Before dawn Chandra has already showered and is ready to take his bag and leave. Left behind are a thin mattress and two cardboard boxes that function as storage space. The photos of Indonesian and Western pop and movie stars, cut from old newspapers, cover the wall but are barely visible from the light of the single bulb that dangles from the ceiling. Chandra knows that his girlfriend, with whom he has been living for the past three months, will be devastated when she returns in a few days from a short trip to her village. However, he feels ashamed (malu) to be living off the salary of a woman while he has nothing to offer. Without a good job or some savings, he cannot afford to send money to his mother in Aceh, much less marry his girlfriend or even return home from merantau, the process of migration. Therefore, he reasons, it is better to move on.

With 300 Singapore dollars (175 U.S. dollars) and a passport in his front pocket, he leaves his room and walks through Belakang Sony, or Behind Sony, the squatter community where he has lived for over six months, named after the factory it abuts. These squats are identified by the government as illegal rumah liar, literally “wild houses.” As Chandra follows the path that leads out of the woods and onto the main road, the sun is slowly rising over the Batamindo Industrial Park, the flagship of economic development on the Indonesian island of Batam.

During the 1980s the “Pacific Rim” emerged as the economic region of the future—a region that would connect Asia with the United States (Dirlik 1993). “Globalization” became the key term of reference. As Japanese business guru Kenichi Ohmae (1995) put it, this was the era of a new “borderless world,” and the nation-state was becoming increasingly obsolete. People, goods, and capital were to flow freely, as economic complementarity and comparative advantages became the dominant tropes. In East and Southeast Asia, transborder and regional initiatives were planned and
implemented in conjunction with this ethos (Sparke et al. 2004, 485), and in the 1990s regionalization took a particular idealized, geometrical form in Asia as “Growth Triangles” embodied hopes for the future. The most successful of these were centered on the region’s emerging global cities, Hong Kong and Singapore. As Hong Kong was incorporated into China, however, the Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore Growth Triangle, which ideally connects Batam, the Malaysian province of Johor, and Singapore, became the most widely featured and discussed transnational economic project in East and Southeast Asia.2 In practice, however, the critical relationship has been between Batam and Singapore, with Johor remaining peripheral to the Growth Triangle project.3

As Singapore has been transformed from an export-processing zone for the global electronics industry into a knowledge-based financial center, factories have increasingly been moved to offshore sites of inexpensive land and labor such as Batam, where environmental and labor protection have remained lax and local ownership and tax laws have been changed in order to facilitate foreign direct investment. The Batamindo Industrial Park exemplifies this process. It houses approximately one hundred multinational corporations, such as Sony and Siemens, and employs seventy thousand workers, most of them young women. Until one month earlier, when he was laid off, Chandra worked in one of the factories. Convinced he will not be able to find a better job on Batam, he has decided to join a friend and attempt to enter Singapore to work illegally. “Anyway,” he says, “even when I had a job I could never save any money since it is so expensive here.”

Chandra has seen Singapore only from Batam’s Stress Beach (Pantai Stres), a patchwork of liar bars and housing inhabited by migrants from across Indonesia—a place and a name that embodies the ironies and emotional anxieties that characterize everyday life on the island. Chandra occasionally goes there with friends to stare at the Singapore skyline, a constant reminder of what Batam’s planners imagine that the island will become, but also an incentive for migrants to cross the Straits of Malacca into Singapore or Malaysia, located only twenty and twenty-five kilometers away, respectively, in search of higher wages.

Global cities that act as financial centers have become increasingly important as nodes in the new global economy (e.g., Sassen 1991; Brenner and Keil 2006). Unlike London, New York, and Tokyo, which are part
Map of Batam and the surrounding region. Reprinted with permission from IIAS Newsletter (see Lindquist 2006).
of larger political entities, Singapore—just over 700 square kilometers in size and with a population of 4.5 million—is a global city that is also a nation-state, meaning that the boundaries of the city converge with those of the state. The distance to offshore locations such as Batam is much closer compared with other major cities, literally compressing the space between center and periphery. The Singaporean state thus has the ability to regulate the movement of unskilled migrants in and out of the city in ways that are impossible in other global cities. Much like the borderland areas that divide the United States from Mexico and Hong Kong from China, the borderless world remains characterized by inequality—literally dividing the “developed” from the “developing” world—and demands a border to keep unskilled labor in place. The transformation of Singapore and the growing ease by which Singaporeans can travel to Indonesia—the fourth most populous and the most populous Muslim-majority country in the world—has thus been matched by intensifying immigration controls, making it increasingly difficult for Indonesian citizens to enter Singapore.

Chandra’s friend Guntur, who is already waiting at the side of the road as he steps out of the woods from Belakang Sony, has worked illegally in Singapore before and knows the way. Together, they walk toward the gate of the industrial park to catch a shared taxi to one of the island’s ferry terminals, where they will take the forty-minute ride to Singapore. Just over four hundred square kilometers in size, Batam has a distinct frontier-town atmosphere. Golf courses, marinas, and gated communities coexist with factories, squatter communities, karaoke bars, and brothels, while large parts of the island remain covered by jungle. Facilitated by an efficient ferry system, Batam serves as a destination for inexpensive shopping and leisure activities—most notably sex tourism—for Singaporeans and Malaysians, many of whom cross the border to escape the “stress” of everyday life. An economy of the day and one of the night have thus developed together, both depending primarily on the labor of young women, leading to the marginalization of men like Chandra from the labor market.

The island’s transformation from a backwater into a large-scale development project has coincided with striking demographic changes: by 2005 more than 700,000 people were living on the island—compared with 3,000 in the late 1960s—as unskilled migrants such as Chandra poured into the area from across Indonesia, lured by rumors of a booming economy. During the same period, Batam became one of the main points of tourist entry.
to Indonesia, as the number of arrivals increased from 60,000 in 1985 to 580,000 in 1990, peaking at over 1.5 million in 2005.

As Chandra and Guntur drive across the island on the newly paved roads, they pass rows of liar squatter housing hidden behind the trees that line the roadside, dilapidated housing estates built for Singaporeans and wealthy Indonesians but never finished, and a new “mega mall” announcing its grand opening. Empty lots and half-built structures that appear and disappear along the road suggest rapid change but reveal little of the past or what the future has in store. Boom and bust appear to coincide. At the last intersection before the terminal, a large billboard advertisement for Hong Kong Bank declares, “Batam is no longer an island,” suggesting that Batam is no longer peripheral, but located squarely at the center of a new borderless economy.

After disembarking at the terminal, Chandra and Guntur “rent” money from an illegal broker in the entrance hall before purchasing their tickets: money that will be shown to immigration officers in Singapore as “proof” that they are not impoverished and looking for work, then returned after their passports have been stamped. The money does not, however, guarantee entrance into Singapore. Particularly since the Asian economic crisis that began in 1997, it has become increasingly difficult for Indonesian citizens to cross the border as the Singaporean and Malaysian authorities have become restrictive with visas.
In this particular case, Chandra and Guntur are turned back at immigration despite carrying 1,000 Singapore dollars each. Back on Batam all they can do is take a taxi back to their squatter houses, 500,000 rupiah poorer (about 55 U.S. dollars) after having bought the ferry ticket and rented the money. The anticipation of entering Singapore for a few weeks to work illegally, making eight times the salary that they could on Batam, is effectively disrupted. Chandra returns to his house in the afternoon, empties his bag, and resumes his life in the shadows of economic development, having told almost no one that he was leaving.

**MOBILITY, IDENTITY, AND EMOTIONS IN THE “BORDERLESS WORLD”**

Batam is exemplary in contemporary debates concerning globalization. While some observers view the creation of economic zones such as Batam as a route to development and improved welfare, others insist that such zones facilitate new forms of inequality that allow multinational corporations to profit at the expense of vulnerable workers. Both perspectives view Batam as a case in support of a broader argument. In similar terms, anthropologists, human geographers, and political scientists have taken Batam and the Growth Triangle as an ideal point from which to consider transforming forms of economy and sovereignty. Most of these studies understand the development of Batam as an effect of changes in Singapore and ultimately the global economy. Macleod and McGee (1996, 430) state this most clearly: the “key to understanding the Growth Triangle lies in the restructuring of the Singaporean economy” [emphasis in original].

This book shifts perspectives by taking as its starting point not the restructuring of the Singaporean economy, but rather the experiences of Indonesian migrants such as Chandra. Chandra’s mobility reveals a structure of indeterminacy that can be reduced neither to his actual intentions nor to the Singaporean economy, as necessity and contingency converge. His story evokes a world in which human mobility is not only intensifying and increasingly regulated, but also driven by desires and emotions. In much theorizing concerning globalization, however, “movement” is taken for granted, a black box subsumed within universalizing discourses in which either poverty “pushes” and economic development “pulls” migrants, or diasporas are understood as imagined transnational communities. Lim-
limited attention has been paid to how particular channels facilitate, organize, and constrain movement (Tsing 2000, 337), and there is little specificity concerning how circuits of human mobility “are configured in particular places, for particular groups of people, and to what particular ends” (Freeman 2001, 1009).

In response, *The Anxieties of Mobility* uses three Indonesian concepts introduced in Chandra’s story—merantau, liar, and malu, meaning roughly “migration,” “wild,” and “shame,” respectively—in order to construct an analytical model that emerges through the process of fieldwork. This highlights the importance of ethnography as a mode of knowledge production. If ethnography makes room for the unpredictable (Strathern 2000, 286), Batam thus becomes a place where it is possible to ask questions and offer responses that cannot be posed before one has been there. Merantau means “circular migration” and includes the explicit demand to return home. Liar literally translates as “wild” but also connotes “unlicensed” or “undomesticated.” It is a term used throughout Indonesia, but it is most clearly articulated on Batam, both by the state and popularly in everyday life. Most conspicuously, squatter settlements are identified as “wild houses” (rumah liar) and premarital cohabitation as “wild marriages” (pernikahan liar); prostitutes who work on a freelance basis outside a designated location, such as karaoke bars or brothels, are also liar. Finally, malu—the dominant emotional trope for migrants on Batam—means, approximately, “shame,” “embarrassment,” and “shyness,” but also “restraint” and “propriety” (Goddard 1996, 432; Peletz 1996, 228). Each of these concepts deals with the problem of belonging. Merantau is about the relationship with home; liar is about not belonging, about being out of place; and malu is about the feeling of not living up to the standards of “home,” meaning the hopes and ideals that define the self.

Together these concepts suggest a particular mode of temporality, namely the belum, or “not yet,” which characterizes life on Batam and, in effect, the open-ended mode of analysis employed in this book. Those who are on merantau have not yet returned home, the liar is not yet developed, and migrants who have not yet succeeded are malu. More generally, Indonesian authorities recognize that Batam is not yet completed as a development project and therefore not yet at the center of the regional economy, as the completion of the island’s master plan has repeatedly been deferred to the future. Belum thus characterizes both the material and existential basis of everyday life on Batam.
In The Culture of the New Capitalism, Richard Sennett (2006, 53) makes a helpful distinction between “anxiety” and “dread.” While the latter is well defined and “attaches to what one knows will happen,” the former “arises in ill-defined conditions” and “attaches to what might happen.” The Anxieties of Mobility attempts to evoke this sense of temporal insecurity and open-endedness. On the one hand, Indonesian migrants express these anxieties most vividly as they transform Batam’s place name into various forms of acronyms, of which the following are two of the most common.

*Bila Anda Tiha Akan Menyesal – When You Arrive You Will Regret It*

*Bila Anda Tabah Akan Menang – If You Endure You Will Succeed*

On the other hand, these anxieties are expressed most pervasively in moral terms through *malu*, which forms the basis for an emotional economy that connects the *kampung*, the village or home, and the *rantau*, the space of migration. By “emotional economy” I do not mean the direct exchange of emotions, but rather migrants’ emotional debt to home, which gains a particular valence in the migratory process with the intensifying temporal burden that characterizes the return of the gift. *Malu*—not the global economy—thus becomes the force that drives the *rantau*, as the demands of what it means to be a moral person haunt the migrant, keeping him or her on the move and from returning home.

By using *merantau, liar*, and *malu* to organize the ethnographic description, this book explicitly avoids taking concepts such as “globalization” or the “Singaporean economy” as a starting point for analysis. This allows us to understand Batam not strictly as a place that is “offshore” in relation to Singapore, as part of the Growth Triangle, or even as a case study for export processing zones, but rather as a node in a system of human mobility that is territorially and culturally unbounded and that draws together Indonesian factory workers (chap. 2) and prostitutes (chap. 3), Singaporean working-class tourists on Batam (chap. 4), and Indonesian migrant workers in Singapore and Malaysia (chap. 5).

The framework is thus neither defined primarily by geopolitical boundaries between nation-states nor the changing regional economy, but by the experiences of migrants and tourists themselves, thereby placing human mobility, gender, identity, and emotion in a landscape of capitalist expansion and state formation. In an important sense, therefore, The Anxieties of Mobility is an attempt to write an ethnography of globalization not as a
series of impersonal transactions, but rather in terms of relationships that bind individuals together over large distances. More generally, this positions anthropology in a world that can be reduced neither to dichotomies between the “local” and the “global,” nor to concepts such as “global culture” or “political economy.” Instead, the book develops a mode of analysis within an open system, providing “orientation, without determining where the system itself, or those who use it, go” (Fortun 2003, 186).  

PUTTING MOBILITY IN ITS PLACE

I conducted fieldwork on Batam at the height of the Asian economic crisis for thirteen months between 1998 and 1999 and five further visits between 2000 and 2007. I had initially planned to investigate the politics of HIV prevention in the Growth Triangle, but my interests shifted as Batam was affected by the crisis. While migrants arrived from across Indonesia in search of work or from Malaysia after a wave of deportations, Singaporean tourists crossed the Straits of Malacca as the Indonesian rupiah dropped to as low as one-fifth of its previous value against the Singapore dollar. During this period I rented a house in a lower middle-class area on the outskirts of the main commercial district of Nagoya, but most of my attention was focused on other places and people around the island. Because of the nature of my Indonesian research visa, and like the majority of my informants, I was not allowed to cross the border to Singapore or Malaysia. Much of my time was instead spent shuttling around Batam on a motorbike together with my research assistant trying to make sense of what was happening during the economic and political crisis.

During fieldwork, many of my informants were more mobile than I was. Batam is a node in the circulation of both capital and people, where both can suddenly appear, only to vanish days, months, or years later. Indonesian migrants I knew would suddenly leave for Malaysia and I would never see them again, or a couple of Singaporean men whom I met at one of Batam’s discos would take the first ferry to Singapore the next morning. Rather than following these circuits, however, staying in place gave me a sense of the complexity and variation of human mobility in the region.

This distinction between following informants and staying in place can suggestively be compared with that between a train and a train station. On the one hand, by taking a train from, say, Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia
to Singapore, it is possible to learn something about the kinds of people who travel this route, or the nature of the landscape between these places, and most certainly the time-consuming experience of crossing the border between the two countries. The train station, on the other hand, is an ideal place to consider not only who is traveling where, but also, for instance, what particular routes are available, who is selling tickets, how the local pickpockets work, and what the police are doing about it. Studying mobility by remaining in place, so to speak, thus offers a type of perspective that is concerned more with the social organization of mobility than with particular circuits, more with a system than a place of origin or a specific destination.

From a similar perspective, Saskia Sassen argues that certain types of places, namely global cities, illuminate the various economies and cultures in which the global economy is situated, thereby allowing us “to recover the concrete, localized processes through which globalization exists” (1998, ix–xx) and situating the channels, circuits, and flows that globalization theorists constantly grapple with. The Anxieties of Mobility shows how a concern with places like Batam, located at the periphery of the global city, offers further methodological incentives by allowing us to consider the social organization of human mobility from the vantage point of the spatial and temporal border between the “developing” and the “developed” worlds, thus highlighting both the unevenness of global economic development and human mobility.

Although ethnographically situated on Batam, this study is thus not limited to one place. Paying attention to the stories of migrants like Chandra suggests a series of links between different places—for instance, a small town in Aceh, a squatter village on Batam, and the Singaporean global city. From this perspective, the stories that people tell, and the consciousnesses they embody, articulate links, both explicitly and implicitly, to various overlapping political, cultural, economic, political, and religious systems. My concern has been to identify how particular forms of knowingness about—and practical engagement with—these systems are articulated with regard to the more specific multilocal systems in which subjects are entangled, and through this process to create an analytical space for description (Marcus 1995, 111; see also Spyer 2000). More broadly, this is a form of “post-ethnographic anthropological writing” that uses “local knowledge” but refuses “the bounds of conveniently sized localities through venturing to speak about regional relations and histories” (Thomas 1991, 316–317).
THE MOBILE SUBJECT

In 1963 anthropologist Hildred Geertz considered the position of an emerging unskilled and illiterate “urban proletariat,” as migrants moved from the villages into the rapidly expanding urban areas. Indonesia had entered the postcolonial era less than twenty years before, and Geertz claimed that a “metropolitan superculture” was developing that transcended the regional cultures of the colonial era. This new national culture—produced in cities like Jakarta—was the culture of bureaucrats and skilled workers, while the proletariat retained their links and allegiances to the villages. Little was known, she pointed out, about this much larger group of Indonesians, subjects who had not yet been transformed into citizens (H. Geertz 1963, 37–38). More than forty years later, it is evident that the urban proletariat has grown substantially in Indonesia but arguably still has not achieved citizenship, while continuing to be of limited concern to contemporary anthropologists.

Historically, merantau was “essentially a male business” (Mrázek 1994, 11) associated with particular ethnic groups. Today, however, there have been two significant changes. First, merantau has become a pan-Indonesian phenomenon as increasing numbers of Indonesians have been transformed into migrants in search of new forms of life and labor. Most people who pass through Batam are on merantau and ideally hope to gain access to the economy of development before returning home successfully. Second, unmarried women are increasingly going on merantau. This is particularly noteworthy on Batam, where migrant women have become the main sources of labor in both the electronics and prostitution industries. On the other side of the border, in Singapore and Malaysia, similar processes are evident as Indonesian women work as domestic servants for the expanding middle class, while men work illegally in plantations or construction sites.

Phrased most strongly, The Anxieties of Mobility argues that during the postcolonial era merantau has become homogenized as a national cultural form; it is no longer a heterogeneous “culture of the fringes” (Mrázek 1994, 17). This becomes particularly evident if one focuses attention on the contemporary Indonesian migrants, most of whom are part of Geertz’s urban proletariat. Becoming a perantau, or migrant, in Indonesia today appears to offer a route from the village into the economy of development and particular forms of modernity. The migrants with whom I am concerned dream of becoming part of the privileged site of the nation—the middle class—but
are most often denied, as what is initially imagined as a rite of passage does not necessarily lead to a resolution (cf. Van Gennep 1960; V. Turner 1970). Instead, Batam is a place where one learns to become a particular kind of Indonesian, one who is part of the underclass. This book thus highlights commonalities between Indonesian migrants rather than primarily addressing ethnic distinctions. This perspective is not “an apologia for the nation,” but rather an attempt “to open a space from which to imagine new geographies of identification” (Boellstorff 2002, 38). In other words, I am not concerned with describing a shift from one identity to another—from the local or ethnic to the national or global—but rather with the formation of experiences that in an important sense are lacking in closure and thus rife with uncertainty and anxiety.

THE ANXIETIES OF MOBILITY

I was surprised. People lived in houses that looked like chicken coops with roofs made out of rubber. “Why do the houses look like that? Why do people live like this?” I asked. My friend answered, “Because these ruli, rumah liar [“wild houses”; ruli is an acronym for rumah liar] will be razed soon, because they were built without permission from the government.”

Chandra (describing his initial arrival on Batam)

The Indonesian government’s identification of the liar—most notably squatter housing, premarital cohabitation, and certain types of prostitution—is by no means random, but reflects concerns with the production of legible environments (Scott 1998). In this context, liar spaces and identities come to inhabit a particular temporal space, namely the belum, or “not yet” developed or ordered. This does not mean, however, that the liar is disorganized or merely an excess of the development process. It is rather structured by alternative forms of ordering, inhabited not only by Indonesian migrants, but also by Singaporean tourists—mainly working-class men marginalized in the new economy—who travel to Batam not in search of the developed sites of tourism, but rather recreational drugs, which are banned in Singapore, or gambling and prostitution, which are heavily regulated. While many of these men develop sustained liar relationships with Indonesian
women, others come to live in liar squatter communities on Batam, which are reminiscent of the village life that has been destroyed in Singapore. The liar thus becomes not only a transnational counterpoint to the Singaporean modernity project, but also a “contact zone” (Pratt 1992; see chap. 3) for different groups of circulating populations.

Upon arrival, migrants such as Chandra expect development but encounter the liar. This is the “shock of modernity” (Watts 1992b). The liar, however, is not necessarily a space or identity that migrants can or wish to avoid. Squatter housing can be a site of community formation, pre-marital cohabitation can be considered a legitimate relationship, working as a prostitute can be a way of gaining access to the economy of development, and engaging in drug use or extramarital sex can be desired. But from the perspective of the migrant, there is usually a sense of instability or anxiety with regards to the liar; squatter housing runs the risk of being razed, prostitutes run the risk of being detained by state authorities, Islam forbids drug use and extramarital sex. Inhabiting the liar is often a temporary condition threatened by violence and associated with the underclass; there is thus generally a desire to move out of the liar toward the middle class or for liar communities to mimic the structure of the state in order to gain legitimacy (cf. Barker 1998). To recognize oneself as permanently—as opposed to temporarily—liar is to be peripheral to the Indonesian nation.

It is precisely through this process of self-recognition that malu gains its force. Generally, men are expected to respond aggressively to the experience of malu, while women are supposed to withdraw, thereby recognizing their subordinate position (Collins and Bahar 2000, 48). This book problematizes this understanding of malu and, more generally, any understanding of emotions that precedes experience (Boellstorff and Lindquist 2004). In contrast, I emphasize that malu gains particular forms of valence as migrants engage in new forms of social interaction and moral boundaries become ambiguous. The classic studies of “shame-embarrassment” in Southeast Asia by Clifford Geertz (1973) and Michelle Rosaldo (1983, 1984) argued that emotions could not be analyzed outside of the social and cultural contexts in which they were experienced, understood, and talked about. However, both grounded their ideas in ethnographic contexts in which culture, ethnicity, and language were relatively isomorphic, and in which translocal economic systems were of limited relevance. In contrast, in the world I will describe, everyday life is constituted within the frame-
work of the nation, and in tension with a transnational economy that utilizes female labor, rather than in the context of a local community where culture, place, and language appear more easily to correspond.

It is thus significant that in the rantau it is not “shame-embarrassment” in other Indonesian languages, such as the Balinese word *lek*—famously translated by Geertz (1973, 402) as “stagefright”—or the Javanese word *isin* that have become key emotional tropes, but rather *malu*, a Malay word that exists in other Indonesian languages, but more important in this context, part of the Indonesian lingua franca. This suggests the importance of moving beyond a false dichotomy between a local moral economy and a global impersonal economy, and instead highlights an analytical form that in a sense is national but also spatially unbounded. *Malu* thus appears as an emotion (and opens up a space of analysis) that describes the failures to live up to the ideals of the nation. It offers migrants an experiential trope as *Indonesians* in the shadows of the promises of *Indonesian* economic development (cf. Siegel 1997; Boellstorff 2005).22

Although economic failure is the main source of *malu* on Batam, for women, in particular, anxieties concerning sexuality are equally prevalent—for factory workers in relation to premarital sexuality, and for prostitutes with regard to selling sex for money. The large number of young women on Batam who control their own wages and move in public spaces generates rumors and gossip in the media and everyday talk.23 As Murray (1991, 127) puts it bluntly, “Sexuality is used to judge women’s morality but not men’s.” It is from this perspective that the gendered relationship between *malu*, sexuality, and Islam become especially pertinent.24 On Batam, it is said, people “forget religion” (*lupa agama*). It is a place as full of danger as much as it is of possibilities; a place where one can either “destroy” (*bancur*) or “develop” (*maju*) oneself. While destruction—understood primarily in religious terms—comes through premarital sex, drug use, or prostitution, personal development is associated with making money or particular forms of religious engagements.

It is from this perspective that it is possible to understand how migrant women sometimes wear the Muslim veil or take the drug Ecstasy in the same places and for the same reasons—reasons that are both comprehensible and explicitly moral. On Batam migrant women use these technologies in order to deal with *malu*.25 While veiling reinforces moral boundaries associated with *malu*, Ecstasy use facilitates the transgression of those same boundaries. Wearing the veil, or *jilbab*, appears to offer an identity that
protects against the dangers of social interaction in the context of migration, while Ecstasy use allows female prostitutes to more easily engage in morally ambiguous forms of transactions. Both activities, however, can be transformed into legitimate models of personal development (kemajuan), which may displace malu upon return home—one as a sign of religious insight, the other as a means for creating economic value.

Veiling and Ecstasy use are therefore both directly connected with the demands of home and the expectations of migration. In this context, it is the experience of malu, or of being identified as someone who should be malu, that becomes an organizing principle for social action and the management of appearances. Although I am by no means equating the two acts, veiling and the use of Ecstasy both facilitate survival in the “situation of duress under which gender performance always and variously occurs” (Butler 1990, 139). More generally, the following chapters will illuminate how various forms of technologies—ranging from clothing to recreational drugs—are used by migrants in a wide variety of circumstances in order to function effectively in the tension between the region’s shifting political economy and the emotional economy of the rantau. Although there are certainly varying degrees of reflexivity involved in these acts, in all situations the primary problem is not self-identity, but rather avoiding being identified as someone who does not belong.

In relation to these processes, a series of recognizable figures have emerged—and appear throughout this book—giving these anxieties a particular cultural form. In the Batamindo Industrial Park, the woman wearing the jilbab (the Muslim headscarf) offers a ubiquitous representation of the female worker in the official economy (chap. 2). Even in the late 1990s, as the recent wave of Islamization was spreading throughout the country, more than 50 percent of the women working at Batamindo wore the jilbab, a remarkable figure at the time by any standard in Indonesia.26 While government officials and factory managers have viewed this as an effect of successful religious programs, many other people on Batam understand it as a sign of deceit, a facade masking immoral behavior, rather than as a sign of piety. In contrast, the lontong, or prostitute, flaunts her body on the main streets of Nagoya wearing platform shoes, tight clothing, and heavy makeup, literally embodying Batam as an “island of sin” (chap. 3). Moving in the shadows of these worlds is the bronces, the long-haired and tattooed man who subsists on the money of women (chap. 3). Reminiscent of the preman (e.g., Ryter 1998), or thug, who is more frequently associated with
crime, the bronces is a predator who brings to light the particular gendered anxieties of Batam, where women support men financially and engage in sex outside the context of the family. The Singaporean man who travels to Batam to gamble and buy sex and drugs makes explicit the island’s ambiguous position in relation to a larger world (chap. 4). Representing either unambiguous chastity or unbridled sexuality, the jilbab-wearing woman, the lontong, the bronces, and the Singaporean man should be understood in relation to the feminization of labor in the rantau. In Batam’s moral landscape, these figures become sites for allocating responsibility (cf. White 2000, 62). Finally, travelling in the opposite direction—toward Malaysia or Singapore—the Indonesian transnational migrant further illuminates the gendered organization of migrant labor throughout the region and the various channels that become available in an economy of border crossing (chap. 5).

**MOVING BEYOND CRISIS**

The Asian economic crisis of 1997 initiated a period of dramatic transformation in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. After the initial collapse of the Thai baht, the Indonesian rupiah followed during the latter half of 1997. The ensuing economic crisis in Indonesia led President Suharto to step down in May 1998, thereby formally ending the authoritarian New Order regime that had ruled for over thirty years and setting the stage for a proliferating political landscape characterized not only by reformasi (democratization) and political decentralization, but also by spectacular forms of violence, including religious warfare in the Maluku Islands, the Ninja killings in East Java, and the Bali bombings.28 These changes have had profound effects both in Indonesia and on scholarship dealing with Indonesia. In the post-9/11 security environment, a concern with violent events and radical Islam, personified by cleric Abu Bakar Bashir and the organization Jemaah Islamiyah, has come to dominate public discourse throughout Southeast Asia, despite the limited support that the acts and ideals associated with them have among the vast majority of the populations in these countries.

This book argues that these terms of debate risk displacing enduring problems for the vast majority of Indonesians, who continue to struggle as they did during the Suharto era.29 For these groups—who ultimately are the historical agents of this book—the expansion of radical Islam and the forms
of violence associated with it are spectacles primarily experienced through the mass media, literally at a distance. Together with informants on Batam, I watched many of these events unfold on television. Although there was often a degree of awe with the effects of the bombs in Jakarta and Bali, or the power of the charismatic Abu Bakar Bashir, there was more noticeably incomprehension rather than identification with the perpetrators.

This is not to deny that the economic crisis, in particular, affected Batam (see chap. 1), primarily through a dramatic increase in migrants who were lured by rumors of employment. Arguably, however, these processes did not create a radical historical disjunction, but rather accentuated the importance of the concepts this book is concerned with, namely *merantau*, *liar*, and *malu*. On Batam economic and political crises led to increasing flows of *perantau*, or migrants, the dramatic expansion of *liar* housing and prostitution, and intensifying feelings of *malu* for migrants who struggled to survive in a context of extreme competition. Thus like the economic development of Batam, the crisis and its aftereffects have clarified particular processes already at work.

In writing this book, I have struggled with closure and attempts at generating a kind of coherence in an area and era characterized by dramatic change. In the end I settle for an “ethic of openness” (Fortun 2003) in which *merantau*, *malu*, and *liar* form a conceptual framework. This allows one to consider how the landscape of human mobility is organized throughout the region. The concepts do not neatly overlap, since they identify significantly different forms: movement, identity, place, and emotion. But considering them in relation to one another creates the possibility of describing, analyzing, and writing about processes and landscapes that become evident through Batam. *The Anxieties of Mobility* thus attempts to create an alternative topography of Southeast Asia that is defined primarily by the mobility of Indonesian migrants and Singaporean tourists, rather than the force of the global economy.

Chapter 1 sets the stage for the chapters that follow via a description of the historical trajectory through which Batam has been transformed from an obscure island located “between” different centers of commerce and power into a major development project and part of a transnational economic zone. In turn, the chapter maps the changing regional forms of mobility and the transformation of space on Batam, thus beginning to describe the place that the migrants and tourists who are the subjects of this book come to inhabit for a period of time.
Chapter 2 takes as its starting point the Batamindo Industrial Park, a quintessential example of a spatial and economic global type—the development enclave—and the liar squatter communities that surround it. Moving between the factory floor and the squatter communities, and by focusing on the gendered relationship between merantau, liar, and malu, the chapter shows how the enclave is “diluted” and best understood in relation to the social world that it inhabits. It thus begins to map a broader emotional economy of merantau that takes further shape in the coming chapters.

Chapter 3 shifts ethnographic attention to Ozon and a different example of a transnational space—the disco. Centered on liar, or freelance Indonesian female prostitutes without pimps, the chapter moves from women’s engagement with the drug Ecstasy and Singaporean clients in the disco to their relationships with boyfriends, children, and other family members. Highlighting the tensions between a short-term engagement with the liar and the long-term demands of merantau, the chapter describes the common emotional economy of the factory workers and prostitutes, one that places them between the demands of home and the promises of development.

Chapter 4 returns to Ozon, shifting focus to the Singaporean working-class men who travel to Batam not to visit the official tourist sites, but rather to spaces and relationships that are identified by the Indonesian state as liar. These men lead various forms of lives, some partake of recreational drugs and sex, others engage in long-term relationships with Indonesian women, and a few live in liar housing that appears reminiscent of a village life that has been destroyed in Singapore. This chapter shows how these men, increasingly marginalized in Singapore’s knowledge-based economy, travel to Batam in order engage in a world of “fantasy”—as one of the men puts it—that remains beyond their reach in Singapore.

Chapter 5 shifts attention to a different form of cross-border mobility through an emphasis on the “immigration industry” that facilitates the movement of Indonesian migrants across the border to Malaysia and Singapore in a context of intensifying state regulation. These forms of circulation highlight the ambiguous boundaries between “legality” and “illegality” and, in particular, the exchangeability of female labor within the Growth Triangle. It is in this context that The Anxieties of Mobility becomes most explicit, as the tensions between the demands of merantau and state regulation lead to intensifying forms of violence.

Finally, chapter 6 offers not so much closure as a way forward. Taking as its starting point an ambiguous structure being built on Batam’s Stress
Beach in 2003—a structure suggesting both boom and bust—this conclusion highlights the form of temporality—the belum, or “not yet”—and the related open-ended circuits of mobility that have formed the trajectory for description throughout this book. In so doing, *The Anxieties of Mobility* reaffirms the critical importance of ethnography as a method that reduces the gap between description and theory in studies of globalization and social life, more generally, thus positioning anthropology as a discipline at the center of social inquiry.