

Jafar Suryomenggolo (ed.)

The background is a solid red color with a faint, large clock face centered behind the text. Two black silhouettes of women are walking towards each other from the left and right edges. The woman on the left is wearing a dress and high heels, carrying a handbag. The woman on the right is wearing a dress and flat shoes, carrying a shopping bag. The title text is centered in the upper half of the image.

AT A
MOMENT'S
NOTICE

*Indonesian Maids Write
on Their Lives Abroad*

Book Excerpt

AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE

*Also published by NIAS Press
on Indonesians working and living abroad*

FOLLOW THE MAID
Domestic Worker Migration in and from Indonesia
Olivia Killias

DEPARTING FROM JAVA
Javanese Labour, Migration and Diaspora
Edited by Rosemarijn Hoeffte and Peter Meel

See back page for fuller details

NIAS Press is the autonomous publishing arm of NIAS – Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, a research institute located at the University of Copenhagen. NIAS is partially funded by the governments of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden via the Nordic Council of Ministers, and works to encourage and support Asian studies in the Nordic countries. In so doing, NIAS has been publishing books since 1969, with more than two hundred titles produced in the past few years.



UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN



norden

Nordic Council of Ministers

AT A
MOMENT'S
NOTICE

*Indonesian Maids Write
on Their Lives Abroad*

Stories collected and translated by
JAFAR SURYOMENGGOLO

At a Moment's Notice
Indonesian Maids Write on Their Lives Abroad
collected and translated by Jafar Suryomenggolo
Nordic Institute of Asian Studies
Voices of Asia series, no. 1

First published in 2019 by NIAS Press
NIAS – Nordic Institute of Asian Studies
Øster Farimagsgade 5, 1353 Copenhagen K, Denmark
Tel: +45 3532 9501 • Fax: +45 3532 9549
E-mail: books@nias.ku.dk • Online: www.niaspress.dk

© NIAS Press 2019

While copyright in the volume as a whole is vested in the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, copyright in the individual stories belongs to their authors. However, the English translation of the text is copyright Jafar Suryomenggolo while illustrations to the text are copyright Sheila Rooswitha Putri. No material may be reproduced in whole or in part without the express permission of the publisher.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-87-7694-270-0 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-87-7694-271-7 (pbk)

Typeset in Arno Pro 13/15.6
Typesetting by BookWork

Printed and bound in Singapore
by Mainland Press

Publication of this book was made possible, in part, with assistance from the LitRI Translation Funding Program of the National Book Committee and Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia.

JHONY THE PLAYBOY

by Maria Bo Niok

Book Excerpt

SHE WAS IN THE LIFT. With her was a five-year old boy in school uniform.

The apartment was on the 21st floor and she didn't want to be late. She was a bit annoyed every time the lift stopped at another floor to pick up more people. Usually she woke up and got ready a bit earlier. But today she had woken up late. She was in a rush to take the boy to his school, which was next to the apartment complex. And now the lift was stopping at every floor. She didn't want her boss to know that she had woken up late. If he found out, she knew that he would be annoyed.

"*Zao shang, sin sang*, Good morning, teacher," she said to the teacher when they finally arrived at the school.

She hurried back to the apartment. On her way back she heard someone calling her name, as if they had been waiting for her.

"Maria!"

"Oh, Markonah, are you still here?"

"Maria, please help me," pleaded Markonah.

"What's happened?"

"I... I..." Markonah couldn't finish what she had started to say.

Maria told Markonah to give her a call later, as she was in a hurry to go shopping. It would be easier to talk on the phone. It wasn't long before Markonah phoned her. Maria could hear her crying on the phone. Markonah told her that she had just had an abortion and was still bleeding. Maria was really shocked to hear this.

Maria had always considered Markonah to be her best friend, as they both came from the countryside – Markonah from Cilacap,

Maria from Wonosobo. Though Cilacap and Wonosobo are different kinds of places, and not that near each other, in Hong Kong Cilacap seemed just a stone's throw away from Wonosobo.

Maria still couldn't believe what she had just heard from Markonah. She encouraged her to tell her what had happened, and Markonah told her that she had gone for an abortion after finding out that she was two months pregnant. Maria felt dizzy when she heard this.

Markonah told Maria the story of her relationship with an Indian guy – a story which Maria had heard before. His name was Jhony, and they had met a few months before. Ever since then, they had always spent her day off together at the Hotel Jordan. Jhony called her Kony, and that was enough to make her feel special and flattered. As they spent her days off in the hotel, they rarely went out. Markonah told Maria that she had reasoned that there was no point wasting their time going out and walking around – it was better to stay in the hotel and make love. Maria didn't comment on this.

They had met when she was taking her employers' daughter to school. A truck had been parked right in front of the apartment's main gate. The driver had been observing her walking to school with the little girl. After she returned from the school, Jhony, who was the truck driver, approached her and gave her a rolled-up piece of paper with his mobile number on it.

Markonah was a widow and not young anymore, so she was delighted to find his number on the piece of paper. She phoned him as soon as she got back to the apartment.

Jhony was round, with a beer belly, and his skin was as dark as that of a water buffalo. He was Markonah's first lover after six months in Hong Kong. She wasn't going to waste her time with him.

Markonah's story about her romance with Jhony always made Maria smile.



The next day, Maria was making a fish salad when her mobile

phone started vibrating. It was in the pocket of her shorts and so she felt it tickling her thigh.

It was Markonah.

“Hi, what’s up, Konah?”

“I didn’t finish telling you about Jhony yesterday, Maria. Listen. I need to tell you. If I don’t, I’ll go crazy.”

“Oh, no worries. Of course, I’m happy to listen.”

“You know, Maria, Jhony was a jerk. The last few times I saw him at the hotel he always brought other guys with him. He told me they were his friends and brothers. He said he wanted to introduce me to them. It turned out that he wanted me to serve them. At first, he would have sex with me, but halfway through he would tell me that he needed to go out to buy some cigarettes. Then those guys who claimed to be his brothers or friends would ask me to serve them, one by one,” she told me, in a pitiful tone of voice.

“What?! Why would you do that?”

“Because I couldn’t say no to Jhony, Maria.” She started to sob.

“And so...?”

“And so I did as they asked. Jhony told me that if I didn’t serve them well, it meant that I didn’t love him. He told me to do it, Maria.”

“Well, what do you expect from him now?”

“I want him to marry me, Maria. At first when my period was late, I didn’t give it much thought, but then I realized...”

“Does he know that you are late getting your period?”

“Well, this has shown me his true colors. It was after I told him that my period was late that he started to bring his brothers and friends to the hotel room for me to serve them,” she sobbed.

“What a dick! I hope you don’t mind me saying this, but he really is an asshole.” Maria wasn’t sure if Markonah would understand how angry she was.

“I don’t mind what you say about him. You’re right! I really feel terrible. I keep saying to him, ‘Jhony dear, you need to accept your responsibility and marry me. This is your child inside me now’. But

he just ignores me. Do you know what his answer is?" She was still sobbing.

"I really wouldn't know what that prick might say," Maria replied.

"He says, 'It wasn't just me you slept with. So why should you ask me to marry you?' You are right, he really is an asshole, he's a real bastard. If we were in Indonesia, I would already have asked someone to put a curse on him. If I weren't thinking of my children back home, I would cut off his penis. Even if I went to jail because of it, I wouldn't mind at all." She was in a real rage now.

Rrrriinnnggg. Rrrriinnnggg. Suddenly, the doorbell rang.

"Maria, my boss, that witch, is back now. I'll call you later. Bye."

She hung up.



Maria was not a prude, but when she heard about what had happened to Markonah and how she had been treated, she was really angry with Jhony. She really felt like giving that bastard a piece of her mind. She couldn't accept the fact that Markonah had been made such a fool of through the game Jhony had played, and that he had taken everything from her.

The next day, Maria phoned Markonah to ask for his number. Then she called him. She tried to sound flirtatious.

"Helloow."

"Yes, hello."

"Could I speak to Mr. Jhony, pleeease?"

"Yes, this is Jhony, my dear."

Oh, how good he was at making his voice sound nice!

"Do you remember me?"

"Hmm... Yep, you must be Tanty."

"Nooo, darling."

"Lusi..."

"Oh nooo, my soulmate."

"Mirien..."

"I am your wife!" Maria pursed her lips.

“Dorothy???”

“*Bangkai setan busuk!*”*

“Ah, sorry, who are you really?”

“Fuck you, you *jangkrik*, you *babi*, you *kunyuk*, you *laki-laki busuk*.”† Maria threw curses at him in Indonesian, one after another.

“Oh no, my name is Jhony, and I’m not a baby!”‡

“Yes, I know! *Anaknya Mak Grandrong dan aku akan cacah lontongmu kalau dekat!*”§ Maria replied angrily.

“Please, darling, you are not speaking clearly.”

“*Bego! Persetan denganmu!*”¶

Maria hung up. She was so upset afterwards that she downed two glasses of water.



Maria informed Markonah when they met the next day at the school that she had phoned Jhony. Markonah was curious to know what she had said to him. Who knows, Jhony might be interested in dating Maria!

After Maria finished telling her what had happened, Markonah began to laugh. Especially when she heard about how Maria had berated Jhony in a mixture of languages. He definitely wouldn’t have understood what she was saying!

“Would you feel satisfied giving someone a piece of your mind in his language? If you do it in your own language, it’s more satisfying. Right?” said Maria. Markonah nodded.

Markonah told Maria that Jhony was now avoiding her. She said that she felt that there was no hope for her, and she didn’t see any reason to keep on living. But then she thought of her family

* Indonesian: literally, ‘Rotten carcass of the devil!’

† Indonesian: ‘You cricket, you pig, you ape, you wretched man.’

‡ The Indonesian word *babi* (pig) sounds similar to the English word baby.

§ Indonesian: ‘You are the son of the witch Grandrong and I would cut your penis off if I were there near you now.’

¶ Indonesian: ‘Stupid [man]! Go to hell!’

back home, and she knew that she didn't want her son to be alone, with no mother.

The whole of her income the next month went to pay for the abortion. And when her boss asked why she was bleeding all the time, she just replied that everything was fine. But actually she was still in a lot of pain.

Markonah told Maria that she never wanted to see another Indian guy. She loathed the idea of running into Jhony. She had once adored him. He had been her *arjuna*.^{*} Now she hated him and she had decided he looked just like a water buffalo. Maria remembered that Markonah had once told her that he looked like Amitabh Bachchan, the handsome Indian film actor. She had wondered at the time whether Jhony was really that handsome; and now he was just an Indian water buffalo!



That afternoon Maria spent her day off with Markonah. They strolled around the Yuen Long area, heading towards the Aviary Pagoda. As they walked along, they saw a young Filipina friend of theirs sitting on the church steps, close to a big, dark-skinned guy.

Markonah instantly turned pale. She recognized the guy. It was Jhony. She took Maria's hand and pointed her finger towards the couple clasped in each other's arms. She whispered in Maria's ear that it was Jhony.

Maria turned to look at him. Ola! He was nothing but a round fat man. He really did look just like one of the dark water buffaloes in her village. She didn't say a word. She just pulled Markonah away and started to walk in a different direction.

In the beautiful garden at the Aviary Pagoda, Maria laid her head down on the green grass, looking at the sky. Next to her, Markonah did the same. They lay there in silence, not saying anything.

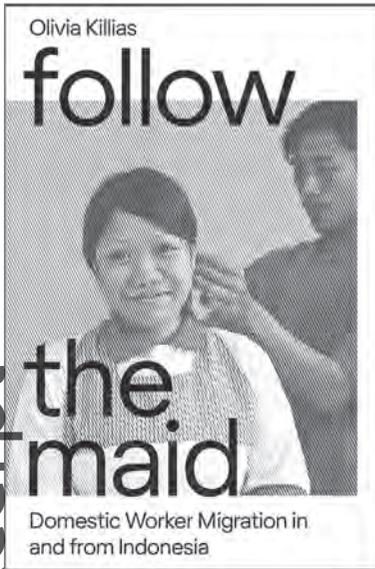
* Arjuna is a handsome prince, the protagonist of *Mahabharata*, and is often referred to as the symbol of manhood.

Maria started to compose some lines for a poem about a wandering princess who was in love. Just then, she received a text message from someone far away, saying: *I miss you so much.*

(February 2006)

RELATED NEW TITLES FROM NIAS PRESS

Book Excerpt



First ethnographic monograph to explore domestic worker migration in and from Indonesia, one of the main labour-sending countries in the world.

"Beautifully researched and ethnographically rich, this book literally 'follows' Indonesian women from village, to training camp, to Malaysia, and back again. Acutely attentive to time and place, Killias weaves together compelling narratives and provides important insights"

- Nicole Constable, University of Pittsburgh

Published 2018, 252 pages, illustrated
ISBN: 978-87-7694-226-7 (hardback)
978-87-7694-227-4 (paperback)

This first systematic examination of the Javanese diaspora as a global phenomenon surveys Javanese migration and communities at home in Indonesia and abroad in Asia, the Middle East, Oceania and the Americas.

"The literature on Indonesians who migrated to lands near and far over the past five centuries is sparse in comparison to voluminous studies on the Chinese, South Asian, Japanese, and Filipino emigration and diasporas. This valuable and pathbreaking collection provides the first systematic and global examination of the Javanese who moved temporarily or permanently, especially since 1900, emphasizing labour, migration, and diaspora. The excellent introduction and nine essays covering Javanese experiences in places as diverse as Sumatra, Suriname, New Caledonia, Saudi Arabia, and Hong Kong should interest specialists on Asian diasporas as well as on Indonesian history, culture, society, and economic issues."

- Craig A. Lockard, University of Wisconsin

Published 2018, 302 pages, illustrated
ISBN: 978-87-7694-245-8 (hardback)
978-87-7694-246-5 (paperback)

