 2016; 2018). Thus, I analyze socio-historically situated moral valences of debt-taking and debt-giving without reducing indebtedness into a locally bounded phenomenon—an approach that Julie Chu has described as the "interpenetration of… various regimes of value in the reproduction of power asymmetries" in her study of morality and credit among Fuzhounese migrants (Chu 2010, 6).

As I have illustrated in Chapter 3, women's microcredit associations are inextricable from moral ideologies of the household, rumah tangga, that valorize women's roles as debt-taker and entrepreneurs. Studies of similar microcredit associations in South Asia and Latin America has shown that these institutions rely on notions of women's collective solidarity as they conceive of and evaluate the creditworthiness of individual women borrowers, their households, and their entrepreneurial aspirations (Kar 2018; Schuster 2015). These forms of indebtedness, furthermore, have become normative in many contexts: in her extensive study of a national microcredit institution in Paraguay, Caroline Schuster describes how "debt is the condition of having" among non-elite households who make a living from precarious entrepreneurial projects (Schuster 2014, 564). In an emerging body of scholarship that criticizes developmental regimes in the Global South, the rapid spread of microcredit loans among non-elite borrowers, particularly among women, has been described as part of the inexorable rise of a neoliberal global economic order—a structure that is supported by the precarious livelihoods of microcredit borrowers and the essentialization of women's roles as responsible borrowers (see Elyachar 2005; Kar 2018; Karim 2011)

As microcredit institutions have become commonplace in Indonesia and elsewhere, borrowers have also become highly aware of how borrowing from different creditors entail different sets of social and economic risks (Sen and Majumder 2015). As a critique to the overdetermined nature of global capitalism, another body of scholarship emphasizes the moral and economic cosmologies that shape relations of indebtedness, even as they reproduce the inequalities that undergird the global financial order (Chu 2010; Cody 2016; Hirsch 2022; Rudnyckyj and Schwittay 2014; Sharma 2008; Schwittay 2014). Thus, through this chapter, I ask how borrowers and community organizers co-produce relations of indebtedness among each other, and how these relations are imbued with moral valence through social interaction (Peebles 2010; Zaloom 2010; 2016). I do so to argue that categories of the borrower, the lender, and the community organizer are inhabitable social roles and not fixed categories: these roles, therefore, are subject to dynamic forms of discursive alignments during social interactions. Thus, as a contribution emerging body of literature in the semiotic mediation of money, my analysis of indebtedness contributes to an analysis of the socio-spatiotemporal cosmologies invoked by the distribution and circulation of money through social interactions (Agha 2017; Keane 2007; 2008).

Drawing from recent studies of kinship, I argue that, while kebersamaan is often idealized as a local form of solidarity, we can productively examine forms of otherness and non-mutuality as a condition of *kebersamaan*, togetherness (Goldfarb and Schuster 2016; Stasch 2009; Rutherford 2001). Furthermore, I draw from studies of meetings and other genres of discursively mediated governance, which pays attention to the socio-spatiotemporally contingent nature of solidarity as enacted in meetings and other decision-making forums—solidarity that also relies on mutual exclusion (Goebel 2014; Morton 2014; Myers 1986; Schwartzman 1987). As I will

illustrate in this chapter, the payment of loan installments in full view of other association members causes borrowers to be individuated; however, the invocation of togetherness brings association members together in mutual alignment against those whose loans are deemed to be undesirable, such as Annie, the banana jelly scheme instigator, or loansharking operations (*rentenir*). Kebersamaan, therefore, enacts difference-making and mutual exclusion while mutually aligning participants of a social interaction (Gal and Irvine 2019; see also Simmel 1971). As I have suggested elsewhere in this dissertation, while kebersamaan has a positive moral valence, it harbors the potential of coercion, and it also entails the reproduction of gendered inequalities among kin (see also Chapter 3).

My emphasis on reciprocity as a condition of indebtedness derives from local understandings of kebersamaan, togetherness, as a form of moral ideal not only among microcredit association members, but also among other collectives, such as church congregations (see Chapters 1 and 2). Building upon scholarship that describes the permeable boundaries between Maussian gift-giving and anonymized exchanges of commodities, I argue that reciprocity is not simply a structural feature of exchange (see Graeber 2001). Rather, I argue that reciprocity is enacted as a framing that imbues acts of giving and receiving a sum of money with moral valence—framings that are invoked during social interaction (see Goffman 1974). By considering the exchange of debt as sites of social interaction, this chapter contributes to scholars who analyze how forms of social difference are generated and contested through the exchange of semiotic modalities (Ball 2011; Gal and Irvine 2019a).

In the rest of this chapter, I will draw from the following examples to explain processes by which microcredit associations invoke kebersamaan to justify relations of indebtedness: (1) the institutional landscape of microcredit associations in Kupang that incorporates a rotating

credit fund; (2) the role of the *pendamping* (community organizer) in organizing and structuring interactions during association meetings; (3) the notion of "modal bersama" (*collective funds*) that serves as a moral rationale for the mutual alignment of association members; (4) the role of an association chief in navigating interactions with delinquent borrowers through forms of speech in bahasa Kupang and in standard Indonesian; and (5) the failures of kebersamaan—togetherness—in Annie's banana jelly scheme.

Institutional Projects: Microcredit Associations and the Rotating Credit Fund

Through 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Kupang, I worked with the staffers of the FCF Foundation in Kupang, a local feminist NGO that functioned as a local implementor of an Indonesia-wide project called Empowering Women (2012–2020), which was jointly funded by the Indonesian and Australian governments. While Empowering Women included a broad variety of organizations that worked on issues of women's rights and women's economic empowerment throughout Indonesia, the FCF Foundation's activities are limited to Kupang and its surrounding rural areas. The foundation established a network of grassroots "community study groups" (*kelompok belajar komunitas*) that, in practice, accomplished three functions: (1) an educational forum for women from low-income backgrounds to learn about gender, women's rights, and women's participation in local democracy at their local village (*desa*) or city ward (*kelurahan*) governments; (2) a liaison between association members and state-funded entrepreneurial projects, such as Annie's ill-fated banana jelly scheme, or catering orders for a village function; and (3) as a member-owned cooperative microcredit association (*koperasi*) that provides loans on a rotating basis to its members.[2] Throughout Kupang, the FCF Foundation has

[2] This organizational model was established by SKT, a Jakarta-based women's rights organization that connected the FCF Foundation to the Empowering Women project. However, in Kupang, FCF

established 16 such groups with about 15 members each, and, in this chapter, I will focus on the role of these groups as *koperasi*s, or microcredit associations.

While the FCF Foundation employs two full-time community organizers (*pendamping*) among its staffers, the 16 microcredit association groups function as relatively autonomous units, as each group is headed by a volunteer who serves as a "chief" (*ketua*) under the regular supervision of a community organizer. The chief of each association is also member of the association, and they are responsible for hosting the association's monthly meetings. At the same time, a separate volunteer treasurer (*bendahara*) serves as a bookkeeper of the association under the supervision of the same community organizer. Overall, these association that I study are relatively small-scale and informal—a contrast to recent anthropological studies of microcredit associations with nation-wide operations and standardized procedures for member recruitment and debt collection (Kar 2018; Karim 2011; Schuster 2014; Kar and Schuster 2016). Furthermore, in contrast to global microcredit institutions—such as the Grameen Bank—that have attracted investments from transnational groups of investors, the women's associations that I study collectively pool money through monthly mandatory deposits (*simpanan wajib*) of 10,000 Indonesian Rupiahs (approximately US$ .67) to lend a portion of the pooled money to members on a rotating basis. This form is also known as "rotating credit associations" (RCAs) that, in Indonesia, are also referred to as *arisan* groups (Ardener 1964; Ardener and Burman 1995; Feldman-Savelsberg and Ndonko 2010; C. Geertz 1962; Rinaldo 2019; Tickamyer and Kusujiarti 2012; Tsai 2000; Vélez-Ibañez 1983). Hence, throughout this chapter, what I refer to as a "association" (*koperasi*) is a group of adult women, virtually all of whom are married and with children, who are members of these rotating credit groups.

Foundation staffers perform the work of initiating running these community groups, and, in 2019, there was only short visit to Kupang by SKT staffers.

Throughout FCF Foundation associations, the rotating credit form is crucial in morally authorizing relationships of mutual indebtedness. In particular, FCF Foundation community organizers have explained to me that they much prefer organizing grassroots associations on the basis of *dana bergulir* ("rotating funds") than *dana hibah* ("one-time grants"). According to them, at the hands of association members, one-time grants often end up being "exhausted" (BK: *kasi habis*) for one-time expenses that consume a lot of financial resources (e.g., building or renovating a house), thereby quickly eliminating the need for association members to sustain their participation. A rotating fund, however, requires association members to meet regularly to collect mandatory monthly deposits and disburse loans on a rotating basis, thereby encouraging association members to sustain their participation within a temporal horizon that extends to an indefinite future (see also Munn 1992). Furthermore, because the rotating funds in these associations came from member contributions, they are separate from the grant-funded activities of the FCF Foundation, thereby providing a temporal horizon of continuity beyond the Empowering Women project.

In contrast to the perceived endurance of microcredit associations, both community organizers and association members recognize that state-sponsored grants for non-profits—such as the FCF Foundation—are temporally circumscribed: during my fieldwork in 2018 and 2019, both FCF foundation staffers and association members are acutely aware that the Empowering Women project will end in 2020—a horizon that could spell the end of the FCF Foundation as well. However, both community organizers and association members recognize that the 16 lending groups they have establied can continue indefinitely if association members continue to attend meetings and are timely with their loan installments. In fact, right as I was about to conclude fieldwork, the FCF Foundation started the long process of filing a petition with

national-level state agencies so that the 16 groups can be legally recognized as a lender separate from the not-for-profit FCF Foundation. As a legally recognized entity, the microcredit association as an institutional form can continue to operate even if the FCF Foundation ceases to operate or runs out of grant funding.[3] Thus, because association membership is mediated through relationships of mutual indebtedness that extend indefinitely into the future, I argue that these forms of reciprocity are fundamental to *kebersamaan*: a local ideal, enacted through the social interactions accompanying the exchange of social obligations, that authorizes and justifies reciprocal indebtedness as a moral and enduring form of relationality.

Microcredit Associations and the Mediation of Indebtedness

Among association members, loans from the FCF Foundation are seen as far less complicated and risky than borrowing from banks, commercial savings and loans associations (*koperasi kredit*), state-run pawn shops (*pegadaian*), or informal loansharking operations (*koperasi harian*). Furthermore, while the FCF Foundation associations are not the only providers of credit for women in the Kupang area, they are among only a few that do not require married women to obtain their husband's signature and copy of identity card (*Kartu Tanda Penduduk*) before obtaining a loan. Although loans from FCF Foundation associations are much smaller from loans that larger associations provide, these loans have been praised by their members as a source of crucial funds that allow them to purchase livestock, obtain seed funding

[3] The FCF Foundation continues to operate as of February 2023. However, the microcredit associations that it established and continues to supervise has become a separate legal entity, the Kupang Women's Grassroots Association. In practice, however, the same staffers continue to perform both functions: they manage grant-funded projects under the banner of the FCF Foundation and supervise rotating credit associations under the banner of the Kupang Women's Grassroots Association.

to open a kiosk, and pursue other entrepreneurial activities (see also Chapter 3).[4] Community organizers, furthermore, often remind their association members that these loans do not come from "other people" (*orang lain*), but from the association's own members, whom the community organizers often address as "mothers such as yourselves" (*mama-mama sendiri*), such that they refer to the association's funds as "funds that [we] own together" (*modal bersama*)—a set of utterances that serve as a moral framing for the association's mediation of indebtedness. Furthermore, unlike the employees of commercial microcredit institutions, community organizers are not authorized to collect debt from delinquent borrowers outside of association meetings—a task that, as I will explain later in this chapter, is taken up by association members themselves.

While these associations valorize indebtedness as a form of self-empowerment among women, not all forms of indebtedness are equal: as illustrated by Annie's banana jelly scheme, if a relationship of indebtedness fails to ensure reciprocity, then such forms of indebtedness become evaluated as a form of selfish enrichment that threatens to unravel a shared sense of togetherness (*kebersamaan*). Thus, notions of kebersamaan allow association members to define themselves in opposition to those who accumulate money without reciprocating, such as Annie and her banana jelly scheme. As I will illustrate in this chapter, association members recognize sentiments of togetherness (*kebersamaan*) not only from the structural workings of these loans as rotating credit, but also from the social interactions that mediate relationships between the association and its members. Following scholars who studied microcredit associations elsewhere,

[4] The amount of loans disbursed by the association varies from one group to another. In one group where most members are lower-income farmers, members receive a loan of 250,000 Indonesian Rupiahs (about US$ 18) per year. In another group located in a more urbanized part of Kupang, members have received loans of up to 4 million Rupiahs (about US$ 267).

these mediators are central in establishing relations of indebtedness and the temporal horizons made possible by such relations (Kar 2013; Schuster 2015).

The Community Organizer (*Pendamping*)

As I have mentioned earlier, a key figure in FCF Foundation associations is the community organizer, which in my field site, is referred to as a *pendamping* (lit., "companion"), who is always a woman. Across ten FCF Foundation associations in the predominantly rural *kabupaten* ("district") of Kupang, Sophia Adoe works as a pendamping, a community organizer, who schedules and leads monthly association meetings. As a community organizer, Sophia is not an anonymous representative of the FCF Foundation, because Sophia has known many association members for many years, even before she started working for the FCF Foundation. Sophia has become acquainted with association members through her church congregation, where she is a church board member (*penatua*), and through her experience as a volunteer for a state-sponsored early childhood program (*kader Posyandu*)—both experiences that allowed her to be acquainted with households in her own village, Ba'a, and in the neighboring villages of Nusé and Bako.[5]

Among association members, Sophia is known to be a successful pendamping, because, among others, she recently secured a large amount of grant funding for association members in Ba'a, her own village, from a national ministry that distributes financial support for small-scale farmers. At the same time, while Sophia is employed as a staff member of an NGO, which is a rare form of employment in her village, association members frequently describe her as a fellow

[5] In the Kupang area, 80 to 90 percent of the local population belongs to the mainline Protestant *Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor* (GMIT; "Christian Evangelical Church in Timor)) denomination, where the majority of church board members (deacons and elders) are women (see also Chapters 1 and 2).

villager who engages in the same kinds of livelihood. In particular, Sophia's family also raises and sells chickens for a living, and her own extended family lives in a neighborhood where most residents grow vegetable crops (*tanam sayur*) as a primary source of income.

Between 2018 and 2019, I befriended Sophia through my time doing fieldwork among the staff members of the FCF Foundation, her employer, and among the members of the Lontar and Nipa associations. As a result, while engaged in fieldwork as an ethnographer, my relationship to my interlocutors is also mediated by Sophia's relationship to association members. Because of Sophia's regular co-presence, I was often seen by my interlocutors as someone who is aligned with the interests of the FCF Foundation in ensuring that association members are committed towards financially sustaining their own lending groups. Hence, particularly in the beginning of fieldwork, my interlocutors tend to shy away from explaining their skepticism towards microcredit and its associated forms of entrepreneurial activity (see also Chapter 3). Nevertheless, these forms of mutual alignments with community organizers and association members have allowed me to analyze how they define their own sense of togetherness—kebersamaan—in opposition to putatively selfish financial pursuits, such as the banana jelly scheme. Forms of togetherness, after all, are made possible through the labor of intermediaries, including Sophia and other community organizers—a form of mediating labor that mobilizes forms of mutual obligation (Cody 2013; 2016).

Association Meetings: Figurations of *Kebersamaan* ("Togetherness")

As I have suggested earlier, an "association meeting" (*rapat kelompok*) happens every month at the house of an association member appointed as a volunteer "chief" (*ketua*), and these meetings are central to the sense of kebersamaan that an association cultivates: almost all

members attend the association's regular meeting every month, and those who miss a meeting normally ask a fellow association member to deliver their loan installment in cash. Furthermore, association members who miss a meeting are expected to justify their absence: those who attend a meeting on behalf of an absent member often relay messages that explain a sick family member or an urgent need to return to someone's home village. Furthermore, as a pendamping, Sophia visits the houses of several association members the day before a scheduled meeting to remind them of an upcoming meeting. Mariah, a member of the Lontar association, explained to me that such in-person visits are greatly appreciated, because it allows her to "sit down and talk" (BK: *duduk baomong*) with Sophia—an opportunity that phone calls (BK: *batelpon*), for instance, do not offer. These forms of co-presence, as I will show in this section, is crucial to the sense of kebersamaan that an association, in its ideal form, invokes for its members.

Figure 4.1. A *pendamping*, community organizer (second from the left) discusses association finances with association members. Photo taken by author.

Figure 4.2. An association member (left) picks a piece of paper (*tarik lot*) for a random draw to determine the next recipient of a loan from the association's rotating credit fund. Photo taken by author.

Across microcredit associations that are supervised by the FCF Foundation, a prototypical meeting typically unfolds in the following order:

1. First, after all members have arrived at the meeting, association members who are in the process of repaying their loans individually hand over a sum of cash to the pendamping, the community organizer, in full view of others. This sum includes both a monthly installment (*cicilan*) and a mandatory monthly deposit (*simpanan wajib*) of Rp. 10,000 (approximately US$ .67). The pendamping then counts the cash given by each association member and reconciles the accounts of each individual member in front of all other association members. These accounts are written down on two books: one book that a volunteer treasurer (*bendahara*) of the group keeps and another book that the community organizer keeps. At this moment, association members are allowed to raise any questions or objections if they see that their account balances are inaccurate or not up to date (see Photo 1).

2. After all loan installment payments are given to the community organizer, association members who have repaid their loans are given the opportunity to obtain another loan. Depending on the association, members can either receive a loan every year, or be picked in a random draw. This process of random drawing, called *tarik lot*, involves an association member picking a folded piece of paper at random from inside a container (see Photo 2). On each of these folded pieces of paper, individual names of association members are written down. The association member (or members) that is chosen through this random draw then receives a sum of cash that constitutes a loan from the association.
3. The *pendamping* (community organizer) then delivers a short "talk" (*omong*) that encourages association members to keep paying their monthly installments and frames the microcredit association's activities as an effort to maintain "funds that [we] own together" (*modal bersama*). Frequently, a pendamping would also deliver announcements that pertain to upcoming activities organized by the FCF Foundation, such as meetings at the village council hall for women's groups, or local entrepreneurial projects (e.g., a catering order for village functions, or an order for handwoven cloths) that association members could take up. Thus, at this point, a short question and answer session between the pendamping and organization members would happen before the meeting concludes.

Out of these three forms of social interactions, the third—a community organizer's closing talk— plays a crucial role in invoking a sense of togetherness, kebersaaman, as it addresses all members of the association collectively after individuating their roles as borrowers. Even when some borrowers might be behind on their installments, a pendamping is expected to encourage association members to keep attending regular meetings and relay any information, such as the sickness of a family member, that might explain why they are behind on their loan installments.

Thus, in the rest of this chapter, I will focus on the utterances that community organizers and their interlocutors deploy in association meetings—utterances that imbue the exchange of debt with moral valence and enact forms of togetherness, kebersamaan. These utterances as I will show below, are crucial in ritually figurating relations of indebtedness into forms of solidarity—a form of relationality that scholars have previously described as the role of monetary exchanges in engendering social intimacy and its co-constitutive other, alienation (Rutherford 2001; Zelizer 2009).

Modal Bersama ("Shared Funds"): Authorizing Collective Funds

During an association meeting at the Lontar group, Sophia was requested to comment on a tricky situation: Lontar association members complained to her about other members who have stopped coming to meetings and paying their loan installments. The amount of delinquent loans was such that Lontar members agreed to Sophia's suggestion of pausing the disbursement of new loans for two months. Expressing her frustration, Sophia said to association members that "you all have these delinquent [loans]" (BK: *mama-mama dong macet*), such that she said that "we all need to get these installments first" (BK: *mari ko katong setor*). However, Sophia did not single out any particular delinquent borrowers as bad examples. Rather, she encouraged others to follow the example of Leena, a borrower in good standing who exemplifies kebersamaan, togetherness, as a form of reciprocity:

> Why did she pay back [her loans]? Because she realizes that our funds are funds [that we own] together (BI: *modal bersama*). So when she has been helped [with a loan] then she is required to help others by paying her installments on time (BI: *mencicil secara baik*)… This is our money, money that we own together (BI: *uang bersama*). [She would say that] **they have helped me, so now I help them with my installments** (BK: *dong su tolong beta na sekarang beta tolong dong deng be pung cicilan*).

According to Sophia, Leena's good standing in the association is not only derived from her timely installments, but also from Leena's recognition of the association's funds as *modal bersama*, "funds that we own together." Here, the phrase "modal bersama" is uttered in standard Indonesian, thereby invoking its relevance as a moral ideal across socio-spatiotemporal contexts (see also Chapter 2). Later, using a reported speech construction in bahasa Kupang, Sophia voices Leena as an ideal borrower in the here-and-now who enacts the association's sense of togetherness—kebersamaan—by reciprocating the help that the association provided to her: "they have helped me, so now I help them with my installments" (BK: *dong su tolong beta na sekarang beta tolong dong deng be pung cicilan).* In other words, after the association "helped" (*tolong*) Leena with a loan, she is expected to help other association members by paying her loan installments on time. By paying their installments on time, such an ideal borrower would allow other association members to take turns in obtaining a loan—a situation that the Lontar association aspires to reestablish.

As I have suggested earlier, a successful invocation of kebersamaan in a microcredit association also requires one to exchange words and other modalities of social interaction, because these are signs that frame and imbue the exchange of money with moral valence. Beyond managing a portfolio of loans, community organizers and their fellow staffers at the FCF Foundation discursively invoke kebersamaan—togetherness—as a form of moral grounding that justifies their disbursement of loans and collection of loan installments. At the same time, kebersamaan relies on the mutual exclusion: when kebersamaan is invoked, it mutually aligns community organizers and association members against selfish others who are purely motivated by profit, such as Annie and her banana jelly scheme, or, as I will show below, mercantile ethnic groups who come from elsewhere in Indonesia.

During one meeting in the village of Tuabuna, Evelyn, a staffer at the FCF Foundation who supervises community organizers, once concluded an association meeting by describing the loans that they disburse and collect as "money we own together" (*uang kita bersama*). This invocation of togetherness, kebersamaan, was crucial, as, previously, Evelyn delineated a new policy of fining delinquent borrowers with a fine (*denda*) equivalent to .5 percent of the loan's principal per month. The fine is a source of concern for Nelly, an association member and a well-respected church elder (*penatua*) in Tuabuna, as she interacts on a regular basis with the association's delinquent borrowers in her own village and at church. Evelyn, however, justifies the fine by mutually aligning association members, who are almost entirely ethnic Rotenese, against their competitors in the business of grocery kiosks (*usaha kios*)—ethnic Buginese and Makassarese merchants:

Transcript 4.1. Fines for delinquent borrowers

E: Evelyn, a staff member of the FCF Foundation
N: Nelly, a microcredit association member and a local church elder

[1]	E	This fine (*denda*) will be applicable for all associations… so that [the fine] will become [not only] something that is fair, but also a form of learning (*pembelajaran*) for our friends who don't follow [our] rules. The fine is .5 percent… if they [an association member] do not come with an installment [on time] or is delinquent (*macet*).
[2]	N	If someone does not come [to our association meeting] and does not inform [us] (BK: *sonde kasi kabar*) then they will be fined. But what if someone comes [to the meeting] without paying their installments? If that's the way we do it (*kalau bikin begitu*)…
[3]	E	Like this, mothers (*begini mama-mama*)… Our primary aim is not [about] money (BI: *tujuan pertama itu bukan uang*). I also hope that you all, mothers (*mama-mama*), are like that too. Our primary aim (BI: *tujuan utama kita)* is to train ourselves, to give ourselves in order to support [each other] (BI: *melatih diri, memberi diri untuk mendukung*)….

[4] When someone borrows [a loan from us], that is our collective money (BI: *uang kita bersama*). [The loan] means that we have supported (BI: *mendukung*) our friend for their entrepreneurial pursuit… [We should do that] instead of supporting the businesses of the Buginese and Makassarese merchants (BK: *daripada katong pi dukung ini orang Bugis orang Makasar dong pung usaha*)… [we] better support our own [association members]… Why? Because [otherwise] the ones who will get rich are [those] migrants (*pendatang*). We natives (*pribumi)* have kiosks that often end up going out of business (*ada kios tapi lama lama tutup*).

Evelyn's contrast between "us association members" and the two migrant ethnic groups, the Buginese and Makassarese, is tied to recent social and economic transformations: in this section of Tuabuna, an urbanizing area, many ethnic Rotenese residents who consider themselves as "natives" (*pribumi*) previously made a living from fishing, but the destruction of local mangrove forests in the 1990s have rendered fishing untenable. Even as some of ethnic Rotenese residents have recently turned towards new entrepreneurial projects, such as grocery kiosks, these new kiosks run against established competitors—grocery kiosks and dry goods stores owned by ethnic Buginese and Makassarese migrants from Sulawesi, who have settled in Tuabuna as merchants beginning in the 1950s. Furthermore, ethnic Buginese and Makassarese migrants are almost entirely Muslim, unlike the Christian Rotenese inhabitants of Tuabuna. To this day, ethnic Rotenese inhabits of Tuabuna often see these Buginese and Makassarese businesses not only as ethnic and religious others, but also business rivals—a pattern of ethnic and sectarian difference that is found across eastern Indonesia (Kadir 2023; Rutherford 2001). Thus, by describing the association's activities in collecting fines and loan installments as a form of mutual "support" (*mendukung*) for fellow Rotenese association members, Evelyn describes the association as an overarching ethnic entity: the loans that the association provides brings together association members as they pursue entrepreneurial activities (see also Chapter 3).

By categorizing association funds as "money we own together" (*uang kita bersama*) in standard Indonesian, Evelyn invokes togetherness—kebersamaan—as a form of mutual alignment that is also enacted through the exclusion of others (see also Chapter 1). Here, her use of standard Indonesian figurates the principle of "money we own together" as something that stands true across socio-spatiotemporal contexts, and not just in the here-and-now (see also Chapter 2). At the same time, she describes the necessity of avoiding "the businesses of the Buginese and the Makassarese" in bahasa Kupang, thereby indexing her addressees (association members) in the here-and-now as mutually inhabiting the role of "natives" (*pribumi*).[6] Thus, through these alignments and exclusions, forms of mutual indebtedness are ritually figurated within a moral cosmology of togetherness (see Chu 2010).

The Language of Debt, the Language of Togetherness

While Evelyn invoked an axis of difference that aligns all association members—regardless of financial standing—against ethnic Buginese and Makassarese competitors, association members must also contend with fellow members whose loans have become delinquent (*macet*). Furthermore, although FCF Foundation staffers, such as Evelyn and Sophia, collect loan installments in monthly association meetings, they are not authorized to collect installments from delinquent borrowers outside of association meetings. In other words, community organizers do not work as debt collectors; rather, they rely on association members to remind each other to attend association meetings and pay their installments during these

[6] The word "pribumi" indicates native-ness in relation to a group deemed as outsiders. However, who exactly these outsiders are depends on the context of the interaction. While the word "pribumi" here refers to fellow ethnic Rotenese association members, the word "pribumi" elsewhere in Indonesia can refer to other groups seen as ethnolinguistically emblematic of the locale (e.g., the Javanese in Java) while excluding others seen as migrants (e.g., Chinese Indonesians).

meetings. These interactions are often morally fraught, as they could potentially single out particular borrowers as financially irresponsible, or, in bahasa Kupang, as someone who just "ate [up] the money" (BK: *makan doi*) and become delinquent. Thus, microcredit association chiefs (*ketua*) often assume the role of a mediator between the association and delinquent borrowers. These forms of mediation, as I will show in this section, relies on notions of togetherness, kebersamaan: a form of discursive alignment that allows association chiefs and their members to mutually inhabit an institutionally recognized social role (Carr 2011; Silverstein and Urban 1996; Silverstein 2003).

For Rose, the former chief of a successful association, togetherness allows association members to mutually inhabit the idealized role of "mothers" (BK: *mama-mama*; BI: *ibu-ibu*)—a role that defines their association against extortionate loan sharks, *rentenir.* As a former chief of the Melati association in Tuabuna, Rose is known for being gentle yet firm towards delinquent borrowers. A college-educated schoolteacher and a church board member (*anggota majelis*) who raised two sons as a single parent, Rose is known for her command of both bahasa tinggi and bahasa Kupang—registers of speech that are key in establishing one's position as someone who "speaks well," *omong bae* (see also Chapter 2). In particular, Rose navigates interactions with delinquent borrowers by addressing them as fellow "mothers" (BK: *mama*, BI: *ibu*) as a form of mutual alignment. To me, Rose describes the necessity of deploying "good language" (BI: *bahasa yang baik*) that invokes "motherliness" (BI: *keibuan*) when approaching association members who are overdue on their loan installments:

> When you talk to these mothers (*ibu-ibu*), [you] can't be loud, [you] must [talk to] them gently (BI: *harus dengan lembut*)… if you [talk to them] coarsely (*kasar*)… oh my (*aduh*). But with good language that touches [their] hearts (BI: *bahasa yang baik yang menyentuh hati mereka*), a motherly language (BI: *bahasa keibuan*), they would never go against (BI: *melawan*) [you].

For Rose, the microcredit association is not simply a conduit for entrepreneurial activities. Instead, it is a social domain that requires particular interactional strategies: to encourage members who are late on their payments to return to the association, one must treat each other "gently" (*harus dengan lembut*)—a mark of a "motherly" (BI: *keibuan*) way of using language. For instance, she approaches members who are delinquent in their payments by encouraging them to paying their remaining balance gradually instead of all at once: "*Mama*, just pay it back gradually" (BK: *Mama cicil pelan pelan sa e*). In such utterances, her use of bahasa Kupang instead of standard Indonesian also indexes solidarity and mutual belonging (see also Chapter 2). Reflecting a common practice among adult women in Kupang, who refer to each other using the kin term *mama* (lit., "mother") in bahasa Kupang, Rose prioritizes a sense of togetherness, kebersamaan among association members regardless of their financial standing. She explicitly discourages other members of the association from "singling out" (BK: *tunjuk sang dia*) delinquent members, and from spreading rumors that a delinquent member "must have eaten up all the money" (BK: *ni su makan doi*)—a phrase that indicates financial and moral irresponsibility.

After becoming a schoolteacher, Rose is no longer an association chief at Melati. Thus, she encouraged her successor as association chief, Martina, to pay attention to the language they use to remind association members who are late on their loan installments. According to Rose, displaying "anger" (*marah-marah*) will only cause delinquent borrowers to distance themselves from the association and stop attending association meetings altogether:

> Maybe they haven't paid their installments for a month or two, [but there's] no need to be angry (*marah*), call them kindly (BI: *panggil dia secara baik-baik*) and ask… Give a solution, give a way out for them. The more we are harsh the more they will run away (*menjauh*)…. Earlier… when [there were members] who are overdue on their payments

> (*tunggakan*) [and we responded with] anger (*marah-marah*), they ran as far away as they could (BI: *mereka menjauh sekali*).

Rose described her own way of talking as one that prioritizes a member's sense of belonging to the association, rather than the punctuality of their installments. She invokes fellow association members' mutually inhabited roles, particularly as mothers (*ibu-ibu*), and differentiates her association from loan sharks (*rentenir*), who prioritize the timely payment of loan installments at any cost:

> When I see them, I hug them and [say] dear (*sayang*), why haven't [you] attended association meetings lately. Join us (*mari sudah bergabung*)… [I would say] don't be afraid if you are late on your installments, [we] can find a way to cover the shortcomings. There's no need to be afraid. We are not loan sharks (*rentenir*) who will go after them, no. We will give a solution…. We are all adults (*dewasa semua*), all mothers (*ibu-ibu semua*)…. With that respect for [each other's] feelings (*jaga perasaan*), they will be devoted (*setia*) to the association… That's what I tell Martina [the association chief].

Rose's approach to communicating with association members emphasizes the importance of attending association meetings, a mark of "devotion" (*setia*) to the association, even when a member is overdue on their loan installments. Furthermore, she deemphasizes differences between members who are in good standing in terms of their loan payments and members who are delinquent. By invoking their common grounding as "adults" (*dewasa*) and "mothers" (*ibu-ibu*) she emphasizes commonalities among members of women's microcredit associations (*koperasi perempuan*)—those who define themselves against the extortionate practices of loan sharks (*rentenir*), who often charge interest by the day and are also known as *koperasi harian* (lit., "the daily association"). In Tuabuna, these loan sharks are known for visiting the homes of delinquent borrowers multiple times a day as a form of intimidation, thereby earning them the nickname of the "good morning and good afternoon association" (*koperasi selamat pagi selamat sore*). Furthermore, among kiosk owners, these loan sharking operations are known for forcibly

taking away unsold goods as a way of recovering delinquent debts. Hence, by deemphasizing differences between association members and contrasting her association against extortionate loan sharks (*rentenir*), Rose invokes "togetherness" (*kebersamaan*) for the association—thereby indexing what Gregory Duff Morton refers to as a structure of "collective voicing" (Morton 2014). Kebersamaan, therefore, constitutes part of the "logics of mobilization" that explains why Rose and association members conceive of these relations of indebtedness as a form of reciprocal obligation (Cody 2016, 182).

The Banana Jelly Scheme: Failures of Togetherness

While the previous examples I discuss invoke kebersamaan to encourage borrowers in their associations to pay their installments on a timely basis, borrowers also contest the moral legitimacy of particular loan schemes (Schuster 2015; Sen and Majumder 2015). For instance, in the banana jelly scheme that I recounted in the introduction, two Lontar association members, Jane and Mariah, encountered a morally dubious loan: according to them, the banana jelly scheme instigated by Annie, a village council member, is a scheme for Annie's own self-enrichment. Because Annie unilaterally imposed a loan of 1.8 million Rupiahs onto association members, who are then expected to rely on the supposed monetary potential of a one-time sale of banana jellies (*dodol pisang*), the loan does not offer the possibility of future reciprocity— a pursuit antithetical to kebersamaan. According to Jane, she and Mariah refused to accept Annie's offer, because they could not see what they could get in the future: "she [Annie] gets money, but what will we get out of this?" (*dia ada yang terima uang, kita terima apa*?). Unlike obtaining loans from the Lontar association, Annie's scheme offers no promise of a similar benefit in the future: it is not a form of reciprocity that justifies the mobilization of economic resources for a collective.

After a meeting with Sophia, a community organizer assigned to the association, Mariah began investigating the numbers that underlie the banana jelly scheme: she calculated the cost of ingredients to see if actual market prices for banana jelly ingredients match the 1.8 million Rupiahs that Annie claimed as the total cost of ingredients. After asking vendors at a local market for current prices, Mariah discovered that Annie dramatically overstated the value of ingredients for the banana jelly. For instance, rice flour, which costs only 9,000 Indonesian Rupiahs (approximately US$ .67) per kilogram in a local market, was listed as Rp 20,000 per kilogram in the manifest that Annie submitted to Mariah. According to Annie, these higher prices are due to "taxes" (*pajak*), which Mariah did not believe. Mariah was also baffled by how she was told to cook banana jellies using these ingredients, because the process involves constantly stirring a vat of thick liquid for hours—something that would be unrealistic for her group of women association members who are all above the age of 50. Making these jellies, according to Mariah, is a "man's job" (*tugas laki-laki*). Thus, for Mariah, the banana jelly scheme was a form of deception: this scheme is not a form of indebtedness that Lontar association members should take up.

At a subsequent meeting with Sophia, the community organizer, Lontar association members joined Mariah's condemnation of Annie: "She only cares about money," said one association member, and "she gets half a dozen paid positions from the village chief in order to get rich," said another. Nevertheless, Jane, Mariah, and others were reluctant to report Annie's banana jelly scheme to the village chief, because Annie serves as a liaison between the Lontar association and the village council—a connection to political authority that could be lost if they alienate Annie from association members. In response to this debate, Sophia's response centers on invoking togetherness, kebersamaan, to mobilize the association as a unified group against

Annie's scheme. Sophia's response is almost entirely delivered in standard Indonesian except for kin terms in bahasa Kupang that address her audience in the here-and-now, the "mothers" (*mama-mama*) who are members of the association:

Transcript 4.2. Sophia's call for unity

Bold indicates bahasa Kupang

[1] Orang bilang apa, belajar dari ilmu jarum,
"People say, learn from the knowledge of the sewing needle"

[2] jahit sakit tapi dia menyatukan
"The sewing needle, it causes pain but it unifies"

[3] Daripada gunting yang lurus tapi sakit, memisahkan
"[That's better] than a pair of scissors that cut straight, [it causes] pain [and it causes] separation"

[4] **Mama** yang pilih mana?
"Which one would **you** choose?"

[5] **Mama** lebih pilih jarum to?
"**You** would rather choose the sewing needle, right?"

[6] Dia jahit edok-edok ini pasti sakit tapi dia merangkul, menyatukan yang terpisah menjadi satu…
"It sews, it stirs things up, it must cause pain, but it embraces [everyone]. [It] unifies what has been separated into one."

[7] Daripada gunting dia lurus… tapi **kasi pisah mama-mama**…
"[That's better] than a pair of scissors that cut straight, but **separates you all**"

[8] **Ma** Annie… dia katanya dia lurus ikut aturan tapi… memisahkan mama-mama
"*Ma* Annie… she said that she follows the rules but straightly but… [she] divides you up"[7]

[9] Harusnya kan jadi jarum biar katong kritik pemerintah desa…
"We must be like a sewing needle instead, so we can criticize the village government…"

[7] Ma here is short for Mama ("mother"), the kin term in bahasa Kupang that is to refer to or to address an adult woman.

[10] **Mama-mama dong** rasa **ju** tertindas **ma mama mama** diam saja. Hayo **karmana**?
"Now, **you all** feel that [you are] oppressed [by this scheme] but **you all** keep quiet.
How does [this make sense]?"

Throughout her response, Sophia primarily uses standard Indonesian, which figurates her utterances as forms of knowledge that are relevant regardless of socio-spatiotemporal context—a key figuration as she invokes unity as a perennially relevant form of relationality among association members (see also Chapter 2). On line 10, however, she switches to bahasa Kupang to encourage her audience member in the here-and-now, the microcredit association members, to take action. In this request for association members to act by reporting Annie's scheme to the village government, Sophia depoys tropes of unity to invoke a form of togetherness—kebersamaan. Sophia likens Annie's scheme as a "scissor" (*gunting*) that "divides" (*kasi pisah*) the Lontar association from the village council that represents them—a council that includes Annie as a representative of women's microcredit associations throughout the village of Nusé. In response to Annie's scheme, Sophia calls for association members to act in unison, as if they were a "sewing needle" (*jarum*) that "unifies" (*menyatukan*): she calls for the Lontar association to mobilize as a group that criticizes the village council for allowing Annie to initiate the banana jelly scheme. In the same meeting, she encouraged the Lontar association to report Annie's scheme to the village chief (*kepala desa*), who presides over the village council. Unfortunately, while Sophia offered a potential avenue of resolution, Lontar association members did not end up reporting the scheme to the village chief. Instead, Jane and Mariah simply refused to make the banana jelly according to Annie's instructions.

For Lontar association members, Sophia's call to align themselves against Annie's scheme was a challenging one: to call attention to a village council member as someone who conducted financial impropriety, they would have to go above the village council and seek

support from higher levels of the state bureaucracy—a move that could potentially alienate them from fellow villagers in Nusé. While Sophia, a resident of a neighboring village and a full-time NGO employee, does not face such constraints, Lontar association members—including Jane and Mariah—often benefit from other entrepreneurial projects initiated and funded by the Nusé village council, such as catering orders, or opportunities to sell products at state-sponsored commercial kiosks near a beachside park. A well-connected figure in the village council is no other than Annie herself, who often decides on entrepreneurial projects that are funded by the village government. Here, the solidarity that is often invoked by microcredit associations to as a moral foundation of their activities turns into a limitation and a double bind (see Cattelino 2010): they can refuse a loan from Annie, but they cannot afford the potential risks of alienating Annie and the rest of the village council. Hence, while Lontar association members were able to reject the loan imposed by Annie, they could not invoke togetherness—kebersamaan—to exclude her altogether.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have explained the political and economic consequences of microcredit associations beyond their role as parts of global financial structures and their incorporation of marginalized borrowers. In particular, I have described how these associations become sites of social interactions that imbue relations of indebtedness with moral valence. By analyzing the moral implications of these social interactions, I have analyzed how the notion of kebersamaan—togetherness—mobilizes the participation of borrowers within the reciprocal obligations of debt payment that these associations entail. Although the act of taking up a loan and paying installments individuates borrowers during association meetings, community

organizers invoke kebersamaan to morally justify borrowers'' participation within the social collective of the association. Furthermore, this chapter situates relationships of indebtedness not simply as a dyadic relationship between a lender and borrowers: rather, the moral valence of indebtedness is mediated by discursive forms deployed by the community organizer (*pendamping*) and the volunteer association chief.

By analyzing the discursive alignments that emerge during interactions, I have also described how moral cosmologies that idealize solidarity, such as kebersamaan, are also co-constituted by stances that entail mutual exclusion (see also Gal and Irvine 2019a). Community organizers and association chiefs, for instance, mutually align association members against ethnic others, loan sharks, and dubious entrepreneurial schemes, such as Annie's banana jelly scheme. Thus, in analyzing what existing literature describes as the inexorable rise of microcredit institutions across the Global South, I emphasize that these emergent institutional configurations also produce new subjectivities that realign forms of social difference within and beyond these microcredit associations (Kar 2013; Schuster 2015). Through such forms of analysis, this chapter contributes to an emergent body of literature that analyzes the semiotic mediation of money and markets: how money co-occurs with other modalities of interaction, such as language, that mediate the efficaciousness of social action conducted through exchange (Agha 2017; Keane 2007; 2008). By interrogating indebtedness rather than money as such, this chapter encourages future research to consider how relations of power are constituted and contested through socio-spatiotemporal configurations of morality that the acts of exchange entail.

Conclusion

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I witnessed a series of public arguments delivered by women members of microcredit associations at a village council meeting in Ba'a, a Kupang-area locale where Sophia, a community organizer and one of my interlocutors, lives. At the village council meeting, Paulina, a successful entrepreneur and a church board member, delivered arguments for more funding to be given for local women's microcredit associations, such that they can embark on entrepreneurial projects that involve making preserved foods for sale. Fluently alternating between bahasa Kupang, a register of local social belonging, and standard Indonesian, Paulina's speech was described by Sophia to me as an example of someone who "speaks well" (*omong bae*). Later, when both Sophia and I paid a visit to Paulina at her house, Sophia asked her: "Sister, why [don't you] tell us why you spoke so well? (*Susi, cerita kenapa sampe ko bisa omong bae tadi*). Paulina then told us that, to speak well, one needs to "be brave… like when we deliver a sermon, right?" (*berani… seperti kitong berkhotbah to?).* Here, Paulina's connection between a churchly sermon and other ways of speaking is key: as I have described throughout this dissertation, one's way of speaking matters not only for one's moral standing not only as a congregant, but also for one's standing as a participant in exchange—acts that involve contesting and distributing resources. Like other Christians in Kupang, Paulina is expected to demonstrate fluency in forms of speech that involve both bahasa Kupang and standard Indonesian—forms of speech that, as I have suggested in this dissertation, are crucial in forms of alignment (or disalignment) in relation to the Indonesian state.

Through these acts of speaking, social actors who describe themselves as coming from the margins, such as non-elite women who are members of microcredit associations, invoke their

belonging to encompassing entities, such as the Indonesian nation (see Kuipers 1998). Through semiotically mediated practices that invoke encompassment, this dissertation analyzes how Kupang residents invoke their belonging to the Indonesian nation-state while also claiming that they are *also* different from the rest of Indonesia. For instance, Kupang residents, who are mostly Christians, see themselves as different from the rest of Indonesia, which is mostly Muslim, although they see themselves as sharing the common ground of a*gama*—a state-authorized notion of moral belonging to a religion. Furthermore, in relation to Muslim-majority Java, which they see as wealthier and driven by the pursuit of money, Kupang residents consider themselves as being politically and economically marginal, but also motivated by shared notions of *kebersamaan*, togetherness—a moral ideal that valorizes generosity to others. Hence, these forms of contrasts are mediated by the ideals of togetherness that Kupang residents claim as their own: by deploying tokens of togetherness, Kupang residents situate themselves in moral and political cosmologies that encompass the nation and its imagined others. As a local concept that mediates the here-and-us with the there-and-them, kebersamaan shapes two interrelated socio-spatiotemporal contexts that constitute the two parts of this dissertation: (1) religion and moral cosmologies of national belonging in a Protestant congregation; and (2) household, gender, and relations of indebtedness among members of women's microcredit associations.

The first part of this dissertation, entitled "Language and the Moral Cosmologies of Religion in Indonesia," consists of two chapters: "Agama: Religion and Relational Common Grounds in a Protestant Youth Ministry" (Chapter 1) and "The Word of God in Bahasa Tinggi, the Word of Worshippers in Bahasa Kupang" (Chapter 2). Through these two chapters, I demonstrate how state-authorized ideologies of religion shape forms of everyday interaction among youth ministry members at the Nehemiah church, a Kupang-area congregation of the

Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor (GMIT), a mainline Protestant denomination. As previous research on Indonesia's sociolinguistic landscapes has shown, social interactions across lines of ethnic difference in Indonesia involve acts of "adequation"—the performance of sameness—that invoke a shared common ground among interacting parties (Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Cole 2010; Goebel 2010). However, I argue that semiotic processes of adequation also facilitate processes of differentiation and of othering: that is, claims of sameness or similarity across two interacting parties also entail forms of mutual exclusion (Gal and Irvine 2019a).

The first chapter of this dissertation describes how the Indonesian state's principle of *agama* (religion) enacts a relational process of social differentiation: Indonesians recognize each other as those who claim different religions, such as Islam or Christianity, but only insofar as these categories of religiosity are state-recognized forms of *agama*. Thus, I emphasize that agama serves as a *relational common ground*: situated perspectives from which differences and similarities are construed by social actors as they participate in social interactions. While relational common grounds enable solidarity, they also involve acts of mutual exclusion: those who are seen as unsteady in their religion or are blocked from morally claiming a religion, such as suspected Communists, become figures of imagined Others against whom Indonesians align themselves. I argue that religion as agama forms the very basis of relationality among Indonesians, as agama is crucial in one's perceived moral alignment along axes of social difference.

In the second chapter of this dissertation, I have described how the role of a Christian worship leader, *pemimpin ibadah,* is shaped by one's skillfulness in the simultaneous deployment of two semiotic registers: (1) bahasa Kupang and (2) bahasa tinggi, a register of standard Indonesian in church worship. As Kupang has become increasingly urbanized and multi-ethnic in

the latter half of the 20th century, bahasa Kupang, variety of Malay that is structurally adjacent to standard Indonesian, has increasingly become recognized among Kupang residents as a register of local belonging. However, unlike Indonesia's multitude of ethnolinguistically emblematic languages, speakers of bahasa Kupang do not privilege any particular ethnolinguistic group as its "native" speaker. In this multiethnic locale, the GMIT, a mainline Protestant denomination where more than 80 percent of Kupang residents are congregants, has witnessed a movement that encourages ministers and lay persons alike to use bahasa Kupang rather than bahasa tinggi—a register of Indonesian that has long been associated with congregational life. According to this group, bahasa Kupang constitutes a "heart language" that is immediate to its speakers, while bahasa tinggi can potentially alienate worshippers from God in their everyday lives (Handman 2009). Thus, in the context of church worship, an important ritual of national belonging in Indonesia, I demonstrate that the co-constitutive nature of bahasa Kupang and bahasa tinggi allows worship leaders to become moral mediators between the word of God (*firman Tuhan*), a semiotic resource figurated as timeless, and congregation members in the here-and-now.

In the second part of this dissertation, entitled "Gender, Households, and Relations of Indebtedness," I describe how gendered social differences are invoked and enacted through moral ideologies of women's entrepreneurialism within and beyond the household—a product of the rise of microcredit associations as a crucial source of livelihood among non-elite households in Kupang. As a contribution to studies of gender, kinship, and forms of indebtedness, this part shows how women's roles as entrepreneurial agents and borrowers from microcredit associations also produce double binds that morally circumscribe their forms of social and economic participation. Furthermore, by analyzing gendered moral ideals of social and economic participation, I analyze how my interlocutors invoke *kebersamaan* (togetherness) to justify

relations marked by inequality, such as indebtedness to microcredit associations. While my interlocutors often idealize togetherness as a form of solidarity, I also demonstrate how they mobilize the lack of togetherness as a justification for mutual exclusion.

In the third chapter of this dissertation, entitled "In Search of *Berkat* ('Blessing'): Gender and the Moral Bounds of the Household," I analyze how the moral notion of the *rumah tangga*, the household, is constituted as a site of gendered social obligations that morally authorize women's entrepreneurial pursuits. In this chapter, I describe how women are expected to both seek a living through entrepreneurial means and to manage household budgets, while men are simply expected to seek a living outside of the home. Furthermore, this chapter outlines how ideologies of generosity and propriety, *berkat* (lit. "blessing"), morally circumscribe women's roles in seeking sources of income for their households. However, rather than revealing a singular perspective on gendered forms of domination, I analyze the how the gendering of social domains is invoked in often contradictory ways by authoritative voicings of the church, the state, and NGOs affiliated with microcredit associations.

In the fourth and final chapter of this dissertation, entitled "*Untuk Modal Bersama* ('For Our Collective Funds'): The Politics of Exchange in an Indonesian Women's Microcredit Association," I demonstrate how practices of reciprocal indebtedness enact notions of kebersamaan, togetherness, which are invoked as a moral justification for women's participation in microcredit associations. Rather than characterizing the microcredit association as a group of borrowers that are accountable to a singular institution, this chapter asks how the community organizer (*pendamping*) and volunteer association chiefs discursively mediate relations of indebtedness. To justify their collection of debt from borrowers, community organizers and association chiefs describe their associations as a source of "collective funds" (*modal*

bersama)—a source of togetherness that mutually aligns them against ethnic others and loan sharking operations. In this chapter, by describing the failure of a loan scheme—Annie's banana jelly scheme—I also demonstrate how conflicts and disagreements are also mediated by the moral terms of togetherness.

By considering how social interactions mediate the exchange of resources and emplace participants of exchange within cosmologies of power, this dissertation underlines the value of relationality and relatedness as analytical strategies. In particular, relationality illuminates how language and other modalities of interaction invoke social structures that encompass both participants in the here-and-now as well as imagined others in the there-and-then. By considering indexical relationships between social interactions and the structures of power that they invoke, relationality allows us to analyze semiotically mediated processes that contribute to adequation and differentiation without essentializing the positionality of social actors. As a form of relationality, kebersamaan—togetherness—sheds light on the unexpected potentials of social life.

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