Living with Uncertainty:
The Experience of Undocumented Indonesian Migrant Workers in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

A thesis presented to
the faculty of
the Center for International Studies of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts

Faishol Adib
June 2010

© 2010 Faishol Adib. All Rights Reserved.
This thesis titled
Living with Uncertainty:
The Experience of Undocumented Indonesian
Migrant Workers in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

by
FAISHOL ADIB

has been approved for
the Center for International Studies by

_______________________________

Jieli Li
Associate Professor of Sociology

_______________________________

Thomas A. Smucker
Director, International Development Studies

_______________________________

Daniel Weiner
Executive Director, Center for International Studies
ABSTRACT

ADIB, FAISHOL, M.A., June 2010, International Development Studies

Living with Uncertainty: The Experience of Undocumented Indonesian Migrant Workers in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (120 pp.)

Director of Thesis: Jieli Li

The purpose of this study is to examine the living conditions of undocumented Indonesian migrant workers, or IMWs, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In particular, this research studies how undocumented IMWs settled and survived in this city. Three levels of questions are answered in this research. The first level relates to IMWs’ life background before coming to the USA. The second level of questions examines their working conditions as undocumented migrant workers. Finally, the third level of questions scrutinizes the community life of undocumented migrant workers in Philadelphia. Qualitative research methodology, especially ethnographic, is used in this study, and it employs two kinds of interviews: semi-structured interviews and unstructured ones. Besides interviews, the author participates in the workers’ regular activities on weekends and holidays, visits their workplaces and stays in their apartments.

This research finds that the author’s informants struggle to face uncertainties in their life because of three situations. First, they face the challenge of settling in a new country without any established contacts. Second are the uncertainties they face in their jobs and housing. Third is uncertainty about when and how they will return to Indonesia to reunite with their families. The author concludes there are three factors that make IMWs remain in Philadelphia, although they face these uncertainties in their life. The
factors are the ability to earn higher wages, the existence of mosque Al-Falah as a community center and more hope for the future after working several years in the USA.

Approved: ____________________________________________

Jieli Li

Associate Professor of Sociology
The highest dedication is

for my wife, Lindra Darnela,

and my daughter, Nathaniela Nabiha Alifa.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe my deepest gratitude to those who made this thesis possible. First of all, I would like to thank my thesis chair, Dr. Jieli Li, whose encouragement, supervision and support from the preliminary to the concluding level enabled me to accomplish this project, Prof. Elizabeth Fuller Collins who patiently read every single paragraph of my thesis, and Dr. Yeong-Hyun Kim who gave me critical feedback.

I am grateful to all the people in Philadelphia: Aditya Setyawan, Ahmad Rafiq, Achmad Munjid, and all my informants who shared their experiences with me. I thank the Ford Foundation for giving me a scholarship to pursue a master’s degree, and International Development Studies, especially Dr. Thomas A. Smucker as my academic advisor, who supported my field research and thesis defense.

I am indebted to many of my colleagues who supported me in finishing this thesis. Tolhas Damanik and Khariroh who first introduced me to the Indonesian community in Philadelphia, Eny Winarti as my discussion partner, and all Indonesian communities and all my classmates in Athens for the warmest friendship and family. I also thank my editors: Jennifer McArdle, Patricia Black, Preston Silvey, Jamie Smith and all the staff at the Student Writing Center.

I would like to show my gratitude to my parents who gave me the moral support I required. May Allah reward them with the best of rewards and grant them mercy. Finally, I would like to thank to my wife, Lindra Darnela, for her love, patience, support, sacrifice and deep understanding, and my daughter, Nathaniela Nabiha Alifa, who always makes me smile and happy.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Pictures</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>list of Maps</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Introduction</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Background</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginalization of Undocumented Workers in the USA</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants, Religious Communities and Supporting Group</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggles of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Philadelphia</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Perspectives</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Undocumented Migrant Worker</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories of Settlement</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories of Survival</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual Frame of Reference</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology and Research Site</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outline of the Thesis</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Locality</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Area</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Philadelphia</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Indonesian Community</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masjid Al-Falah</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Life</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Life Course</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Education and Jobs</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for Coming to the USA</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How They Managed to Get to the USA</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Table of Contents

A Case Study: Lina ............................................................................................................... 56

Chapter 4: Working Conditions .................................................................................. 63
How They Gained Jobs ................................................................................................. 63
Employment Agencies ................................................................................................. 64
Conditions in the Workplace ......................................................................................... 67
Some Benefits .............................................................................................................. 72
Job Satisfaction ............................................................................................................ 75
A Case Study: Bono ....................................................................................................... 76

Chapter 5: Community Life ......................................................................................... 81
Strengthening Community ........................................................................................... 81
Empowerment .............................................................................................................. 86
Escaping Work Lives ................................................................................................... 88
A Case Study: Bagas ..................................................................................................... 90

Chapter 6 Discussion ................................................................................................. 98
Living with Uncertainty ............................................................................................... 98
  Uncertainty of Starting Life ..................................................................................... 99
  Uncertainty in Employment and Housing ............................................................. 101
  Uncertainty about Returning Home .......................................................... 104
What Persuades Them to Remain in Philadelphia .................................................... 105
Conclusion ................................................................................................................. 108

References ................................................................................................................. 112
Appendix A: List of Questions .................................................................................. 117
Appendix B: Map of Philadelphia ............................................................................. 118
Appendix C: Map of South Philadelphia ................................................................. 119
Appendix D: Map of Indonesian Community ......................................................... 120
LIST OF PICTURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Picture</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mosque Al-Falah</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>South Philadelphia Neighborhood</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Job Advertisement at Kabar Kilat Bulletin</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Machines in Plastic Factory</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Reading Yasin Together</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Memoir Workshops</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF MAPS

Map 1: Map of Philadelphia .................................................................118
Map 2: Map of South Philadelphia ..................................................119
Map 3: Map of Indonesian Community .........................................120
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The first time I visited Philadelphia was from March 23 to March 29, 2009. I stayed in my friend’s apartment on 17th street, South Philadelphia, where I accidently met a male Indonesian, Roni, whom I talked to about his experiences surviving in the city. Later, I realized that he was an undocumented worker who came to the USA on a tourist visa. During my visit, my friend invited me to visit Masjid (mosque) Al-Falah, located near his apartment. In this mosque, I met other Indonesians, and some of them were undocumented workers whom I talked to about their experiences working in the USA. I also visited Warung Surabaya—the first Indonesian restaurant in Philadelphia—Pendawa Café, and other Indonesian stores. Before leaving the city, I visited Bagas, another undocumented worker who worked in a wood factory in New Jersey. It was a wonderful experience meeting with some Indonesian fellows in this city. This moment reminded me of when I visited Hong Kong in May 2005 to meet Indonesian workers. Both situations in Hong Kong and Philadelphia made me realize how Indonesian migrant workers had to separate from their families in Indonesia to gain a better life.¹

This thesis describes the lives of some Indonesians who migrate to the USA, specifically Philadelphia, to pursue better lives. The number of IMWs in Philadelphia is difficult to calculate. The 2000 U.S. census states that there were 37,167 Indonesians in this country: they live in California (16,388), New York (2,433), Texas (1,771), Washington, D.C. (1,242), Maryland (1,108), Virginia (1,095), Ohio (1,061), New Jersey (1,020), and Pennsylvania (536) (Garoogian, 2005). This data of course does not represent the real number of Indonesians in the USA. Based on the estimation of the General Consulate of the Republic Indonesia in New York, there were approximately 3,000 Indonesians in Philadelphia in 2007. This figure is based on the number of Indonesians who registered in the General Consulate office for renewing their passports (Widjanarko, 2007, p. 33).

¹ Personal field note.
This research examines the living conditions of Indonesian migrant workers (IMWs) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA. One of the critical issues of IMWs in Philadelphia is that most of them are undocumented workers. This means that they work in Philadelphia without a work permit or other legal or official documents. They came to the USA, usually with a tourist visa, for six months and then look for jobs with the assistance of their families or friends. After finding a job, they usually stay for five years until their passport expiration date or even longer.

The focus of this research is to learn how IMWs manage living as undocumented workers. Referring to the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, the word “settle” means “make one’s home in a place,” and the word “survive” means “continue to live or exist.” As suggested in this definition, this research examines the living conditions of undocumented workers who are struggling to settle and survive in Philadelphia.

There are three levels of questions that will be addressed in this research, to answer how undocumented workers settled and survived in Philadelphia. The first relates to the life or background of the IMWs before coming to the USA, such as social status and occupation before coming to the host country and their motivations and connections that allow them to come to the USA. Some of the undocumented workers came directly from Indonesia to this city and others had worked in other cities in California and Texas and moved to Philadelphia for better jobs and wages. The second level of question examines the working conditions of undocumented workers; how they settled and survived in Philadelphia and dealt with unstable jobs. They faced risks, such as having to stay home when the demand for their companies’ products decreased and they would not
get a wage or being laid off if their companies faced a worse situation. When they were laid off, they had to find another job. Those who could not find another job would move to other cities or return to Indonesia. Finally, the third level of question scrutinizes the community lives of undocumented workers in Philadelphia. This level explores how they spent their weekends and holidays. Not all undocumented IMWs have regular holidays or weekends off, but most do. Do they engage with other Indonesian fellows on the weekends and holidays to strengthen the community of Indonesians in Philadelphia? Do they have another community besides the Indonesian community? How do these communities contribute to their struggle to survive in this city?

Personal Background

I was first introduced to migration issues when I realized that some of my relatives were working abroad. My uncles and aunts decided to work in Saudi Arabia as drivers and domestic workers in 1995. Some of them are still working there as I write this thesis. They usually go with a two-year contract, but stay longer. After several years working there, they return to Indonesia to build new houses, to operate their own businesses, or to take a couple years off and then go back to Saudi Arabia. This led me to be concerned with migrant worker problems for the first time. I wondered why they decided to work abroad when they had never gone overseas before? What were their working conditions abroad? Did they get what they wished for?

Most puzzling, I wondered: Why did some of them go to Saudi Arabia several times? It seemed that they returned to Indonesia when they had earned sufficient money
from Saudi Arabia. Then, they went back to Saudi Arabia when they had spent all the money for their family needs in their villages. This cycle continues up until now. Their life seemed to be without certainty. Their wages apparently could not provide them a sustainable life after finishing their work contracts. I wondered if this situation was also faced by other IMWs. I was doubtful that they enjoyed their life, because they were separated from their family when they were working in Saudi Arabia. I thought that this was the only motivation why they worked overseas: to gain a better life because they failed to get a good job and a good salary in their own country, Indonesia.

My concern with migration problems brought me to be active in Migrant CARE—an NGO concerned with migrant workers protection—in May of 2005. I worked with Migrant CARE for almost two years and found that there were more than 5 million Indonesians working abroad in foreign countries, including Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Japan. They decided to work in these countries where economic growth had increased rapidly so that they needed overseas workers who were paid higher wages than in Indonesia. However, not all of these workers were legal. Some were undocumented workers in destination countries, especially in Malaysia. The reason was that the Indonesian government had an inadequate system for migrant worker recruitment. This system was burdened by an ineffective bureaucracy, an expensive recruitment fee, and insufficient education of migrant worker candidates about crucial skills and information necessary for migrant work. That was why some people had chosen to be undocumented migrant workers. Of course, it was not a good solution
because they became vulnerable to trafficking, both on the way to destination countries and within destination countries.

Working as the Coordinator of Advocacy, I realized that lack of legal status and trafficking were not the only problems faced by IMWs. They also faced physical and sexual harassment, the death penalty, and unpaid labor. I felt deep sorrow and compassion for the many difficulties, injustice, and hardship that IMWs suffered abroad. Even when they worked based on a signed contract, their rights were not fully acknowledged.

When I got a scholarship from the Ford Foundation in 2007 to attend a Master’s program, I was excited to have an opportunity to strengthen my knowledge on migration issues. Prior to my coming, I planned to study male IMWs, because most of the previous research on IMWs was focused on women. My friends, Tolhas Damanik and Khariroh, also Ford Fellows, told me that they had met IMWs from a community in Philadelphia. They suggested that I do my research on IMWs in Philadelphia. I thank them for that information. My first visit to Philadelphia strengthened my wish to do research on IMWs in that city.

Literature Review

*Marginalization of Undocumented Workers in the USA*

There are some in-depth reports and research on undocumented workers in the USA. Authors examine this topic from various perspectives, considering for instance, workplace dangers, wage differences, gender trends and legal concerns. All these studies
confirm that undocumented workers in the USA face difficult conditions in their workplaces and struggle to live with insufficient earning or facilities. This condition, in some degree, is similar with undocumented IMWs in Philadelphia, as I observed in my research.

Two in-depth reports were written by journalists of the New York Times. Finder (1995) reported that there were around 2,000 sweatshops operating openly throughout New York City. Workers were paid in cash, without observing the minimum wage, overtime, holidays or any other benefits. Since they were undocumented workers, they did not complain about this poor situation because they were afraid that their boss would dismiss them. Language barriers also prevented them from pursuing their proper rights fulfilled. The second report detailed the lives of undocumented workers in Los Angeles, where hundreds of thousands of undocumented workers can easily be found. One of them was Ruben, an undocumented worker from Mexico, who was working as a day worker and standing on corners waiting to be hired. Rayner (1996) reported that:

At 7:30 in the morning, he stands on a street corner beneath a Bank of America sign that towers above the parking lot of the 7-Eleven. He spoons noodles into his mouth as a flatbed truck pulls in with two workers already in the back. The driver buys a Snapple and the truck heads out again, up into Topanga Canyon (n.p.).

Ruben and other undocumented workers earned around $7 or $8 an hour while documented workers would get $20 per hour.

Beside the in-depth journalistic reports, some scholars have conducted some research on undocumented workers in the USA. Research on this issue is diverse. Three research studies focus on examining the experience of injury, illness, and disabilities of undocumented workers (Walter, Bourgois, & Loinaz, 2004; Walter, Bourois, Loinaz, &
Schillinger, 2002; Guthrie & Taseff, 2007). The researchers described how undocumented workers address this problem because they do not have health insurances from their employers. One of their findings is that the status of undocumented workers made it difficult for them to gain health insurance benefits similarly to documented workers.

Other research on this issue examines different aspects. Batiz (1999) compared wages between legal and undocumented Mexican workers in the USA. One of his findings is that both male and female legal Mexican workers gained higher wages than that of male and female undocumented workers. The average hourly salary rate for male legal workers was 41.8 percent higher than that of undocumented workers, while 40.8 percent of legal women earned higher wages than those of undocumented women. Sarathy and Casanova (2008) compared guest workers and undocumented workers in the forest industry in the USA. One of their interesting findings is that both of these groups were exploited in their workplace. Their recommendations to decrease this exploitation were to increase monitoring of labor abuses, to conduct inspections in the workplace, and to establish better communication between land managers and the Department of Labor.

Research on undocumented workers does not always examine male labor, but there are some that scrutinize undocumented female workers in the USA. While Seif (2008) examines undocumented women farm workers as agents of democracy through their participation in electoral mobilization, Meghani and Eckenwiler (2009) studied undocumented female workers as caregivers in the USA. Once again, while male undocumented workers face human rights’ violations, female undocumented workers also
meet the same conditions in their workplace.

It is not surprising that most of the research on undocumented workers in the USA focuses on Mexican workers because they represent the majority of undocumented workers in the USA. For example, Hanson (2006) reviews current research on *Illegal Migration from Mexico to the United States*. The author examines various issues of illegal migration from Mexico, such as the supply and demand of the workers and wage differences between Americans and Mexicans. The author also examines law enforcement of the U.S. laws on regulating illegal migrants in the country. One of his findings is that some Mexican workers came to USA illegally and then attempted to gain permanent residence visa via sponsorship by a U.S. family member.

This research on undocumented workers, which was explained above, describes how they struggle with their difficult conditions in their workplace, and how they get benefits from their jobs. It is quite clear that their benefits are different compared to what documented workers accepted. For example, undocumented workers receive lower wages and also do not enjoy health insurances from their companies. This is certainly a condition that displeases undocumented workers; and to address this situation, some of them attempt to deal with their status as undocumented workers by proposing to the USA government to be permanent residents that give them better opportunity to take more benefits in this country.
Some scholars have researched extensively on immigrants and religious communities in the USA. Religious communities are usually established after places of religious practices or worship are founded by their members. Bankston and Zhou (2000) found that places of religious practices are founded “after the group members had established themselves in housing.” After finding housing, an immigrant’s next priority is establishing a place of worship. Hirschman (2004) noted that most major cities and small cities in the USA have seen more Islamic mosques and Buddhist and Hindu temples being built during the last few decades. This reflects that immigrants need to engage with their fellows when they have satisfied their daily needs, such as housing, and worship is a place where they can socialize with other people they can relate to. Soon after the places of religious practices or worships are founded, their members utilize the places for many purposes.

A function of places of religious practices is helping immigrants to adapt to new environments. Foley and Hoge (2007) found that “Immigrant worship communities provide important resources for adaptation to the difficult circumstance of immigration.” This adaptation includes psychological, moral, cultural refuges and also social capital for their members. Besides immigrants, Bankston and Zhou (1995) found that religious participation in worship also helped adolescences of Vietnamese-Americans in adaptation processes with American society.

Maintaining cultural traditions and faiths are another function of worship. Abusharaf (1998) found that immigrants utilized worships to maintain their religious
practices in host countries where they live. This is seen when Min (2006) describes how Korean immigrants celebrate their traditional holidays, such as New Years and Thanksgiving, in Korean churches where they serve their traditional foods and wear traditional dresses. Two major national holidays, the Independence Commemoration Day and Independence Day, are also celebrated in their church.

Besides adaptation and maintaining cultural traditions and faiths, worship also offers social services. As found by Min (1992), counseling and educational services were provided by Korean ethnic churches for their members with marital and juvenile concerns. Further, a number of clerical and lay opportunities were provided by the church for their members who had problems in their life. Hurh and Kim (1990) found that Koreans in the United States recognized Korean ethnic churches as social, cultural, and educational centers where the churches accepted Koreans from various social statuses, sexes, and ages without any discrimination. Thus, Korean ethnic churches were more preferable places for Koreans in the United States to engage and gather with each other than other Korean ethnic organizations, such as alumni associations, sport clubs and ethnic business associations.

This review shows that places of religious practices offer several functions for their members who participate in their activities. Hirschman (2004) formulated the functions of worships into searching for refuge, respectability, and resources. Refuges refer to situations where worship assists its members in adapting to the new environment where they live, separate from their families, language, and communities in their home countries. Respectability refers to conditions where worship is an inclusive place for
every member from different social-economic statuses, backgrounds, and sexes, who can meet and help each other without any discrimination. Finally, resources refer to circumstances where immigrants can gain information about job opportunities, housing, and others in worships.

*Struggles of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Philadelphia*

Some in-depth journalistic reports and academic research focuses on Indonesian migrant workers in Philadelphia. The journalistic reports were written by journalists of the GATRA, a national newsmagazine in Indonesia. They explored the experience of some Indonesian immigrants who were seeking political asylum from the U.S. government. Prambadi (2004) reported that political asylum seekers did not always provide the true facts about their condition or reasons why they should be given asylum. For example, one asylum seeker said that he was mistreated in Indonesia because he was a member of religious minority. Prambadi (2004) described instances when Indonesian immigrants were caught by the FBI due to their illegal activities helping Indonesian immigrants get political asylum from the U.S. government. These immigrants helped asylum seekers by manipulating stories and documents.

There are two academic studies on Indonesian migrant workers in Philadelphia, both written by Setiyawan, as master’s theses for two different universities. The first thesis studied “social and cultural identity development and community building” among Indonesian immigrants in Philadelphia. Employing an ethnographic method, the author described the problems immigrants, mostly ethnic Chinese Indonesians, faced in
establishing their cultural identity. For example, ethnic Chinese Indonesians who lived in Philadelphia’s Chinatown neighborhood could not engage with their Chinese fellows because they did not speak Mandarin. This research also examined the establishment of business centers and places of worship in South Philadelphia as a part of way these immigrants established their communities (Setiyawan, 2005).

The second thesis discussed the process of the community development among Indonesian immigrants in South Philadelphia. The author explained how ethnic Chinese Indonesian immigrants, moved from Philadelphia’s Chinatown neighborhood to establish a community of Indonesian immigrants in South Philadelphia. They moved to get cheaper apartments that could accommodate newly arriving Indonesian immigrants. The community faced a challenge after 9/11, when the U.S. government increased its monitoring of immigrants (Setiyawan, 2007).

These journalistic reports and academic research show the problems faced by Indonesian immigrants in Philadelphia in relation to political asylum and community development. However, they do not show how Indonesian immigrants struggle with uncertain jobs that place them at risk of being laid off. In addition, they focus on ethnic Chinese Indonesians who are the majority of Indonesian workers in Philadelphia.

There are important reasons for conducting further research on undocumented IMWs in Philadelphia. The first is that this research focuses on Muslim Indonesian workers. Secondly, this research fills a gap in the literature on IMWs by focusing on the problems they face in their work situation. One goal of the research is to provide a framework for further research to improve how the Indonesian government addresses
problems of undocumented IMWs in the United States. This research should also increase public awareness of IMWs’ problems and draw the attention of Indonesian NGOs to IMWs in the USA. Based on my experience working in migrant advocacy, there was limited attention, or maybe no more attention, to IMWs in the States.

Theoretical Perspectives

Defining Undocumented Migrant Worker

The term “undocumented worker” is usually used interchangeably with the terms undocumented immigrant, illegal immigrant, unauthorized migrant, illegal alien, undocumented alien, and illegal migrant. Every term should have a different meaning and consequence, but sometimes is not an easy task to distinguish these terms. For example: “Does the term “undocumented” have the same meaning as “illegal?” Does the term “worker” mean the same as “immigrant”? It is important to pay attention to the negative or positive connotations of the term that a writer chooses to use.

Vargas (2001) categorizes undocumented Mexican workers in two groups. The first is the temporary agricultural worker who is referred to as an Undocumented Temporary Agricultural Worker (UTAW). This group includes Mexican citizens who live in rural areas and work as farmer laborers. They cross the border of the U.S. to seek jobs in the agricultural sector for a couple of weeks, months, or years. When they finish their jobs, they return to their country. The second group is comprised of undocumented workers who continue dwelling in the U.S. This group is willing to work in any field, but
they usually seek jobs in the service division, for example as a dishwasher in a Mexican
restaurant. The second group plans to settle in the USA (pp. 21-26).

Faller (2004) explains that an individual is called as an undocumented immigrant
when the immigrant comes to the USA and the country has not given authorization for
their stay. The term undocumented immigrant also refers to people who enter the country
legally but overstay their authorized time (p. 13). This definition is similar with the
definition of U.S. immigration law, which defines immigrants as undocumented when the
Citizenship and Immigration Services do not give them authorization to work and live,
but they remain working and living in the USA. Immigrants who overstay the permission
periods are also called undocumented immigrants (Jakubowski, 2007, p. 511).

This research uses the term “undocumented migrant worker” to refer to
Indonesian workers who came to the USA legally with tourist, business, or other official
visas and who have overstayed their visas limits. I employ the term “undocumented” to
refer to workers who gained jobs without needing to provide legal or official documents.
I also employ this term rather than “illegal” in order to avoid the negative association that
might arise with the term “illegal.” I use the term "migrant worker" to refer to groups of
workers overseas. I also use the term “migrant worker” rather than “immigrant” because
this term can refer to “a foreign-born individual who has been admitted to reside in the
USA, also called a Legal Permanent Resident, or LPR” (Faller, 2004, p. 13). Some of the
undocumented workers I met in my field research said that they did not plan to reside in
this country. Thus, the term “migrant worker” is more appropriate than “immigrant.”
Theories of Settlement

The term “settlement” is used differentially in various fields. In the context of migrant workers, one of the uses of this term is to explain settlement patterns of immigrants when they settle in a foreign country. Newbold and Achjar (2002) examined “the choices of the intended destination” among new immigrants in the USA between 1980 and 1990. One of their findings was that metropolitan cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Boston, and Miami attracted more new first-time immigrants. For first time immigrants who are not able to settle in such cities, an alternative was metropolitan cities such as Atlanta and Phoenix that have a lesser economic advantages. Another interesting finding is that the destination of new arrivals was influenced by their families or friends who came earlier, so, for example, Chinatown is an intended destination for new Chinese arrivals.

Baird, Adelman, Reid, and Jaret (2008) found that the arrival destination of new immigrants to the USA changed from 1990-2000. Instead of settling first in gateway cities like New York City and Los Angeles, new immigrants during this period settled in “the second-tier global cities, such as Atlanta and Dallas” (p. 326). The authors also examined the Balkanization phenomenon. This refers to a condition where new immigrants first settle in gateway cities, while the native-born of these cities move to other cities that offer better circumstances, such as fewer inhabitants and more economic opportunity.

had limited educational background chose gateway cities where they could find low skill jobs, such as taxi drivers, parking lot attendants, restaurant waiters, and factory laborers. The existence of relatives or friends in a city was another reason why African immigrants chose the place of first settlement. African immigrants who came to the USA earlier provided a home and assistance with adjustment to new arrivals which made it easier for them to begin their life in a new country.

What we can learn from the research on the settlement patterns of new immigrants in the USA is that the patterns generally refer to two conditions. The new immigrants tend to come to gateway cities. Cities like New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and San Francisco attract new immigrants from around the world because they already are the home of many immigrants and they offer more economic opportunities. The cities not only welcome educated immigrants, they also offer opportunities for immigrants with low educational levels. Another pattern is that new immigrants prefer to settle in cities where their family, relatives, or friends came earlier.

Theories of Survival

Being an undocumented migrant worker is not easy. When the workers come to a new country, they must deal with new environments, different cultures, and different religions. After adapting to new conditions and getting jobs, they realize that they can only get unstable, temporary jobs. This leads to the question: How do they deal with unstable jobs? The next problem the undocumented workers face is how to fit in with local communities. Will they engage with new communities? This is a part of a survival
strategy.

Dominguez and Watkins (2003) have studied how low-income mothers survive and maintain social mobility by utilizing the social networks to gain capital. Studying African-American and Latin-American women in the Boston area, the authors found that there are four main sources of social support networks: family, friends, husbands or boyfriends, and social service agencies (p. 117). The younger mothers mainly utilize family-based networks to survive in their communities. For example, their families take care of their children when they work. Friends-based networks are utilized by mothers who did not have a strong and large family network. Friends not only offer emotional support, they also provide financial support. The last network is social service agencies, such as childcare centers, clinics, and community centers, through which the mothers gain food, childcare, and jobs. While Families, friends, and husbands or boyfriends are called “strong ties,” social service agencies are called “weak ties” (p. 121).

Andrews, Ybarra, and Miramontes (2002) found similar patterns of family networks as Dominguez and Watkins (2003). The authors found that family-based networks play an important role among undocumented Mexican immigrant women in the Pacific Northwest. They suggest that powerful and multifaceted family networks among Mexican immigrants are due to the long history of migration and these networks support undocumented Mexican immigrant women to settle and survive in the region (p. 445).

Vigdor (2009) proposes a survival strategy called “the assimilation bond.” He argues that illegal immigrants should become legal residents and attempt to assimilate with the American society. To be legal residents, they would have to pay a sum of money
to the USA government, but the money will be refunded by the government if the immigrants achieve a certain level in English language training courses (p. 168). Vigdor believes if illegal immigrants have good English language skills, they can integrate with the American society and have a better life in this country. Seemingly, “the assimilation bond” is a good proposal for illegal immigrants.

**Dual Frame of Reference**

New undocumented immigrants have hope in their host countries, such as the USA, to pursue a better life than they could obtain in their home countries. One theory that can be used to interpret their hope and expectations in their host countries is the dual frame of reference (Orozco, 1989). This theory explains how new immigrants consider their hope and reality they face in host countries and how they negotiate these dual perspectives. Reese (2001) found that the home country “remains a treasured source of moral values” to deal with these dual perspectives of the dual frame of reference (p. 470).

The spirit to gain a better life in host countries encourages immigrants to confront uncertainty and endure the risk of travel and the unknown as they fly, travel by ship, or even drive across borders to new host countries where they may have never visited before. Flying to host countries is common and the easiest way to reach other countries. However, there are many, such as the people of Fuzhou, China, who make the very challenging journey across the world by ship all the way to New York (Guest, 2003). Furthermore, to reach host countries through *El Brinco* (the jump) is even more difficult and risky, because these individuals have to pay fees to whomever helps them, as seen
with many Mexican immigrants who cross Mexican – USA borders and are assisted by smugglers (Vargas, 2001). These undocumented immigrants are willing to risk everything in order to reach host countries where they will achieve their goals.

Once new undocumented immigrants reach the USA, they will soon realize that their goals are not always easy to obtain. Many of them find obstacles to their dreams of success in their new host countries. Mahler (1995) found that El Salvador immigrants had to struggle to improve their socio-economic status in the USA, and they faced some handicaps: such as “undocumented status, language and cultural differences, residential segregation, constricted employment opportunities, and outright prejudice and hostility” (p. 215). These handicaps were a stark contrast to what they had imagined about the USA before their arrival. They thought that they would gain jobs quickly and earn money for their daily needs and for their families in El Salvador.

Living as an undocumented worker is not an easy task for new immigrants. They have to face some risks, and the most serious being that the host countries’ governments will deport them to their native countries. Chavez (1998) found that undocumented immigrants in the USA are offered two options if they are arrested. The first one is that they are asked to return voluntarily to their native countries. This return will not be counted as a formal deportation, and will give them better possibilities in returning to the USA at a later time, especially for temporary migrants. The second option is that they can propose a formal hearing where they have the opportunity to ask an immigration judge to get a postponement of deportation. Chavez (1998) noted that these appeal cases are hard to win. Oftentimes their requests are rejected by the immigration judge and they have to
go back to their home countries formally, making it them difficult for them to return to the USA in the future (pp. 163-164).

Some handicaps and risks, faced by undocumented immigrants, do not always encourage them to return to their native countries even if life in their new country is difficult. They remain permanently or temporarily in their new host countries, such as the USA, to achieve their goals despite many hardships. Chavez (1994) found that some undocumented Mexican and Central American immigrants came to the USA without contacts, friends, or relatives already living in the country. This obstacle only encouraged them to remain longer in their host country, in order to obtain social and economic networks overtime. These networks connected them to the larger American society and persuaded them to remain in the USA. Sanders, Nee, and Sernau (2002) noted that connecting into host societies can be established through “the social capital properties of ethnic networks” (p. 303). They argued that the ethnic networks assisted immigrants to access a metropolitan labor market. Soon immigrants obtain jobs in this market and they can incorporate “more fully into the social mainstream by increasing their economic opportunities while engaging them in a wider slice of society” (p. 305).

These reviews, as explained above, show how immigrants address dual perspectives of the dual frame of reference, and how they keep their hopes alive in order to achieve their goals in their host countries where they dream of pursuing a better life. They realize that they will endure many obstacles and risks in their daily lives. However, these obstacles and risks do not change their wish to obtain a better socio-economic status in their host countries. They address these problems by connecting to their ethnic
networks which can help them incorporate into the greater community of American society through a metropolitan labor market.

Methodology and Research Site

This thesis is based on my field observations in conducting qualitative ethnographic research, utilizing participant observation as a tool. My research location was one small area in South Philadelphia. I chose the mosque Al- Falah to be the research center. I lived there for two months: July 2009, and December 2009. Al–Falah is located at 1603 S. 17th Street. From the center of Philadelphia, the mosques can be reached by subway from the Tasker-Morris station. From the station, one continues walking six blocks. Most of my informants live near Al-Falah. They go to the mosque on weekends by walking; a few arrive by car.

Living in the mosque gave me a better opportunity to understand the living conditions of my informants. It also made it easy to build a rapport and establish trust, which was very important in conducting interviews. I felt that the undocumented workers accepted me as part of their community. If they were not able to make an interview, they would reschedule. Some of them invited me to join them for dinner or lunch when I was interviewing them. These informal relations were more like friends who met and shared their experience with each other. However, a few people were not willing to participate in my research. I believe they were afraid to share their experiences because it might cause trouble for them with officials in the Immigration service or their Embassy.
I interviewed around 15 IMWs, but selected only 6 informants to get to know on a deeper level. To gain information from my informants, I conducted two kinds of interviews: semi-structured interviews and unstructured ones. The former are flexible, meaning that I prepared some questions pertaining to my research topic. I utilized this technique for in-depth interviews and for those who were willing to participate, speaking openly and freely about their living conditions without fear due to their status as an undocumented worker. I recorded all of my interviews and took notes on important information during the interview.

Unstructured interviews were more flexible. I utilized this method to select the 6 people for in-depth interviews. In this case, I did not take notes during the interview, but I documented as much as possible afterward. Both of these interview approaches were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and were translated into English.

When I was staying in the mosque, I sometimes visited my informants’ apartments. I also visited three non-governmental organizations which work for migrant advocacy: The Welcoming Center, The Women’s Opportunities Resource Center (WORC), and The Southeast Asian Mutual Assistant Association Coalition (SEAMAAC). To broaden my understanding of undocumented workers in Philadelphia, I conducted a literature search in the Van Pelt Library at the University of Pennsylvania.

In this thesis, I secured my information in a locked computer, and I assured my informants that all information I collected was confidential. I have not used their names in this thesis. I also have not told what city in Indonesia they came from. I provide a case
study of my informants in Chapters 3 through 5 to give real-life examples of the issues faced by IMWs.

Outline of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into 6 chapters. In the first chapter I provide an introduction to the research. I explain the general and specific problems of the research and identify three key questions that I will answer. I also tell about my personal experience as an activist for Indonesian migrant workers with the non-governmental organization, Migrant CARE Jakarta, as part of my background explaining why I research undocumented workers. This chapter also reviews the relevant literature on the topic. Finally, I explain the theoretical perspective of the research and the methodology I employed in my field research.

Chapter 2 provides the study area where I spent two months of field research. I first describe Philadelphia as one of the oldest cities in the USA which has welcomed new immigrants from around the world. I then focus on exploring South Philadelphia where I found some communities, such as Italian, Lao-Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Indonesian. Finally I describe mosque Al-Falah where I lived during my field research.

Chapter 3 explores the background of undocumented IMWs in Philadelphia. This includes their previous jobs and educational background, reasons for coming to the USA, and how they managed to get to the USA. I asked whether they had previous experiences of being a migrant worker abroad. If not, then I asked how and why they decided to be migrant workers in the USA, especially in Philadelphia. I tell the story of Lina because
her background is unique: a businesswoman, who had a bankrupt company because her business’ partners disobeyed their business’ cooperation.

Chapter 4 scrutinizes the working conditions of undocumented IMWs living in Philadelphia. I show how they struggled as undocumented workers without regular benefits, such as health insurance and bonuses. They faced other problems when they had to stay home or were laid off when the company they worked for had limited orders for their product. In this chapter, I tell the story of Bono, a worker in a chemical products packaging company. He suffered an accident that affected his left ear and his hearing, but he did not get any compensation from the company or the agency that employed him.

Chapter 5 describes how undocumented IMWs in Philadelphia spend their weekends or holidays. Not all IMWs have regular holidays or weekends off, but most do. I show how some undocumented IMWs maintained their sense of community with activities during the weekends. However, others sought simply to escape their work lives. I tell about Bagas, who spent a lot of money on weekends gambling in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

In the final chapter I discuss two important points about undocumented IMWs’ conditions: “Living with Uncertainty” and “What Persuade Them to Remain in Philadelphia.” In this chapter, I also relate my findings to the greater context of undocumented workers’ issues in the USA. Finally, I propose a recommendation, suggest further research, and provide some questions about the futures of my informants.
CHAPTER 2: LOCALITY

Study Area

Philadelphia

Philadelphia has a long history of immigrants coming and living in the city. Since 1682, when Philadelphia was founded, the city has welcomed immigrants. The city was founded by William Penn as a “Holy Experiment” to welcome immigrants from any country of Europe, especially Quaker dissidents and German priests. Immigrants from France, Spain, African slaves, and Native Americans added to the city’s diversity. In the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, Philadelphia was a port of entry for many immigrants (Ven, 2004, p. 33).

While immigrants from Europe were the dominant new comers in Philadelphia during the 16th to 19th centuries, in the second half of the 20th c. immigrants from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia began to arrive (Goode & Schneider, as cited in Philadelphia Inquirer, 1988). However, this new wave of immigrants was not able to find sufficient economic opportunities in Philadelphia, so they moved on to other cities. While New York welcomed 92,345 immigrants and Los Angeles received 57,912 new comers per year between 1984 and 1986, Philadelphia merely attracted 7,117 immigrants on average (Goode & Schneider, 1994, p. 49).

Immigrants from around the world have colored the neighborhoods of Philadelphia: there are immigrants’ organizations from different countries, business centers established by different communities and worship places built by different followers of different religions.
There are many immigrant communities in South Philadelphia, including Italian, Lao, Cambodian, and Vietnamese communities. The Italian community located on 9th Street is known for Philadelphia's 9th street Italian market built in the late 1800s, a tourist market and the largest working outdoor market in the U.S. Fresh meat and seafood, Italian bread, cheese, and Italian ingredients can be found in the stores. The market is open from Tuesday to Saturday until 5:00 pm and Sunday morning. The market extends from Wharton to Christian Street. At Wharton and Passyunk Avenue I found Pat’s King of Steaks. One evening my informants and I visited the restaurant. I eat steaks rarely, but Aditya, a catering chef who has visited many steak restaurants in the city, said that Pat’s King of Steaks was really good.

Across from Pat’s King of Steaks is Geno’s Steak restaurant, another good steak restaurant. Heading north on 9th Street, I found many Italian restaurants, cafes, and shops, such as: Anthony's Italian Coffee House, Esposito’s Meats, DiBruno Brothers House of Cheese, and many more. Italian immigrants have mostly moved from South Philadelphia to suburbs, but new immigrants have replaced them.

The Vietnamese community is found on Washington Avenue. There were two big plazas with Vietnamese restaurants, stores, and cafes. New World Plaza extended to Saigon Maxim restaurant, Khmer Angkor jewelry, Pho Ha restaurant and Yan’s fashion. Near the plaza was 1st Oriental Supermarket. Wing Phat plaza is located at 1122-38 Washington Avenue; it contained Pho 75 Vietnamese restaurant, Bimco Insurance
Agency, Pho & Café Viet Huong and Hung Vuong Supermarket. My informants and I went to the second plaza several times to visit Hung Vuong supermarket.

These different communities and businesses are important, because undocumented IMWs depend on the economy of the businesses, and are connected with them either directly or indirectly. There were three undocumented IMWs who worked in a store in the 9th Street Italian market. The owners of the store were an Italian man and his Korean wife. Their store was open from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, and it sold household items. When I visited the store, one of the IMWs was serving customers. “Today my boss asked me to work in front of the store where we place many household items,” she said. “I like working here because my boss is a kind person. But, I do not know how long I will work here. I hope I work in the store longer.” She and two other undocumented IMWs earned daily wages of $80. If the store was very busy, their boss would give them $100 daily.

While the Italian market is on 9th Street, there are Laosian and Cambodian markets on 7th Street. I found many stores, restaurants, and cafes established by immigrants from Laos and Cambodia, such as Phnom Penh Market, New Phnom Penh Restaurant, Koh Kong Grocery and Phnom Penh Jewelry. Linda (not real name) was a loyal customer of Phnom Penh Tmay Market at 2127 South 7th Street. Besides working in the Italian market, Linda was an entrepreneur who made peanut brittle crisp, and she could find its ingredients in the market. When I visited Phnoum Penh Tmay market, I found several Indonesian foods and drinks there, such as Kopiko candy, Teh Botol Sosro

---

2 Interview with Linda.
drink, and ABC Sauce. Besides restaurants, stores, and cafes, there were temples, the offices of Lao and Cambodian organizations, and a public field. My friend Aldi took me on a tour of the Lao and Cambodian neighborhoods where he once stayed for a while. He told me, “In the summer, Lao and Cambodian families relax and play in that field. Some of them sell traditional foods from Laos and Cambodia. We can also find traditional games played by the immigrants.”

This picture shows that the migrant communities from different countries connect to each other. In particular, they support each other economically to fill their daily needs in Philadelphia. The fact that there is no single area which is inhabited by only one ethnic community requires interactions among these different communities to survive in the city.

**The Indonesian Community**

I arrived at the Greyhound bus terminal in Philadelphia on July 23, 2009 at 8:00 am. Travel from Athens to Philadelphia took almost 19 hours. I was so tired but I wanted to continue my trip to *Masjid* (mosques) Al-Falah, where I would stay for a month. I called my friend, Dedi, who stays in Al-Falah. Unfortunately, my cell phone battery was low. I looked for an electrical connector that could charge my cell phone. When I was waiting for my cell phone to be charged, somebody tried to grab it. I tried to defend it, but he tried to grab it again. He also tried to grab my luggage. Then, I took all my stuff and walked away from the guy, but he followed me and tried to grab my stuff again. Another person witnessed this situation and asked a security man in the terminal to handle it. The security guard walked toward me and the man. Then he called 911 to ask for help.

This was my first experience the day I arrived in Philadelphia, where I conducted research from July 23, 2009 till August 22, 2009. Another disturbing story was a murder.
that occurred near Al-Falah. I rode the subway from the Greyhound bus terminal and then walked six blocks to Al-Falah. I saw some toys under the traffic light near the mosque. I ignored these toys and knocked on the door of Al-Falah. Dedi opened the door and I asked about the toys. He told me that two men were killed near the mosque, and these toys were a symbol of the murder. My unhappy experience in the Greyhound terminal and my friend’s story scarred me, and strengthened my belief in the Indonesian workers’ perception that Philadelphia, especially South Philadelphia, is an unsafe place to live.

I asked my informants why they live in South Philadelphia. The first reason is that IMWs go to work for companies or factories associated with agencies. The factories are located outside of Philadelphia in New Jersey and Delaware. The agencies pick up IMWs every morning and bring them back to their apartments in South Philadelphia. The agencies do not want to waste time picking up workers from different areas of Philadelphia. For this reason, IMWs choose to live there. If they do not live in South Philadelphia, they have to own a car in order to get to work. The second reason is that they can have contact with other Indonesians in Philadelphia. They prefer living together with other Indonesians. They need friendships and brotherhood to cope with their experiences in big cities like Philadelphia. The third reason is that they can find Indonesian foods in this area.

Most of undocumented IMWs live in neighborhoods west and east of Broad Street. There are Indonesian groceries and also Indonesian restaurants located west of Broad Street. One Indonesian grocery, called the Indonesia Store, was opened in 2001 by Handoko, a worker from Jakarta who came to Philadelphia in 1998. The other groceries
are Café Pendawa 5, Friendly, Borobudur Mini Market, and Santos Groceries. All these groceries are located near Al-Falah within a two – five block radius. Surabaya restaurant is also near Al-Falah, four blocks away. Other Indonesians groceries and restaurants are located 10 – 15 blocks from Al-Falah.

These groceries do not only provide Indonesian foods and ingredients; they also offer money transfer and package delivery to Indonesia as well as Indonesian products. When I interviewed Handoko, he could not tell me how many IMWs’ remittance, money workers send home, he transfers to Indonesia per month, because he also transfers remittances to other countries, such as Cambodia. As the first Indonesian grocery store in the area, the “Indonesia Store” seems to provide the most comprehensive services for IMWs’ needs. For instance, the Indonesia Store also sells Indonesian magazines, such as Tempo, Gatra and Kartini.

Al-Falah is the only mosque established by Indonesians in Philadelphia. However, there are some churches established by Indonesians. One of them is the Philadelphia Praise Center established in 1998 and located near Al-Falah. I visited the church at the end of my first field research and interviewed Pastor Aldo Siahaan. He told me that there are 14 churches established by Indonesian communities in Philadelphia. The Philadelphia Praise Center is not only for Indonesians but also for Christians from other countries. For example, when I visited the church, I saw some Mexicans there. Before Indonesian Moslems had their own mosque, they utilized the church to pray.

Cambodians, Vietnamese, and African-Americans also live near the mosque. Cambodian and Vietnamese have lived in South Philadelphia since the 1970s. Some are
refugees because of the war in these countries. Since they have been in this area for a long time, they dominate small businesses, such as laundries. Some Indonesian workers work in these laundries.

There is no workers’ union or organization for Cambodian, Vietnamese, or Indonesians in this area. Indonesian workers tend to build relationships with other Indonesians, which replaces the need for a workers’ union or organization. Cambodians and Vietnamese also tend to build relationships with their fellow countrymen. I found a different situation when I visited Indonesian-worker communities in Hong Kong in 2005. IMWs there not only communicated with other IMWs, they also built relationships with workers from other countries. I even found some international worker unions in Hong Kong.

Masjid Al-Falah

_Masjid_ (mosque) Al-Falah is a community center for IMWs in Philadelphia. Al-Falah, which has rooms for rent, was originally a dwelling which the community bought and renovated to be a place of prayer. Al-Falah consists of three floors. The first floor is a basement and it has been renovated. The second floor is a place for worship and also functions as a meeting room. There is a kitchen on this floor. The third floor consists of two bedrooms, one bathroom, and an office. The mosque was bought in 2008 with a loan. The down payment was $15,000, which came from IMWs’ donations. IMWs have to pay a monthly installment of $250, which is collected at the congregation’s weekly meetings.

As far as I know, this is the second mosque built by Indonesians in USA. I believe Al-
Hikmah in New York was the first mosque. Al-Hikmah was donated largely by Soeharto, the second President of Indonesia, who governed the country for more than 32 years.

![Picture 1: Mosque Al-Falah.](image)

IMWs utilize Al-Falah as a public place where they are able to meet one another. There are a lot of activities at Al-Falah. I classify these activities in three categories. The first is related to religious activities. Daily prayers are the main activity in the mosque. The mosque should be open at any time for daily prayers, not only for Indonesian Muslims but also for Muslims from other countries. However, the mosque is not open all day, every weekday. The mosque opens only for *maghrib* (sunset prayer) and *isya* (evening prayer) daily and at specific times during the weekend, such as when IMWs have scheduled programs and the Saturday evening meeting.

Only a few people have keys to the mosque. Security concerns are the main reason why the mosque is not open all day. A couple of weeks before I stayed in the mosque, some items were stolen. The mosque is now monitored by cameras. When I was staying in the mosque for my first field research, Putra, a worker, prayed at the mosque.
almost every day. This was unusual, because most IMWs have a fixed work schedules. Since Putra had a flexible work schedule, he could go to the mosque anytime. Moreover, he could reach the mosque by walking from his house.

The second category was activities organized by the Indonesian Community of Greater Philadelphia (ICGP), which I will describe in Chapter Five.

The third category is social activities, such as individual ceremonies of ICGP members. The first ceremony I went to was a party to celebrate Rafiq’s second son’s birthday. It was held on my first day of my first round of field research. Like birthday parties in Indonesia, Rafiq brought yellow rice: an Indonesian tradition. The rice was shared with everybody who came to the party. Ahmad Munjid also celebrated his daughter’s birthday in the mosque. Unlike Rafiq, Munjid brought birthday cake to be shared, especially among the children. This shows how Indonesians are different on how they celebrate their special days. Rafiq wanted to bring Indonesian spirit by bringing yellow rice in his son’s birthday. In contrast, Munjid did not need to bring Indonesian dishes, because for Munjid, the main, important message was how to celebrate the special day not the cultural food.

Another social event I attended was a wedding party. Nadia and Michael celebrated their wedding in the mosque on August 16, 2009. Nadia worked in a printing company and Michael worked for a home improvement company. This was the second marriage for Nadia. She has a daughter with her first husband, an ethnic Chinese Indonesian worker. Nadia was not the only female Indonesian worker who had an
American husband. I met four other female Indonesian workers who had American husbands.

Daily Life

To describe the daily life of IMWs, I recorded events in the neighborhood of Al-Falah over one day.

Wednesday at 5:00 a.m., the neighborhood of Al-Falah was very quiet. Cars were parked in front of apartments on the right and left sides of the street. Big plastic garbage cans had been put out in front of apartments. Philadelphia’s Department of Sanitation usually collected the garbage Tuesday morning. Snow was piled in front of the apartments since a snowstorm had happened three days before. I did not see any official cars or trucks clean the streets. Every apartment owner was obliged to remove the snow in front of his or her entrance. If the snow was not removed and somebody fell, the owner of that apartment would be responsible to pay the medical costs if sued in court. The chairman of the Indonesian Community of Greater Philadelphia (ICGP), Aditya, was sued because of this problem.

Two sedan cars passed the junction of Tasker Street and 17th South Street, and a sedan passed the junction of Morris Street and 17th Street. A man came out of his apartment to put the garbage can in front of his apartment. Twenty-five minutes later, I saw two big, white vans pass Al-Falah. These cars picked up workers at the mosque and took them to their work place. Ahmad was waiting for the car that would pick him up to take him to work. A couple of seconds later, a small, blue van arrived at the mosque to pick him up. There were two passengers in the car. Ahmad wore a dark jacket and a red
hat, and brought a small green bag that contained three small boxes and a plastic bag of shrimp crackers. It took 1.5 hours to reach his work place in a suburb of Philadelphia.

I saw the first public bus No. 2 at 5:33 am. Later, the bus usually came every fifteen minutes. After 6:00 am, bus No. 29 passed on the right side of the mosque. The bus traveled from Wal-Mart in North Philadelphia to 32nd Street in West Philadelphia. The neighborhood of Al-Falah was still quiet at 7:00 am. I saw a yellow school bus pass the mosque, and a bus stopped in front of the mosque at 7:25 am. It waited for a child who would take the bus to school. Thirty minutes later some people were waiting for bus No. 29 to North Philadelphia. The temperature was to be a high of 23 degrees Fahrenheit and a low of 11 degrees Fahrenheit. Everybody was wearing jackets, gloves, and hats.

On the north side of Al-Falah was George W. Childs Elementary School: a Pre-K and elementary school where African-American, Asian, and Mexican children studied. When I entered the school at 8:20 am, some students had just arrived, and an African-
American woman, sitting at the reception desk at the main door, asked the children to enter their classes quickly. This school received an award for excellence in Mathematics and Reading in 2008-2009. The award was presented by the School District of Philadelphia on August 10, 2009. On the walls of the school were pictures of Barack Obama, Martin Luther King, and Coretta Scott King. The day I was at the school was the last day before the children would have a long holiday for Christmas and New Year.

During the noon and afternoon, the neighborhood of Al-Falah looked busy. Several women and children went to the office of Women Infant Children (WIC) located several blocks from Al-Falah, and other people went to the health center near the mosque. At noon, some people went to a shop that provided lunch. During this period, I also recorded several vans picking up workers in the neighborhood of Al-Falah.

At 8:00 p.m., the area near the mosque was quiet. Cycle Laundry was a couple of blocks from Al-Falah. Around 8:00 pm, the laundry usually was full of customers, but there were not a lot of people there that night. The attendant at the laundry was Rima, an Indonesian female worker from East Java, who worked from 8:00 am till 9:00 p.m. When I asked her when she took her break she said: “I rest by talking with customers. This is my rest time. I enjoy working here because the owner is a kind man. The man trusted me to operate this shop. He rarely comes here, maybe once a day for a short time.” She did not work on weekends. She has been working there for four years. The owner is a Vietnamese man, who has owned the laundry for seven years. This was one of the biggest laundries near Al-Falah. There were 10 small, 16 medium, 5 big, and 2 super big washing machines and 30 dryers. While customers were waiting for their clothes, they could
watch two big TVs on the wall. There were also two vending machines. While I lived in
Al-Falah, I washed my clothes here.

After 9:00 pm, the neighborhood of Al-Falah was quieter. Only a few people walked in the streets near the mosque. Generally, Al-Falah and its surroundings are a quiet area from the morning to the night. However, the quiet did not mean it was a safe area. Several murders happened in the neighborhood.
CHAPTER 3: LIFE COURSE

I collected information about my informants’ lives before they migrated to the U.S.A. One theory that can be used to interpret their backgrounds is Life Course Theory. White and Klein (2008) explain that this theory studies an individual’s history, and looks for preliminary happenings that affect future decisions (p. 122). This chapter does not explore the whole of my informants’ life history, but it describes some part of their history, in particular, their education and work experience, their reasons for coming to the U.S.A. and how they managed their travel to this country. As suggested by White and Klein, the description of these three aspects will help to show in what ways their background influenced how they came to be IMWs. At the end of the chapter, I describe my informant, Lina, who had a unique experience when she first settled in the USA.

Previous Education and Jobs

My informants had different backgrounds of education. Nurul, born in 1951, graduated from a school for secretaries in Jakarta. She worked as a secretary for different corporations in this city. The last job she had before leaving Indonesia was as a manager at “The Indonesian Magazine,” a tourist magazine. She lost the job in 2002 when the company went bankrupt due to the Indonesian financial crisis at that time.

Before Anto graduated from the management study program at a good university in Central Java, he had studied in several universities in different programs. After graduating, he worked in a national contracting company under the Ministry of Public Affairs for 15 years. His last position was the Head of General Affairs. Before leaving
Indonesia for the U.S., he operated a travel agency and illegally helped Indonesians obtain jobs in South Korea.

Bono also obtained a university education, and later he worked in a fish export company in Indonesia, which benefited from the Indonesian financial crisis when the Indonesian currency, the rupiah, was depreciated to 15 thousand rupiah per dollar. The benefits included improving its office and buildings. As a liaison officer, Bono’s job was to communicate with international trading partners and hold meetings with the Indonesian government. He felt that his job was a good job, and he enjoyed it. While some of my informants had previous work experience in Indonesia, others had gained experience abroad.

Several informants had previously worked overseas as migrant workers. For example, Bagas left Indonesia for Malaysia in 1982 to live with his uncle, who left for Malaysia earlier to work in a contracting company, which hired workers for construction jobs in Malaysia and Singapore. He worked there for more than 10 years. In Malaysia, he gained a temporary residence and married for the second time. Besides finding temporary homes in Malaysia, workers have also migrated to other countries, such as Saudi Arabia.

Ahmad (53-years-old) had experience working in Saudi Arabia. He was a chef for 16 years in an exclusive hotel owned by the King Faisal Foundation, Saudi Arabia. He said that he really enjoyed his job in Saudi Arabia. He got the job through an official agency in Jakarta, Indonesia, and after working there for two years, he was given two months’ vacation. Later, he got a month vacation every year, which enabled him to make the pilgrimage to Mecca several times. The hotel provided him with an apartment, and
gave him three break times in his job: breakfast, lunch and an afternoon break. He resigned from the job when he wanted to go back to Indonesia and live without having to work.

Their educational backgrounds show that they have various majors and different levels of education. Some of them graduated from high school in Indonesia, and a few graduated from good universities, such as University Indonesia in Jakarta and Diponegoro University in Central Java, which are among the top ten universities in the country. Besides various educational backgrounds, they also had diverse job experiences. Some of them had worked in stable workplaces in Indonesia, and the others had worked overseas, such as Malaysia, Singapore and Saudi Arabia.

Reasons for Coming to the USA

Indonesia suffered a financial crisis in 1997. The national currency depreciated by 100% doubling the amount of rupiah per US dollar within 5 months. Devaluation began in June 2007 (Yusanto, 2001, p.2). Some financial institutions and companies collapsed. As a result, they laid off their workers. Ananta, Kartowibowo, Wiyono, Hadi, and Chotib (1998) note that the biggest job losses were in the construction industry. The banking and financial sectors also contributed to the loss of jobs. Besides these sectors, the crisis also increased the bad conditions for the manufacturing sector, which had suffered a loss of workers earlier (p. 317). In addition, the increase in migration might be related to the political unpredictability and its impact on the economy. Suddenly Malaysia and Singapore were no longer the main destination of Indonesian migrant workers. Rather
Thailand, the Philippines, and Australia were destinations for IMWs looking for work (Ananta, Kartowibowo, Wiyono, Hadi, & Chotib, 1998, p. 332). The number of Indonesian migration workers abroad increased after the crisis. In 1997, according to official statistics of the National Agency for Placement and Protection of Indonesian Overseas Workers there were 235,253 workers. The number increased to 411,609 workers in 1998, 427,619 in 1999, and 435,148 in 2000.4

Although the U.S. was not the main destination of Indonesian workers overseas, this country remained a destination for some workers. Interestingly, working in the U.S. was not only for those who suffered from job loss, but also for the owners of bankrupt companies and students whose scholarships were discontinued, because the Indonesian government did not extend their scholarships due to the crisis. Lina is an example of an owner of a bankrupt company who considered working in the U.S. as a way to survive the crisis, and Putra is an example of a student who could not continue his education because of a discontinued scholarship.

Another reason for working in the U.S. was to escape from political turmoil. Aldi, a member of ICGP, is an example. He came to the USA in 2001 to find security because he felt that Indonesia was not a safe place to express his criticism. When he departed for the USA he asked for political asylum by showing newspaper clippings that described his social activisms, such as demonstrations, to criticize the Indonesian government. Assisted by a lawyer, his request to get political asylum was approved in 2003.

When I asked my informants’ reasons why they worked in the U.S., some of them said that it was by chance. They did not mean to come to America to find jobs. For example, Bono came to the U.S. in 2000 for vacation for a month. After landing in New York, his friend picked him up at the airport to go to Philadelphia. When he arrived in this city, he was surprised when he saw that a studio room was occupied by eight people. What he knew from American movies was different from the reality he saw in the city. The apartments he saw were in blocks, while the houses he saw in the movies were single houses with a garden. When he was chatting and talking with his friends, somebody told him that there was a job. Bono took this opportunity and worked in a warehouse in Philadelphia. He was picked up by an agency at 5:00 a.m. daily to reach his work place where he began to work at 8:00 a.m. and finished at 4:00 p.m. “It was a real physical job that I have never done before, and I worked in the winter that required me to wear double clothes because of very cold weather. My job was to bring items from the warehouse and to put them in containers located outside.”5 He only worked in the warehouse five days. He said that the job was very hard, and he was not strong enough to do it. However, his friends offered him another job. In his first month working in the U.S., he earned $2,300. He was really surprised, because he had never earned that amount in Indonesia. He decided to resign from his job in Jakarta to work longer in the city.

Like Bono, Anto had no plan of working in the U.S. Before leaving Indonesia in 2005, he operated a travel agency for almost 5 years and helped Indonesians illegally find jobs in South Korea. He came to the U.S. in 2005 to explore opportunities to help

---

5 Interview with Bono.
Indonesians find jobs here as he had been doing in South Korea. He planned to facilitate
Indonesians’ traveling to the U.S. and assist them in finding jobs. However, he decided
that the U.S. was too far from Indonesia, and it would be difficult to arrange travel visas
for Indonesians. He cancelled his plan, and decided to stay in the U.S. He then began to
work here.

Ahmad’s reason for working in the U.S after working in Saudi Arabia for 16
years was that somebody invited him to work in the U.S. He rejected this invitation
because he wanted to enjoy his life in Indonesia after working in Saudi Arabia for such a
long period. One of his friends told him that he could not work in the U.S. because his
name is an Islamic name and he had just lived in Saudi Arabia. His friend said that he
would be arrested by the U.S. government because of his name and work experience in
Saudi Arabia. “It was a challenge for me that it would be difficult to come to the U.S.”
He told his friend, “Nobody can stop us if God allows us to go wherever we want.”6 He
applied to the U.S. embassy for a visitor visa, and surprisingly was given the visa.

Most of my informants said that the U.S. offered better wages when compared to
Indonesian wages. Moreover, when the Indonesian rupiah was depreciated, what workers
earned in the US was more valuable when converted to rupiah. Another reason, they said,
is that the US is more welcoming than other countries for people like them. “As long as
we do not violate U.S. law, I think we will not be arrested. So, this country is good for
my life security.”7 A third reason is that the tourist visa to the U.S. is for a longer period
than other countries. Since it is difficult to get a business visa, they realized that getting

---

6 Interview with Ahmad.
7 Interview with Bagas.
the tourist visa was the best alternative to reach the U.S. It gave them enough time to look for a job before the visa expired. In other countries, they would not get the same opportunities as the U.S. government gave.

It is very difficult to work in Japan illegally, but not in the US, I think. Maybe this country naturally needs illegal workers. However, we do not need to say that we will work in the US when we apply for a tourist visa. Another reason is that the US government gives six months for tourist visa. Could we get the same thing when we apply to Europe or other countries like Japan? I think Europe only gives three weeks. When I visited Germany, I got only three weeks.8

Every worker has different reasons for working in the U.S, from economic to political reasons. However, they have the same purpose: establishing a better life than they could in Indonesia. For them, the U.S. is a new hope after facing hardship, not only to secure their life but also their family’s life. They would work in a place they had never seen before except on television or in a movie. They did not care what kind of job they would do. The goal was to find a job quickly and send money to their families.

How They Managed to Get to the USA

Living or traveling overseas is not new for some of my informants. They went abroad before coming to the US, and a few had already experienced working abroad. Most had gone abroad for vacation, official trips, or to visit family members overseas. For instance, Bono had visited France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Thailand, and Singapore both on official trips and for vacation. Anto had visited Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, and Japan. Ahmad had gone to India, Hong Kong, Egypt, and Syria for vacation,

8 Interview with Bono.
and Lina had visited Japan on an official business trip. Those who had experience overseas were familiar with international documents, such as visas and passports.

There is no official agency in Indonesia that manages work placement in the U.S. Most labor agencies (Pelaksana Penempatan Tenaga Kerja Indonesia Swasta-PPTKIS) manage placement in Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, Saudi Arabia, Canada, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. Since there is no official agency that manages work placement for the U.S., candidates have to find work themselves. But this saved them the cost of using an agency, and they were able to save their money for travel costs. On the other hand, they had to get the necessary international documents by themselves.

The first matter that they had to handle was a visa application. There are four kinds of visa that IMWs in Philadelphia need to work in the U.S. The most common is the tourist visa. This permits its holders to stay in the U.S. for six months. During this period, they look for jobs with the help of their friends or relatives who are working in this country already. Whether or not they find a job, they usually stay more than six months. The second visa is the business visa. This visa is for IMWs who own a business in Indonesia and plan to go to the U.S. for business, such as promoting their products or participating in business conferences. The third visa is a student visa that allows Indonesians to take English courses for several months. After finishing the course, they look for jobs and overstay the visa period. Fourth, they come to the U.S. with an Indonesian government official who has a diplomatic visa. They would pay a specific amount of money to the official in order to join the official trip to the U.S.
Another matter that they must consider is where they will stay in the U.S. when they arrive. There are two typical solutions to this problem. First is to stay with their family or friends. While they were staying with their friends or relative, they would also ask for help looking for jobs. Second is to go to the U.S. without having any relatives or friends in this country. Two informants, Anto and Lina, came to the U.S. without any friends or family members here. Anto first applied for a tourist visa, but the U.S. embassy in Jakarta refused him. Anto thought that he was rejected by the embassy because they thought he was not likely to go on vacation without family members. Two years later, he researched information about conference agendas in the U.S. and paid for a conference. With proof that he was going to a conference Anto applied for a visa. The embassy gave him a business visa a couple of days later.

Anto had no relatives or friends in the U.S., and he had limited English. It was his first time in the U.S., and he never attended his conference. After arriving in L.A., he stayed in a hotel for a day. He went to China Town to look for other Indonesians. When he met an Indonesian, he asked where he could work in the city. Anto found his first job in a Chinese restaurant. After a couple of months working in L.A., he flew to Philadelphia without having any relatives or friends there. He just had information about an Indonesian restaurant in the city.

A Case Study: Lina

Lina was born 50 years ago in West Java, Indonesia, to an agricultural family. Her father treated her like a boy, encouraging her to climb coconut trees and swim in rivers,
inviting her to go fishing with him at night. When her father went to the rice fields, Lina took care of her sisters at home. She began joining her father in the rice fields when she was 8 years old. She really enjoyed it, and she even spent her leisure time in the fields, not just in her father’s fields, but also in her uncle’s fields. She also spent time fishing in small rivers, and was very happy when she caught something. Some afternoons she skipped school to play in the fields.

Her father thought education was very important for Lina and her sisters, and was angry when he learned that Lina had played hookey to spend time in the fields. To ensure a complete education, her father sent her to school in the morning, to study secular knowledge, and to religious school in the afternoon. When Lina was in the fifth grade, she asked her father to let her quit school, because she had no girl friends. She was the only girl in the class because most of the girls her age were married. Her father rejected her request and forced her to finish elementary school.

Lina moved to Jakarta after finishing elementary school to live with a rich aunt, who provided her with all of her needs, including her school costs. After finishing senior high school Lina did not want to continue in school. She wanted to begin working to help her younger sisters, but her aunt required her to stay in school if she wanted to get any financial help for the family. Lina went to Yogayakarta to study at Gadjah Mada University, but she left school after a couple of weeks and returned to Jakarta to study in a modeling school. She also skipped those classes. Her aunt sent Lina to Singapore to take a management program. Lina only stayed four months, and then went back to
Jakarta. Her aunt was preparing to send Lina to study in Germany, but she ran away from her aunt and stayed with a friend.

While she was staying with her friend, Lina checked the help-wanted ads in the daily newspaper. She found a job in a restaurant near the Krakatau Steel factory in North Jakarta where most of the customers were expatriates. She was supposed to get parental permission to get the job, but she said her parents lived too far away. She was happy to get a job. Her salary was 300 thousand rupiah, supplemented by tips from the customers. However, her aunt found out she had a job and asked Lina to go back to school.

Lina enrolled in a secretary and management course and then worked for an accounting company in Jakarta. While there, she began her own catering business filling her company’s orders. She also started a business as the supplier of the rice her company regularly gave to its employees. Lina got the rice from her parents who had rice fields and a rice mill. While she worked at the accounting company and ran her own business, she met and married an old friend from her senior high school.

Lina did not expect to marry the man. “I had a boyfriend whom I wanted to marry,” said Lina. Her husband was from a rich family and the son of an official of the Customs and Excise Division of the Indonesian government. Their wedding was widely celebrated. A couple of years later, Lina gave birth to her first daughter and quit her job. While being a stay-at-home mother, Lina still ran her own business. She seemed to have a good life with a daughter and a comfortable home. However, when her daughter was two and a half years old, Lina got divorced because her husband took a second wife. Lina was offered two choices for property division: custody of the daughter with no property
or property without the daughter. Lina chose her daughter and left her husband and properties with only one and a half million rupiah.

Lina began a new life with her daughter, renting a small house in South Jakarta. She cried when her daughter asked why the house was so empty. This was the first time she had cried since she was a child. But Lina soon set up her own business with the rest of the money she had. She established herself as a vendor selling rice and chicken dishes. Her business grew quickly and she hired six employees. Within two years, Lina was able to establish a proper restaurant. When her business prospered, her father asked her to return to West Java to live with her family, and she could not refuse her father’s request.

Lina helped to develop her father’s 14-year-old garment business. She expanded the business from knitting garments to creating other products, such as clothes, bags, trousers, and embroidered fabrics. The business prospered and actually increased its profits during the financial crisis that Indonesia suffered in 1997. It was cited as the best independent small business in the West Java region. Seeing this success, the G7 countries visited the business, and the Indonesian government offered a five billion rupiah development loan, but Lina did not take it because the amount was too large. She worried that she could not repay the loan even though it was interest-free. When she asked the government for a loan of only one billion rupiah, the government could not honor her request, because the program was set up only to award a five billion rupiah loan.

In 2001 the business was beginning to fail. Lina had contracts with 12 overseas companies: 10 in South Korea, 1 in the Philippines and 1 in India. These companies withdrew from the contracts, 1 by 1 dropping from 12 to 3 companies. The last orders
were from the Philippines and India for almost 1 billion rupiah. Unfortunately, the companies in these 2 countries did not pay for the products that Lina sent and she was not able to contact them to get the money.

Lina had been swindled out of almost 1 billion rupiah worth of products. She was very stressed. Moreover, this was just two weeks prior to the Islamic Celebration of Eid Fitr when she had to meet her workers’ payroll and pay for raw materials that she bought from local business partners. She sold 4 cars and 1 home to pay her laborers’ wages. She did not have a burden any more, but she also had nothing except a car and a daughter who was finishing medical school at Trisakti University in Jakarta. As a medical student, her daughter needed a lot of money for her classes and her practicum classes. When her daughter asked for money for her school expenses, Lina would always say yes, although she did not know where to get the money, because her company was in bankruptcy.

Lina tried to keep the garment business. While she usually sold her products overseas, after the collapse, she only sold them in local markets. One time her head mechanic said they needed parts for the production equipment. She went to Jakarta to buy the parts. She always traveled on the highways to reach Jakarta, but this time she drove on city streets and passed the U.S. embassy. She noticed the long line of people in front of the embassy. She parked the car, went back and asked a security man what the place was and why so many people were standing in line. She really did not know that the place was the U.S. embassy and people were waiting to apply for visas.

Lina asked about the requirements for visas, and she decided to apply for one. The first requirement was to have a passport. When she went to an immigration office to
apply for one, she was asked: “Do you want to get the passport in a short time or long
time?” “What is the difference?” Lina asked. Finally, she paid 1 million rupiah to get
one-day service. Then, she filled out a visa application and got an interview scheduled for
1 week later.

When she came to the U.S. embassy for her interview, she had to wait in a very
long line and to pass a couple of application processes. She watched the interview
process and saw that many applicants were refused a visa. She was worried that she
would not get a visa. While she waited to be interviewed, she prayed, “My purpose in
going to the U.S. is only to support my daughter’s education in order for her to graduate
from the medicine program.” Finally it was her turn for an interview. Since Lina had
applied for the visa under her company’s name, the embassy interviewer asked her who
would run the company during Lina’s trip to the U.S. She said her secretary would. Of
course, Lina did not tell the interviewer that her company had actually collapsed. But
Lina still employed her secretary, so when the embassy officer called, the secretary could
verify the existence of the company. Surprisingly, Lina got a tourist visa one week later.

It was July 26, 2004, when I got the tourist visa. I promptly called my friend who
has a travel agency to schedule my trip, and I got the ticket on July 31, 2004. I
was still in Jakarta on July 30, 2004 to visit money changer, and I did not mention
my trip to the U.S. to my daughter and my family till that afternoon when I got
home to West Java. My daughter was so sad when I told her that I would go to the
U.S. to work. She was crying. My father was actually difficult about allowing me
to go to the U.S.

She departed for the U.S. at 6:00 am on July 31, 2004 by Philippine Airlines. Her
transit through Ninoy Aquino International Airport in Manila, the Philippines, entitled
her to a 1 night stay in the Century Hotel. However, she preferred to wait in the airport
because she was afraid she would be late for her connecting flight. When she arrived in
Los Angeles International Airport, she wanted to go right on to Philadelphia, but the
airfare would be $670. However, if she was willing to wait for one week, she could get
the ticket for $400. Since Lina brought only $1,125 from Indonesia, she chose to wait,
because she needed to save her money. She spent one week in the airport. “My
information about Philadelphia was only the address of ‘Indonesia Store.’ When I arrived
at the store at 5:30 a.m., I was very happy,” said Lina.
CHAPTER 4: WORKING CONDITIONS

How They Gained Jobs

Looking for jobs was the first challenge that my informants had to face when they came to this country. They needed to find jobs as soon as possible. Lina, for example, had only $1,125 when she arrived. My informants also needed to find jobs because they had to send money home to their families in Indonesia.

There were three common ways to find a job. The first was through friends. Most of the friends were Indonesians. If a friend had no information about job vacancies, he or she would call employment agencies or other friends. One time I accompanied Manan (not real name), a new undocumented worker, while visiting Bagas’s apartment to see whether Bagas could help Manan get a job. Bagas called his employment agent to get Manan a job working in the factory where Bagas worked. A couple of days later, Manan was working in Bagas’s factory. Manan had worked only ten days when the agent laid him off. Bagas helped Manan to find another job. Soon after, Manan worked in a printing factory. Besides calling friends or visiting friends’ apartments, my informants could meet other Indonesians in Masjid Al-Falah on the weekends.

Another way to find a job was through the Indonesian media published in Philadelphia. Currently there are Indonesian bulletins which are published weekly, and my informants can pick them up for free in Indonesian stores and restaurants. They are published in Bahasa (Indonesian language). Kabar Kilat and Dunia Kita were the most preferred bulletins for information about job vacancies. The advertisements had information about the kind of work and location of the workplace, but not about salaries.
or benefits. In Kabar Kilat and Dunia Kita the advertisers of job vacancies are employment agencies, instead of the companies or factories themselves that needed workers. The agencies select people to fill the vacancies at companies. There are no job requirements. As long as candidates could do jobs that the agencies offered and they were willing to receive the salary the agency provided, they would be hired.

Picture 3: Job Advertisement at Kabar Kilat Bulletin.

The last way to find a job was through the agencies. My informants kept lists of agencies and would call them if they got laid off. My informants called the employment agencies to ask whether they had job vacancies. It was simple. If the agencies had job vacancies, candidates could begin work the next day. The longer workers stayed in the U.S., they acquired longer lists of agencies.

Employment Agencies

Employment agencies are legal companies that supply workers to companies or factories. After getting a contract from a company to supply workers, the agencies recruit
workers to fill the vacancies. The agencies do not always seek workers themselves. They contract with ‘sub-agents’ to look for workers. The sub-agents might use ‘second sub-agents’ to find workers.

While the employment agencies are legal companies, the sub-agents and second sub-agents are individuals without any legal responsibility. They work illegally. They take a cut of the workers’ salaries and do not pay taxes. Most of the sub-agents and second sub-agents hide their identities and addresses to make sure that the authorities cannot identify them.

The role of the employment agencies is very important. They are the main source of jobs for undocumented workers. All of my informants who worked in factories got jobs from the agencies. Some employment agencies had job vacancies from more than one company, and my informants said they could choose where they wanted to work. They could not get jobs from the factory or company directly because they are undocumented. Also, the hiring offices of most companies or factories are located outside of Philadelphia. It is difficult for workers to reach these places to apply for jobs. Most of the undocumented workers don’t own cars.

When my informants first found a job, they did not know whether they had been hired by the employment agency, the sub-agents, or the second sub-agents. The most important point was to find a job as soon as possible. Later, when they received their salaries, my informants realized whether they had been hired by the employment agency, the sub-agent, or second sub-agent.
Anto learned from his company’s owner that his salary was paid to an employment agency. Anto then asked for his salary from the employment agency through which he had gained his job. The agency told him they had not yet received his salary from the employment agency with the actual contract with the company. This made Anto realize that the agency through which he had found the job was not ‘a real agency.’ It was a sub-agent or second sub-agent.

Employment agencies have responsibilities to the workers who found jobs through them. The agencies give weekly salaries to the workers. The agencies are also responsible for picking up workers to take them to their workplaces. After work hours, they take workers back to where they live. The agencies usually use a big van that can accommodate around twelve workers. They do not always have a driver, so use workers with a driver’s license as the driver. If regular undocumented workers gained salaries of $7 per hour, the drivers would earn $8 or $9 per hour. If the drivers provided a car, they would earn up to $10 per hour.

Besides working as an undocumented worker, my informant Bagas was also a driver for the agency through which he gained his job. He did not have a U.S. driver’s license, but he had an International driver’s license that he got in Indonesia. When I asked him whether the police allowed him to use the International driver’s license, he answered:

The police actually do not allow me to use the license. One time a police stopped me, and he said to me that I could not use the license. I told him that I did not know the rule. But I always bring the license because I believe that I will not meet the same police officers when I drive cars. So I am not worried about my license.9

9 Interview with Bagas.
Another responsibility of the agencies is to take care of the workers when they have an injury in the workplace. The agencies are responsible for facilitating the workers’ visits to health centers or giving money to workers in order to get medical aid for themselves. My informants said that the medical aid from their agencies was usually insufficient. Sometimes they did not get any medical aid when they had an accident in the workplace. When Bagas was injured in the wood factory where he worked, he asked for medical aid from his employment agency. The agency told him that they did not have money to provide him with medical aid. When Bagas asked for help from the factory’s manager, the manager said that Bagas’s agency should be responsible because the factory provided funds for medical aid to the agency.

Conditions in the Workplace

Undocumented IMWs in Philadelphia work in different places and in various fields. I classify my respondents’ jobs into three categories: laundry and dry cleaners, restaurant work, and factory work. The laundry and dry cleaners and restaurants were located in Philadelphia and the surrounding area, and the factories were located outside of Philadelphia in New Jersey, Delaware, and Pittsburg. Only a few undocumented IMWs worked in laundry and dry cleaning shops and restaurants. Most worked in factories that produced items such as paper, mushrooms, wood items, chemical products, and plastics. Not all undocumented workers worked in big factories, some worked in small factories that was managed by a family and employed only a few workers. For example Anto
worked in a plastics factory in which there were only four workers who worked four days in a week and in twelve hour shifts.

*Picture 4: Machines in Plastic Factory.*

The first experience of IMWs working in factories was not always happy. Some informants had difficult experiences when they began their first jobs. The jobs they did were totally different than what they had done in Indonesia. In the U.S. they did physical labor, which they had never done before. “It was a real physical job that I had never done in Jakarta, and I had a break for 30 minutes only,” said Bono. Lina recalled:

I looked sick on my first day. When my friend asked me how I was, I was too shy to say that I was not feeling very well. In fact, I only worked till 11:00 am and I fainted while working. When I woke up, I was in the hospital. I did not work for four days. When I worked in the spoon factory, I was also sick because I had to work twelve hours during the nightshift. At that time, I wanted to go back to Indonesia. I was like a robot: working, working, and working.

Their status as undocumented workers had many consequences in their workplaces. They did not have signed contracts. They had only agreements with their agencies. These agreements were that the workers had to follow the companies’ rules,
such as safety rules and working hours, and that the workers would receive the wages agreed upon with the agency. Since undocumented workers did not have signed contracts, they could be laid off at anytime. This happened when the companies received fewer orders for their products. Often undocumented workers worked for only a couple of weeks or several months at one job, depending on how long it took for the orders to be filled. One time Anto, and his fellows were picked up by their agency and taken to their workplace only to be sent home because the company had no work for them that day. When the company received additional orders, they would hire new workers, and existing workers could work for two shifts per day, or even work for 24 hours a day.

In addition to precarious work situations on the part of the companies, the employment agencies could also lay off the workers at any time. The agencies would just call workers to tell them not to come to work without giving a reason, and the agencies might then seek other workers to fill the empty position. Laid off workers had to look for another job from a different agency.

If there was a signed contract between undocumented workers and their companies, the contract was not about duties that they had to do, or benefits that they would receive. The contract said that the company would not be responsible for any injury undocumented workers suffered on the job. Instead, the employment agencies would be responsible. Bagas’s company required every worker to wear protective hats, glasses, ear covers, gloves, and shoes. However, Bagas had to provide these items himself.
Another consequence of being undocumented was the work hours. While documented workers worked eight hours per day, undocumented workers worked for more than eight hours. How long undocumented workers worked depended on a company’s rules. One company allowed undocumented workers to work for ten hours; another company allowed them to work for twelve hours.

In the end of 2009, some of the companies where my informants worked, received additional orders, and the companies had the undocumented workers work two shifts a day. Lina was an example. Working two shifts meant that she had to work for 16 hours, take an eight hour rest (including travel time), and then work another 16 hours. My interview schedule with Lina was delayed several times because she was working such long hours. When I finally met her at her apartment at around 8:00 p.m., she had just gotten home.

Undocumented workers could not choose to work only during the day shift. If their companies required them to work in the night shift, they had to do this. The wood company where Bagas worked sometimes required him to work the shift from 3:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m., and then put him on the first shift in the morning. I observed how Bagas struggled to adapt to his changing work schedule. When he worked the afternoon shift, he usually arrived home at around 3:00 a.m. He was so tired because he had worked for more than ten hours and he also had to drive, picking up and bringing home his work fellows. He said that he usually went to sleep after 5:00 a.m. and woke up at 1:00 p.m. The worst thing was that he rarely communicated with his wife if he worked the afternoon shift. When Bagas arrived home at 3:00 a.m., his wife was sleeping, and when
he woke up, his wife was working. Thus, they only spent time with each other on the weekends and holidays.

The amount of wages earned was another consequence of being undocumented. The amount of their weekly wage was not decided by the companies but by the employment agency. The companies’ responsibility was to give workers’ wages to employment agencies, and the agencies then distributed the wages. The problem arose when undocumented workers found jobs through sub-agents or second sub-agents. Then the workers would receive lower wages. The employment agencies would take a percentage of the wages to pay the sub-agents or second sub-agents and the agency staff. Another problem was that undocumented workers would often receive their wages late if they found jobs through sub-agents or second sub-agents. These secondary agents would not give workers their wages until the agents received them from the employment agencies. To distribute workers’ wages, the agents would usually visit workers’ apartments or make appointments. They did not allow workers to get their wages from their agents’ apartments since the agents worked illegally.

I asked Lina how much her agency took when she was paid $10.50 per hour. She said that the agency took $3.50 per hour, because the company paid $14/hour to the agency. The agency would use some of the $3.50 to pay for taxes, drivers, gasoline, and car maintenances. She calculated that her agency maximally received $2/hour for each worker after expenses. If Lina worked eight hours/day, her agency received $16/day. One of my informants, Putra, worked in an agency that supplied workers for four companies.
His job was to handle workers’ problems, including work accidents. He earned $1,500 weekly.

The last consequence of being undocumented that I observed was the instability associated with employment agencies’ changes in workplaces. Companies might change employment agencies without giving information to undocumented workers. Or an employment agency could “sell” its contracts to another agency without informing the undocumented workers. Sometimes the first agency does not give the second agency the workers’ wages for the last week the workers worked. When undocumented workers ask the new employment agency for their wages, they are told that the first agency should have given them the wages. This happened to my informants. Bagas’s agency changed three times, and one time he did not receive his wages for three days of work. When Bagas complained to his company, he was shown a receipt that said his wages had been paid to his agency. This also happened to Bono who did not receive a week’s wages when his employment agency sold its contract to another agency.

Some Benefits

Undocumented workers received few benefits for working as hard as they did. However, I reflect that they received three benefits as undocumented workers. Their employment agencies, sub-agents, or second sub-agents transported them to their work places and brought them home after working hours. I call this a benefit because most undocumented workers did not have cars, and they would had have difficulties reaching their workplaces otherwise because most factories were located outside of Philadelphia. I
visited Bagas’s workplace in New Jersey which was 24.7 miles from his home in South Philadelphia, a trip of around 45 minutes. There was no public transportation to this factory because it was in a rural area.

Only a few undocumented workers had their own cars. Not only could most not afford to purchase cars, they could not get driver’s licenses. The undocumented workers who had licenses had usually gotten them through other people by identity fraud, using other people’s identities, rather than their real identities. It was a high-risk practice. If the fraud was discovered by police, they would be sent to jail. To avoid this risk, the undocumented workers tried to obtain licenses from other states. This meant they lived in Philadelphia, but their driver’s license was from California or another state. The assumption was that the officers would not ask for details if the driver’s license was from another state.

Another risk of having a license arose if the IMWs were in an accident. When this happened, they had to deal with police officers, and the officers might discover the identity fraud. To avoid this risk, in the case of an accident, the workers would first contact their insurance companies to handle the accident, and then they would go back to Indonesia as soon as possible in order to avoid arrest. One of my informants, Roni, had this experience. He worked as a delivery man for a Chinese restaurant located outside Philadelphia. When he had an accident, he quickly contacted his car insurance company which fortunately handled the accident very well. Then he purchased an airline ticket to return to Indonesia. When he said good-bye to the Indonesian community in the Al-Falah mosque, the community seemed surprised. They thought that Roni should wait and see
what happened. Roni told me that his parents in Jakarta were unhappy when he told them he planned to return to Indonesia. One week later, he departed.

The second possible benefit for undocumented workers was an increase in wages for undocumented workers who had worked in a company for three to five years or more. On the other hand, the workers would not get raises if they moved from one company to another. The increases varied from 25 cents to $1 per hour. Some companies gave an increase once a year; others once every two years. The increase usually depended on whether undocumented workers demanded a raise. When workers felt they had done very well in their workplaces for a certain period, then they would ask for an increase in their wages. In 2001, Bagas accepted a starting wage of $7.75 per hour. The following year, his company increased his wage to be $8 per hour. His next wage increase was to $8.50 per hour, and in 2009, his wage was $13.50 per hour. If he worked overtime, he earned $15 per hour. Lina also received a wage increase. Her first pay rate was $7.75 per hour in 2005, and four years later, she earned $10.50 per hour.

The final benefit for undocumented workers was “career development.” Undocumented workers could advance from regular undocumented work to being group leaders. The leaders usually did not do the same work that the regular undocumented workers did. Lina, who worked as a group leader in a paper company, was responsible for making sure that raw materials for paper production were always available. She was also required to call a mechanic if one of the paper machines broke down. For this job, she was paid $1 more per hour than regular undocumented workers.
Job Satisfaction

Locke (1969) defines job satisfaction as “the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one's job values” (p. 316). This definition places the emotions of people as the important factor in job satisfaction. People’s emotions vary depending on their experiences in their workplaces and their expectations of what they would like to achieve in their jobs.

Every informant in my field research had different experiences that influenced his or her job satisfaction. My question was general: how did they like their job? In answering this question, they expressed their job satisfaction based on their own perspectives.

Anto complained that he was exploited in his workplace, but he needed his job in the U.S. to improve his family’s well being in Indonesia. He worked not only to meet his daily needs, but also to purchase technological items, such as laptops and cameras. This was the reason why he stayed in this country for more than four years.

Lina had a different response. She realized that her employment agency earned a lot of money off of her, but she thought it was fair for the service they provided her.

If I was an employment agency, I am not sure that I could distribute workers’ wages regularly. My agency had to distribute wages weekly to workers, even though my company would not give workers’ wages until the workers had worked for three months. You can imagine how much money the agency had to provide to pay workers’ wages in advance. I am happy with my work, and I enjoy working in the paper factory.

Since Lina was happy at her workplace, she did not plan to leave her job unless she was laid off. Moreover, she had been promoted to be the group leader of several
undocumented workers, earning her a larger wage and giving her duties other than physical labor.

Bagas’s response was similar to that of Lina. He felt at home in his workplace. The first reason was that he was not young any more: he was 47-years-old. In his view, it was not easy to find a job as one became older. Another reason was that he had limited English skills. Although his job required him to speak English, he did not need to know the language well. It would be different if he worked in a restaurant that required him to speak English better. The last reason for his contentment was that he earned sufficient wages compared to other undocumented workers in different places. He earned $13.50 per hour whereas others received around $8 per hour.

Bono explained that he sometimes felt exploited in his work place, especially when he realized the employment agency earned a lot of money. However, after thinking rationally, he accepted this because the agency was also responsible for picking up and bringing workers home, paying drivers, maintaining cars and purchasing gasoline. Moreover, he and other undocumented workers did not have the necessary documents when applying for jobs. What he needed to do was to work, work, and work, so that he could earn money.

A Case Study: Bono

Bono began his day at 6:00 am when he was picked up by his employment agency to go to his workplace. The agency did not go to the place directly but picked up other workers in the South Philadelphia area in a big 15-passenger van. However, the van
carried 17 workers. Since Bono always sat in the front near the driver, he did not feel
crowded in the van. This over-crowding of the van happened when the company needed
additional workers and the agency did not want to provide additional cars to
accommodate the workers. The van would carry only 12 workers when the company
reduced the number of workers. The trip took around an hour to the workplace, and Bono
usually slept. Other passengers usually chatted during the trip.

Around a year ago, Bono and the other workers were always worried when they
got to work. The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency sometimes
stopped vans to look for workers who failed to return to Indonesia although they had
been told to do so by the U.S. government. They were usually political asylum seekers
whose application had been denied by the U.S. Courts. Although Bono and his fellows
were not political asylum seekers, they feared that their status as undocumented workers
would be discovered. If that happened, they might be deported to Indonesia.

Bono began work at 8:00 am. While documented workers would sign in by
touching their fingerprints, undocumented workers would clock in on time cards. If the
undocumented workers were late, they would be docked three minutes for every minute
they came late. For almost four years working at the company, Bono had never been
absent. If he had been a documented worker, he would have earned time off after 300
hours on the job.

Bono worked in a company that produced chemical products, such as alcohol and
sterile water, to supply U.S. hospitals. He was required to wear a blue uniform, gloves,
shoes, mask, and glasses before entering the workplace. His job in the production
division included filling, labeling, packaging, and sealing products. He used machines to do these jobs easily and quickly. For instance, he just needed to push a bottle into a machine in front of him to fill it with sterile water. Then, he would move the bottle to other workers to be labeled, sealed, and packed. Bono worked in this section for several hours and would then change to labeling, packaging, or sealing sections. All these sections were in one location.

Bono had three breaks during work hours. The first was for ten minutes at 10:00 am. The second one was at noon for lunch, and the last one was another 10-minutes break at 1:30 pm. The lunch break was only 25 minutes, just enough time to eat. Bono usually brought lunch and snacks from home, but he could also buy them in the cafeteria, where they were sold by other workers as a side business. Even though he was a Muslim, Bono could not perform the daily noon prayer. However, he substituted the prayer when he arrived home.

Bono’s position in the workplace was as a group leader of 29 undocumented workers, which required him to work a little bit differently than the other undocumented workers. Besides working in the production division, he had to know who was absent from work and report this to the company manager. He would also bridge communications between the company and workers, especially to help workers who had limited English skills. As the group leader, he earned $8.25 per hour while other undocumented workers earned $7.25 per hour. One time he tried to get a wage increase for his group because they had not had one for two years. The company asked Bono’s employment agency to come into discuss the increase. Bono asked the agency several
times to come to the company, but they were not willing to. The company would not increase the wages without making an agreement with the agency. Finally, the group and Bono got a raise of 75 cents per hour.

In 2006 Bono had an accident at his workplace. When the accident happened, only Bono and a few others were in the production place because it was just at the break and most workers had left the floor. Bono’s friend filled an alcohol bottle with three times its capacity, and the bottle exploded. This affected Bono’s left ear and his hearing. For a couple of minutes, he was deaf to any sound. He continued to work because he was well physically, but his ear hurt. The company’s manager acknowledged the accident, but the company was not responsible. Bono’s agency was responsible for medical assistance. Bono called his employment agency, and he got medical attention on the third day after the accident. But, it appears that he did not get proper medical assistance. When I interviewed Bono, he told me that he had only 90% hearing and could not hear very well in his left ear.

I actually could sue the company because of the accident. However, I did not do that because I was worried that the company would employ a better lawyer than I would employ. If that happened, I would fail. Moreover, during the court proceedings, I could not work for this company. I feared that if I sued the company, it would counter sue me as an undocumented worker. Another risk was that the company might not hire Indonesian workers anymore.10

Although Bono was satisfied with his job and he was at home in his workplace, he was worried that his company might lay off its workers. “Layoff” was the term used for documented workers, and “stay home” was the term for undocumented workers. Both terms had the same meaning: workers losing their jobs. In 2007, the company had 30

10 Interview with Bono.
workers stay home. The workers had to look for other jobs. During the U.S. economic crisis in 2009 when I did my field research, it was difficult to find jobs.
CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY LIFE

Strengthening Community

The Indonesian Community of Greater Philadelphia (ICGP) is an organization established by the Indonesian community in Philadelphia in 2003 for all Indonesians from different religions and ethnicities. Indonesian students who were studying in the city also joined ICGP, as did the Indonesian Moslem Community of Greater Philadelphia (IMCP). Since the number of students was not large, ICGP and IMCP united, becoming ICGP. Although ICGP was established for all Indonesians, almost all members are Muslim, and it is now viewed as a Muslim Indonesian organization.11

ICGP has regular activities, and most are conducted in Masjid Al-Falah. Before owning Al-Falah, the members held their meetings in a member’s apartment, and one time they used a church established by another Indonesian community. ICGP has two regular meetings a week: Thursday night and Saturday night. Both have the same purpose: strengthening the Indonesian Muslim community in Philadelphia. Thursday night meetings are for reading the Qur’an together, especially Yasin. It is the chapter which Muslims are encouraged to read, especially on Thursday nights. These meetings are initiated and led by Toni (not real name), an undocumented worker who had been working for more than four years in the U.S. and before that for several years in Saudi Arabia. He can read the Qur’an well and speak Arabic fluently. The meetings begin with the members praying together, reading a chapter of Yasin, and dining together at the end.

11 Interview with Aditya.
Everybody brings dishes to share with others. Here I could find Indonesian foods that I usually cannot find in Athens, Ohio.

![Image](image.jpg)

*Picture 5: Reading *Yasin* Together.*

Only a few people attended the Thursday meetings. After attending this program several times, I observed that around 10 people usually came to this meeting. Most ICGP members cannot come because they are still working or they are tired after returning from their workplace. Rafiq and his family always come to this meeting, although it takes them 30 minutes to reach the mosque by subway from their apartment. Rafiq is one of the religious advisors of ICGP. I asked Rafiq why he and his family always come to this meeting, and he said, “To establish a new community requires a long time and also requires some people who can keep its activities running continuously.”

More members come to the Saturday night meetings. Usually around 40 people come by walking or driving. Those who live far from the mosque and have no vehicles

---

12 Interview with Rafiq.
are picked up by other members. They usually bring their families to the meeting and various Indonesian foods to share with other members.

The ICGP board arranges activities during this meeting. They begin the program by providing free English lessons and training to read the Qur’an. The main agenda of the meeting is a sermon by an Islamic scholar. Two advisors of ICGP, Rafiq and Munjid, usually give the sermon. Occasionally speakers come from other institutions or cities. The topics vary. One time, the guest speaker was from Harvard University, Dadi Darmadi. He delivered his speech on the Haj (pilgrimage). After the speech, the speaker gives members the opportunity to ask questions and there is a discussion. On my last Saturday night in Philadelphia, the Board of ICGP asked me to give a speech. I talked about the Hijriyyah (migration) of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in the 7th century. I was very happy to have an opportunity to deliver a talk in Al-Falah. While adult members of ICGP listen to the sermon, children play in the basement of Al-Falah. There are around 10 children that come to the meeting regularly. In the future, the Board of ICGP will organize a weekend school for these children.

I always attended these meetings and saw that it was very important for the community to share their daily life experiences. The meetings were an escape from daily hard work. During the summer, the meetings end at 10:30 p.m.; but people often stayed talking until 1:00 a.m. Once, I recorded Eko (not real name), a member who shared his daily experience in a discussion about life as an undocumented worker, saying, “I drive at least 1 hour to reach my work place every day.” Eko is a worker from East Java, who has
been living in the USA for more than 5 years. “Moreover, I face hard work. My job is to move big boxes from one place to another in a warehouse in New Jersey.”

Those who work in restaurants usually cannot come to Saturday night meetings. One of them is Roni, who works in a Chinese restaurant. Weekends are the busiest for him, and he usually returns to his apartment at 1:00 a.m. That is why he has a day off every Tuesday.

Besides regular activities, ICGP organizes occasional programs. In summer 2009, they organized the Al-Falah Summer Camp in cooperation with the Community of Nahdlatul Ulama of North America and Canada, Muslim Intellectuals Society of Indonesia (ICMI) USA, and the Asian Society for International Relations and Public Affairs (ASIRPA). The program was held at the Foundation for Islamic Education, Villanova, Philadelphia, from August 14 to 16, 2009. More than 100 participants from Philadelphia, Massachusetts, Ohio, New Jersey, New York, Georgia, Maryland, West Virginia, and Canada attended. The program was very interesting, combining academic forums and cultural activities. There was a seminar in which Syamsi Ali, the Imam of the Jamaica Islamic Center in New York, gave a speech, a panel discussion “One God, One Humanity,” and small group discussions. For cultural activities, the committee organized Indonesian traditional games, a soccer competition, and children’s plays. I was impressed to see most members of ICGP helping each other to make the program successful. They worked very hard to prepare and to welcome participants. During all three days, the committee provided authentic Indonesian foods that participants from other states could not find where they live.
I observed some regular and occasional activities organized by the ICGP Board. ICGP members worked hard to establish and strengthen their community. They felt, as Aditya said, that they needed to unite Indonesians of different ethnicities, regions, and social status to be one family. In ICGP, people who might never have met in Indonesia can meet, share, and help each other in a foreign country. The establishment of Masjid Al-Falah is a great achievement that shows how undocumented IMWs can unite to support each other.

I wanted to know why some undocumented workers, such as Anto and Bagas, did not join activities of ICGP at Al-Falah. When I asked Anto, he said:

I do not like gathering with many people like the Saturday night meeting in Al-Falah. I prefer to avoid talking and chatting too much. If we talk too much, it will become gossip and I do not like that. I prefer staying in my apartment to search the internet and watch movies. Sometimes I explore Philadelphia.

I went to Anto’s apartment several times. Although his room is small, located in the basement, there were two televisions, a video player, tons of videos, computer speakers, and high speed internet access. Utilizing these conveniences, he felt completely at home on his weekends and holidays. He told me that he often sent moral or religious messages to the ICGP’s website or the ICGP’s account on Facebook. In these ways, he communicated with the Indonesian community virtually, although he did not meet them directly.

Bagas has a different reason why he did not join ICGP’s activities, although his apartment was only a block from Al-Falah. “I am not proper enough to go to Al-Falah regularly because I go to Atlantic City for gambling. Later, if I can stop my gambling, I will go to the mosque,” he said. I observed that Bagas did not do the five daily prayers,
which are part of Muslim obligations. However, in my view, he is a very kind person as a
friend and as an informant. He helped other undocumented IMWs find jobs, and he
helped me with my data collection process.

Bagas could go to Atlantic City for gambling alone and Anto could go explore
Philadelphia neighborhoods anytime. They also enjoy their lives. It seems that they do
not need a community in the form of the ICGP.

Empowerment

I visited a memoir writing workshop “My Life in Philadelphia” on Sunday,
December 13, 2009. It was held on the second floor of Tasty Asia, a restaurant
established by some Indonesians. The workshop was funded by Leeway Foundation and
facilitated by Indah Nuritasari, a member of Al-Falah who used to be a freelance writer
for Indonesian newspapers. All female Indonesians in Philadelphia were welcomed to
join this workshop, and 15 participants were selected to contribute to the memoir
collection that would be published in Indonesian and English with photographs. The
participants came with their children who were playing on the first floor of the restaurant
while their moms attended the workshop. When I arrived at the workshop, there were 8
Indonesian women, mostly Al-Falah members.

The participants were to write about their experiences working and living in
Philadelphia. Since they were undocumented workers, it was brave of them to speak
about what they faced, felt, and experienced. Of course, not all Indonesian women in
Philadelphia were willing to write memoirs and in fact, some of participants decided not
to submit their memoir. They were frightened because the memoirs would have their names and their photographs would also appear.

I view this as an empowerment program for female undocumented workers, because they learn how to tell their stories. As a facilitator, Indah Nuritasari assisted those composing sentences to be paragraphs, organizing paragraphs to be subtopics, and formulating subtopics to be a complete story. This process was not easy for some. One participant, Nurul, showed me her compositions in a hand written form. “I wrote more than 10 pages. I told my stories from when I came to Philadelphia, about looking for jobs, searching for an apartment, helping with my friend’s problem, supporting my son’s education, etc. What do you think?” she asked me.

The women also learned how to use computers and the internet. Most of them were familiar with Facebook and actively posted and wrote message on their walls. However, a few of them could not save their files in computers properly. One participant was confused about how to search for stories that she had written on the computer. When
she asked Indah Nuritasari where her file was, she realized that she had not saved her stories properly.

Nurul and other participants might never have thought that they could be writers who could write books. This is what happened with Indonesian women migrant workers in Hong Kong, some of whom have published books, such as *Nyanyian Imigran* [Migrant Songs], a compilation of short stories; *Ranting Sakura* [Sakura Branch], a novel; *Memoar of Kungyan* by Maria Bo Niok; *Penari Naga Kecil* [Little Dragon Dancers], a compilation of short stories by Tarini Sorrita; and *Catatan Harian Seorang Pramuwisma* [Diary of A Housekeeper] by Rini Widyawati (Adib, 2007). Another productive writer is Mega Vristian, a female worker from East Java who has been working in Hong Kong for more than five years. She contributed to the anthology *Nyanyian Migran, 5 Kelopak Mata Bauhinia* [Five Bauhini Eyes], and the poetry anthology *Dian Satro for President!* Mega has her own poetry collection, *Kepak Camar Teluk Hong Kong* [Sea-gull Wings of Hong Kong Bay] and has just launched her novel *Perempuan Penyangga Separuh Langit* [Woman Support Half the Sky].

**Escaping Work Lives**

Exploring other neighborhoods in Philadelphia and other states in the U.S. is one activity of undocumented IMWs. It is how they spend their weekends and holidays. They arrange their travel with their roommates or work mates or occasionally go alone. My informants told me that they had been to China Town, City Hall, bookstores, and other neighborhoods in Philadelphia. They had also traveled to Washington D.C., New York,
and Boston. When they traveled to different states, they usually rented a car together; going as a group made traveling less expensive. For instance, to go to D.C. they only needed $40 per person for a round trip.

On Monday, July 27, 2009, I accompanied Anto on an outing. Anto lived in Snyder, South Philadelphia with other undocumented IMWs. From his apartment, we took a bus to reach City Hall. We explored City Hall and its surroundings, including China Town and the Gallery at Market East.

Another way undocumented IMWs escape their work lives is gambling. This includes exploring new places when they go to Atlantic City, New Jersey. Bagas spent a lot of money gambling and shopping there. He would go with his apartment mates or work partners, sometimes as frequently as five times a month. He realized that he would not always win in gambling and his chance for losing was greater, but he was not ready to stop going there, especially when he felt bored in his apartment. His weekly wages, which are around $500, were sometimes lost gambling. If he was lucky, he would win $100 or $200. One time he won $1,000. He usually plays poker, roulette, black jack, baccarat, and machine games. It seemed that Bagas was addicted to gambling. When I came to his apartment for the interview, he was playing online gambling.

You can imagine that playing a free online game could give us challenges and sensations. We would have bigger challenges and sensations when we were playing directly.⁴³

⁴³ Interview with Bagas.
I think that exploring neighborhoods new places and gambling are simple ways for undocumented workers to escape from their work lives. What they needed was simple, relaxation from their hard week.

A Case Study: Bagas

On Thursday, December 24, 2009, I had to go back to Athens, Ohio, at 7:30 am. I tried to check-in for my airline flight online five hours prior to my departure, but when I opened the website of US Airways, I found a Travel Advisory for the Midwest that said there were no flights leaving Philadelphia because of bad weather, so I decided to delay my return.

I called Bagas at 10:30 am and asked him whether we could go to Atlantic City that day. Fortunately, Bagas, his wife, and friends had arranged to go to Atlantic City and would leave Philadelphia at 4:45 pm. Bagas asked his wife to arrange my ticket. I was happy. Bagas and I had planned several times to go to Atlantic City on a Sunday, but we always failed to go.

I went to Bagas’ apartment at 3:50 pm. He and his wife were ready to go to the station where the Greyhound bus would pick us up. Bagas brought a backpack and his wife carried a plastic container. They only wore jackets, because it was not very cold. We walked ten blocks to reach the shop, and we had to walk carefully because there was a lot of snow, which made the street slippery. I heard from my friend that the Philadelphia government could not remove all the snow in the city due to a limited budget.
We took 20 minutes to reach the station. While I was waiting, Bagas and his wife went to the McDonald’s restaurant across the street. There were big banners that said, “Casino Buses” on the wall of the shop. The Greyhound schedule for Atlantic City was also posted on the wall. There were 14 departures starting at 9:15 am. with the last departure at 9:45 pm. Every departure time had arrived at a different casino hotel in Atlantic City, such as, Caesars, Tropicana, Ballys, A.C. Hilton, Taj Mahal, Claridge, and Showboat. The ticket cost was $20 per person.

I entered the bus station due to the cold wind, and I saw several passengers waiting for the bus. Some were Indonesian. They were talking about their work and daily life experiences. Ten minutes later, the Greyhound arrived and everybody went to get on the bus.

The bus had 46 seats, and only eight were vacant. I sat in seat no. 35. Bagas and his wife were in front of me, and behind me were Dani (not real name) and Wulan (not real name). Dani was from South Sulawesi while Wulan was from East Java. They were Bagas’ friends. There were also two Indonesians to my left. Bagas’ wife offered me chicken nuggets that she had bought at McDonald’s. Bagas started talking with the two Indonesians about their gambling experiences and the amount of money they had won. Soon the bus was quiet, and it seemed most of the passengers were sleeping.

The bus arrived at the A.C. Hilton Hotel at 5:50 pm. Only a few passengers got off. The bus stopped again a few minutes later at Ballys Hotel, where most of the passengers got off. The bus entered a mini bus terminal located in the basement of the
hotel. Buses from other cities, such as New York, Washington D.C., Boston, and Pittsburgh were there.

Bagas loaned me his friend’s Total Reward Card. I saw that he had brought more than three cards. “I borrow other cards from my friends who do not visit Atlantic City and you can use one of them,” Bagas said. All passengers gave their cards and tickets to a woman at the gate and received a $20 coupon. This coupon could be used to play in any casino game and encouraged every passenger to gamble.

While Bagas and I were waiting in line, Bagas suggested that I request a new card instead of borrowing his friend’s card. A couple of minutes later, it was my turn and I gave the woman my ticket and my State ID. The woman swiped my ID and gave me a $20 coupon. Then, I went to the hotel reception desk to gain a Total Reward Card under my name. Soon I had a new card at the gold level, which was the lowest. The second level was platinum and the third was diamond. Seven stars was the highest level. Every level had different benefits. The higher the level, the more benefits. If a member spent a lot of money on gambling, they would accumulate points to increase his/her level. Bagas and Dani had platinum cards. “If we have a diamond card, the hotel will provide us with free rooms and food to make us comfortable while gambling,” said Bagas. The cards could be used at any hotel in the Harrahs’ hotel group in Atlantic City, such as Showboat, Claridge, and Caesars.

It was 6:45 pm. Bagas, his wife, Dani, Wulan, and I walked from the bus terminal to the lobby of Ballys Hotel. The corridor to the main lobby was not crowded and Bagas commented, “This corridor is usually very crowded. People go back and forth from the
bus terminal to gambling rooms. Maybe because tomorrow is Christmas, everybody is staying home. But this corridor will be crowded tomorrow.”  We stopped for a couple of minutes at the Total Rewards counter. Bagas swiped his rewards card in one of the Total Rewards machine kiosks. He wanted to know how many points he had. Near the counter was a health center that was open until 3:00 am. I talked with the doctor who was in charge of the health center that night. He was a Haitian immigrant who had been living in the U.S. for more than 15 years and had five sons who were born in this country.

At the hotel, Dani and Wulan reserved one room. Bagas and his wife would reserve a room in the Showboat Hotel, located several blocks away. Ballys and the Showboat were under the same management. Before going to reserve a room, Bagas and Dani went to the Slot and Video Poker Hall where there were more than 1,000 game machines. Bagas played the $20 coupon. He chose a poker game machine to try his luck. If he could win $20, it would pay for his Greyhound ticket. Unfortunately, he only won $16. Then he played his wife’s $20 coupon.

Bagas and Dani played in the Slot and Video Poker Hall for more than 30 minutes. They were just warming up before they would play in the main gambling hall. We walked through the Boardwalk of Atlantic City where there were shops, restaurants, and gambling counters. We saw a Hard Rock Café and another casino hotel, the Trump Taj Mahal Casino. At the Showboat Hotel, Dani helped Bagas and his wife reserve their room. They were given a room on the 11th floor which consisted of two beds, one television set, a deluxe bathroom, and one table. Like Dani and Wulan, Bagas and his wife did not have to pay for the room. They only paid $13 for the room tax. Harrah’s
Resort Atlantic City regularly sent them an offer to stay in one of their hotels for free or pay a discounted price. Bagas, his wife, Dani, and Wulan were able to stay there during the busy Christmas season.

It was 8:30 pm. While Bagas’ wife went to the room, I went with as he looked for his favorite game: Texas Hold 'Em.

I rarely play in the Showboat. That is why I do not remember where I could play my favorite game. I prefer gambling in the Ballys Hotel because the hotel provides the bus terminal that offers trips hourly to Philadelphia. So, I could go back to Philadelphia as soon as I finish gambling. If I played in the Showboat, I have to walk to the Ballys Hotel to get my bus. This is okay if I won because I am willing to walk happily. However, if I loose and I have to walk, it would make me upset.¹⁴

We passed the lobby of the Showboat Hotel to get to the place where Bagas would play Texas Hold 'Em. The place was named House of Blues Poker Room. It was a great place to spend several hours gambling. A casino cashier was in the front of the room where everybody could change money into poker chips to play. A bar was located near with the cashier. The room had 28 gaming tables and more than 10 plasma televisions on the wall. Gamblers could play Texas Hold 'Em and also Omaha and Seven Card Stud.

When we arrived, there were people playing games at five different gaming tables. Most of them were playing Texas Hold 'Em. The tables were divided into no limit betting and limited betting. Bagas asked a game dealer where the limited betting gaming table was. He pointed to a table near the casino cashier. There were eleven seats at the table but eight players already filled seats at the table. The game was facilitated by a female dealer. Bagas watched for a couple of minutes before joining the game. He gave

¹⁴ Interview with Bagas.
the dealer $60 to buy a poker chip set. Some chips were valued at one dollar, while others were valued at five dollars.

The players were predominately male. Every player could join or leave the game anytime. When Bagas started playing, a boy with a dark jacket joined and gave $100 to the dealer. The boy played his chip set by betting and folding. He seemed very aggressive. However, he lost his entire chip set in 20 minutes. He did not give up with this loss. He moved to a no limit betting table. He might have been lucky at that table, because I saw a lot of chip sets in front of him after one hour.

Bagas gambled at that game for almost two hours. Sometimes he won $20, then $30, and even $60. When Bagas won, he usually gave a tip of $1 or $2 to the dealer. He did not give money, but he gave a chip of that value. Other players did the same thing. The dealer would put his/her tips into a transparent box. When a player left the game, the dealer would say: “Have a good holiday” or “Have a good Christmas.” Every 30 minutes, a new dealer would take over and the former dealer would take a break. The first dealer would take over another dealer’s position at a different table.

At the gambling table, Bagas saw his two cards and decided whether he should bet or fold. While he was playing, sometimes he turned to watch the plasma television near his chair. He never talked with the other players, and he did not respond when another player invited him to talk. One time, he ordered a Heineken beer from a waiter, because it was free. Bagas and other players could order any drink and the waiter would come back in just a couple of minutes. Although the drink was free, players usually gave the waiter a $1 or $2 tip of cash or a poker chip.
It was 12:40 am. Bagas had been playing for more than four hours. He was willing to play longer because he was enjoying the game. He had never had to buy another poker chip set other than the $60 set when he began the game. Finally he decided to leave. He had lost $25 from his poker chip set. He gave me a poker chip with the value of one dollar. “It is for you, just for a souvenir,” he said. Then, he went to a casino cashier to cash in his poker chips.

Then he invited me to explore the Showboat Casino. Located on the same floor as the lobby and the House of Blues Poker Room, the Showboat had more than 1,000 slot machine and more than 50 gambling tables. He showed me people playing blackjack, baccarat, and roulette. He said that he played all these games, but his favorite game was Poker Texas Hold 'Em. He said, “I think this is a fair game. If you know its tricks, you can win. That is why I like this game.” We stopped at the blackjack table where he explained to me how a player could spend a lot of money in one game: “See that guy. He is betting $1,000! I guess he is rich. Maybe he has a big business.”

The next day, Friday, December 25, 2009, Bagas and his wife checked out of the hotel at 11:30 am. At the receptionist desk, they met other Indonesians. They talked about the games and whether other Indonesians stayed in hotels in Atlantic City. We planned to walk to the Ballys Hotel, but it was raining. We got a shuttle bus that connected to the Ballys Hotel and other casino hotels.

We decided to get lunch. While we were looking for restaurants, Bagas invited me to see the Ballys Hotel casino. Like the Showboat Casino, the hotel had more than 1,000 slot machines. The hotel also provided gambling tables, poker rooms, and a
Baccarat Palace. The Ballys Hotel was connected to the Wild Wild West Casino, which was decorated with an Old West theme. The Ballys Hotel was also connected to Claridge Casino Hotel, Caesars Casino Hotel, and The Pier Shops at Caesars.

We ate lunch at Noodle Village, an authentic Asian restaurant near the Baccarat Palace and the slot machine hall of the Ballys Hotel. While we were waiting for a table, Bagas gambled in the slot machine hall. He played for a couple of minutes and won the game, but it was only $1. After 20 minutes, we were seated in the restaurant. Bagas ordered beef soup, his wife ordered seafood fried rice, and I ordered Korean short ribs. They spent $30 and I paid $15.

After lunch we walked around The Pier Shops at Caesars Atlantic City. Famous fashion brands were available, such as A|X Armani Exchange, Banana Republic, BOSS HUGO BOSS, Gucci, Guess, and more. We stopped in the Levi’s store, where Bagas’ wife bought jeans for $49.90. The original price was $79.90. We also stopped in A|X Armani Exchange where Bagas bought a white t-shirt for $19, using a $29 discount. It was 3:00 pm, and we went back to the Ballys Hotel. Bagas and his wife would stay overnight in a room on the 41st floor and Bagas would continue gambling.
CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION

Living with Uncertainty

I have described the living conditions of undocumented Indonesian migrant workers (IMWs) in Philadelphia. In my field research I did my best to understand how undocumented IMWs settled and survived in Philadelphia. Besides participating in their activities in mosque Al-Falah, I visited their work places. I observed what kind of work my informants performed and who their co-workers were. I also visited their apartments, mostly in the evenings and on the weekends, to understand how they spent their time after their workday was over. I accompanied my informants on their days off as they explored neighborhoods in Philadelphia, and I visited other states with them. While I accompanied them, I talked with them about their experience of settling and surviving in Philadelphia. In addition to telling me about their working conditions and daily lives, they also told me about their families in Indonesia.

As I recorded and observed my informants’ struggles to settle and survive in Philadelphia, I empathized with their worries about working unstable jobs. I worried when they told me about problems they faced, such as accidents in the workplace and how difficult it was to get the help they needed. Dedi sued his company when he suffered a work-related accident. A private legal service helped him, and he won the case in court. The company gave him an undisclosed sum of money as compensation. Dedi shared the compensation with the legal service. But this case was unusual. Few undocumented workers are brave enough to sue a company when they are the victim of a work-related accident. For example, Bono did not sue his company when a work-related accident
damaged the hearing in his left ear. He thought that the company would hire a better lawyer than he could and he was concerned that his company would turn him in for being an undocumented worker.

I have entitled this thesis “Living with Uncertainty,” because this is the dominant theme in the narratives of the IMWs whom I studied and lived with. First they face the challenge of settling in a new country without any established contacts. Second are the uncertainties they face in their jobs and housing. Third is uncertainty about when and how they will return to Indonesia to reunite with their families. I conclude there are three factors that made them remain in Philadelphia, although they face these uncertainties in their life. The factors are the ability to earn higher wages, the existence of mosque Al-Falah as a community center and more hope for the future after working several years in the USA.

Uncertainty of Starting Life

Scholars have identified patterns of settlement for immigrants in a host country like the USA (Newbold & Achjar, 2002; Baird, Adelman, Reid, & Jaret, 2008; Takougang & Tidjani; 2009). One pattern is that new immigrants utilize family or a friend to find housing and a job. Earlier arrivals assist the immigrants to adapt to the new environment and help them to find jobs. These connections influence the immigrants’ choice of where to settle. An example is Chinatown as an intended destination for new Chinese immigrants. After the immigrants become comfortable in their new environment and are financially independent, they loosen these connections.
This pattern applies to the undocumented IMWs in Philadelphia. Most stayed with a relative or friend when they first settled in the USA. This gave them a chance to adjust to American life and accept the realities of American life compared to what they understood about this country from the mass media in Indonesia. For example, Bono understood from television that all Americans lived in single houses with gardens. When he first stayed with his friend, he was surprised that he lived in a block apartment where a studio room was occupied by eight people. He was also surprised when his friend introduced him to an “American job” that required physical work and provided only a 30-minute break.

I found that two of my informants, Anto and Lina, did not fit this pattern. They came to the USA without knowing any family member or friend who could help them settle in or look for a job. Anto arrived in Los Angeles and stayed in a hotel for a day. He went to Chinatown to look for other Indonesians. When he met an Indonesian, he asked where he could find work in the city. Anto’s first job was in a Chinese restaurant. After a couple of months working in L.A., he flew to Philadelphia, again with no relatives or friends there. Lina had a different experience. She came to the USA bringing only the address of an ‘Indonesia Store’ in Philadelphia, and fortunately its owner helped her to settle and find a job. These stories suggest that informal self-help groups or organizations, business centers, or personal information, like Lina’s address for an “Indonesia Store,” also play an important role in the experience of immigrants.
Uncertainty in Employment and Housing

Uncertainty characterized my informants’ daily lives as they spent hours, days, months, and years in Philadelphia and colored their experience of life in this city. I observed that there were three factors that created uncertainty: insecurity of employment; uncertainty regarding income; and uncertainty in housing.

Scholars have defined job insecurity in terms of “powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation” (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984, p. 438), “a potential threat to continuity in his or her current job” (Heaney, Israel, & House, 1994, p. 1431), “conceived as an overall concern about the future existence of the job” (Rosenblatt & Ruvio, 1996, p. 587), and “one's expectations about continuity in a job situation” (Davy, Kinicki, & Sheck, 1997, p. 323). Uncertainty in employment means that workers do not know in how long they will work. The problem is particularly acute for undocumented workers who can be laid off from their workplaces at any time. If they are laid off, they confront a critical situation where they have to find other jobs quickly.

Job insecurity arose due to the 1970s economic crisis in the United States and affected all the country’s laborers. Gordon (1996) noted that the “wage squeeze”—decreasing wages—hurt many USA laborers. It was not only unskilled and disadvantaged workers who were victims of the “wage squeeze,” but the middle class also experienced the squeeze (p. 15). According to Bluestone and Harrison (1982), hundreds of thousands of blue-collar laborers have been made jobless because of the “deindustrialization of America” in the 1970s (pp. 6-7). This is due to the need to increase efficiency, decrease
the cost of production, and reduce the number of laborers, especially the number of unskilled workers (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002, p. 25).

The IMWs I interviewed mostly worked based on the orders a company received: they worked until the orders were filled. That means they worked only if the company had more orders and lost their job or worked shorter hours when the company received fewer orders. This made informants, like Anto, realize that they could only count on work in a workplace for a couple of weeks or several months. They had to be ready to be laid off from their jobs and to look for another job at any time. Anto changed jobs 15 times within five years. Other examples are Mariana who moved from one workplace to another 11 times within six months (Prambadi, 2004), and Mr. Cheng who moved 15 times within six years (Philadelphia Daily News, 2009).

Some of my informants were successful in finding “steady work” in what are considered unstable jobs. Examples are Bagas, Bono, and Lina, who worked for more than four years in their workplaces. Bono and Lina rose from jobs as regular undocumented workers to be group leaders and were not required to do the same work as the regular undocumented workers did. They earned $1 more per hour than regular undocumented workers. However, this does not mean that they really enjoyed job security, because the company could lay them off at any time.

A second uncertainty relates to income. Incomes of undocumented workers are based on how many hours they work (including overtime). In addition to their hourly wage, they do not get additional benefits as document workers do, such as health insurance and bonuses. In addition, their wages are lower than what documented workers
earn. Problems due to uncertainty about income arose when my informants were laid off. When Manan, a member of the ICGP, was laid off by his employment agency after working ten days in a wood factory, he could not find a job quickly. Besides meeting his daily needs, he was supposed to send money to his family in East Java. Furthermore, he was not paid for ten days he had worked, so he borrowed money from his friend. This situation increased the financial risk of his friend spreading uncertainty to others. The uncertainty about income was increased because IMWs could not expect wage increases, especially when they were forced to move from one workplace to another. They would always get starting wages for undocumented workers at around $6 or $7 per hour. This means that they could not increase their income, although they had worked in Philadelphia for more than four years. They could not save part of their wages, because they would send significant amounts of money to their families in Indonesia. When they lost a job or needed money, they had to borrow money from their fellows.

Finally, a third uncertainty was due to housing. My informants and other undocumented workers mostly lived in South Philadelphia. Besides being able to meet with other Indonesian fellows, they could find Indonesian foods in this area. However, they might be forced to move to other cities if they were laid off and could not find another job quickly in this city. They would contact friends who might be able to help them to find a job in another state, such as New York or California. Then they would move to begin work and live in a new neighborhood. My informants and other undocumented workers would also move to other cities when they could get better benefits in that city. They usually rented apartments monthly because they might have to
move quickly, and they could not be burdened by an apartment contract. Some undocumented IMWs returned to Indonesia because they were laid off and they could not find other jobs. Udin (not real name), a member of ICGP, had to move from one city to another, leaving his family, a wife and a daughter, in Philadelphia. He worked in Japanese and Chinese restaurants in different places, including Boston, New Jersey, and Delaware, to get better benefits. He visited Philadelphia two days a week to see his family.

Uncertainty about Returning Home

My informants came to the USA to look for jobs in order to earn higher wages so they could send money to their families in Indonesia. Lina and Nurul told me they worked in the USA to finance their son and daughter’s schooling. Bagas also informed me he supported his son so he could go to school and graduate. Most of my informants told me they would go back to Indonesia when their sons and daughters finished their schooling. When I conducted my field research in 2009, Bagas’s son had graduated from school, and had been offered a job in an international shipping company. Bagas plans to return to Indonesia a few years from now.

Based on the explanation above, they would return to Indonesia when they feel they have accomplished their duties for their families. A few of my informants have considered staying for a longer period of time in the USA, because they have no accomplished their duties to their families. Lina is an example. She had planned to stay in
this country until she was 50-years-old, but when she became 50 she was not able to return to Indonesia. Even with this uncertainty, my informants still desire to return.

Similar to Lina, Nurul, and Bagas, my other informants, such as Bono, and Anto, also plan to return to Indonesia. This shows that the USA is not “a dream land” or “a country of hope” for IMWs. They do not try to get green cards, to gain naturalization, or make other efforts to give themselves the possibility of staying permanently in this country. For example, even though Lina married a Puerto Rican in Philadelphia, she did not take advantage of the opportunity to be a U.S. citizen. She has asked her husband to live in Indonesia with her, and he has already bought some land for them to live on in West Java.

What Persuades Them to Remain in Philadelphia

Living with uncertainties is not an easy task. As I have explained in the previous sections, they have struggled with addressing their living conditions. Whether or not my informants enjoyed their uncertain lives, they still survived in Philadelphia for more than four years. While Bagas, Bono, and Lina enjoyed their “steady jobs,” Anto had to move from one workplace to another, because he could only find unstable jobs. Whereas some undocumented IMWs had returned to Indonesia because they were laid off and they could not find other jobs, Anto persevered and continued to look for a stable job.

I observed and learned why they remained in Philadelphia, although they lived with uncertainties. There are three supporting factors that sustain them living longer in this city. The first one is that they could earn higher wages compared to what they gained
in Indonesia, or in other countries where they had worked. In particular, they gain more money as well as receive a higher income when the Indonesian currency, the rupiah, is depreciated in comparison to the U.S. currency, the dollar. In this situation, they willingly do psychical jobs that they had never done before in Indonesia. The important thing is they could earn better incomes in the USA.

With the wages Anto, Bagas, Bono, and Lina earned at their jobs they sent parts of their wages to their families in Indonesia to fund necessities, such as their sons’ schooling, buying houses and cars. They also filled their daily needs in Philadelphia with the money they earned, including purchasing technological stuff, such as laptops and cameras. They even utilized part of their wages to explore neighborhoods of Philadelphia, and to visit other cities of the USA. A few of my informants spent their wages to buy cars in Philadelphia. In short, they could utilize their money to support their life in Philadelphia and better support their families in Indonesia.

The second factor is the existence of mosque Al-Falah as a community center. I visited Philadelphia three times for my field research. I lived in mosque Al-Falah on my second and third visits. Here undocumented IMWs gathered, especially on the weekends and holidays when they had regular meetings. I always participated in their meetings during my visits. Besides regular activities on the weekends or holidays, I also observed that Indonesians utilized the mosque for individual activities, such as celebrating their children’s birthdays and their marriages.

I learned that the mosque plays an important role in connecting Muslim Indonesians in Philadelphia. Al-Falah was created with a loan Muslim Indonesians
received from the bank. They pay for the loan with weekly donations from members.
This shows that IMWs are willing to sacrifice part of their wages for the establishment of
the mosque. Initially some IMWs did not think that they could establish a mosque. When the mosque was established, however, they realized they could accomplish this
goal by cooperating with each other. So, they not only donated money, but also
contributed their energy and time to renovating the mosque building.

Al-Falah has helped new Indonesian migrant workers adapt to life in Philadelphia. Newcomers are always introduced to the community in the mosque. The community
enthusiastically receives them, asking the new arrivals where they come from in
Indonesia and what they plan to do in Philadelphia. Newcomers, like Lina, who did not
know anyone in the USA, especially felt the importance of mosque Al-Falah. It created
the feeling of a big family with close relationships and ties that helped Lina become
comfortable in Philadelphia. Members of the mosque community would also help each
other to find jobs and find a place for arrivals to live.

The function of Al-Falah, for undocumented workers, is beyond regular religious
activities. IMWs make the mosque a community center where they can communicate,
engage, and help each other. Some of them found their spouse among the mosque
members and got married. They bring their children to the mosque to engage with other
Indonesian Muslim children.

The third factor is their hope for the future. Although they face uncertainty as to
when they will return to Indonesia, they felt that they would have a better future in

\[15\] Interview with Aditya.
Indonesia after working for several years in the USA. Some of my informants plan to establish their own businesses when they return to Indonesia. Thus, my informants save parts of their wages to implement their plans. Another informant, Lina, plans on buying some land to establish a small-scale farm, where she would do animal breeding for her family’s future daily needs. Lina said that she would spend the rest of her life in her village with her husband and family. With such a life, she believes she will be happy.

To secure their hopes, my informants were willing to work hard in Philadelphia. They also struggled to work at unstable jobs, where they were uncertain how long they would keep the job. They even sacrificed their energy and time to work more than eight hours per day when their companies required them to do that. Some of my informants even voluntarily worked overtime to receive higher incomes. In addition, my informants also sacrificed their lives by living separately from their families in Indonesia.

Conclusion

In this current era of globalization, people move to other countries to search for better political, social, or economic opportunities in host countries since they could not find sufficient opportunities in their own countries. In the case of economic opportunities, they could earn better wages and send part of these wages to their families. In 2009, the World Bank measured that remittance, money sent by workers to their home countries, was around $420 billion.\textsuperscript{16} In this situation, governments in home countries indirectly also receive economic benefits from these remittances through taxes. Since governments

in home countries accept economic benefits, these governments should take political responsibility by providing better protection for workers who have transferred part of their incomes gained in host countries.

The Indonesian 1997 financial crisis caused Indonesian workers to be more mobile and spread to a wider range of countries. Besides Thailand, the Philippines, and Australia (Ananta, Kartowibowo, Wiyono, Hadi, and Chotib, 1998), the USA has become a destination for Indonesian workers abroad. Since there are no official work agencies to facilitate new workers getting to the USA, workers acquire official documents that allow them to fly to this country on their own. Soon after they arrive in the USA, they have to adapt to a new environment, cultures, and workplaces. Some of them really struggle to deal with these circumstances. For instance, they have to move from one workplace to another in a short period of time. For those who get unstable jobs in this country, they also have to deal with critical situations in their workplaces, such as earning lower wages and having accidents without health insurance.

When I started my field research, I hoped I would find some institutions that could help undocumented Indonesian workers, especially when they suffered from work-related accidents. The Welcoming Center and The Women’s Opportunities Resource Center (WORC), both non-governmental organizations that work for migrant advocacy groups, are dedicated to advocating for documented workers, but I did not find any organizations that provided direct help to undocumented workers. Due to limited resources and budgets, the mosque Al-Falah could not help its members in court. This left me with the idea that the Indonesian embassy in Washington D.C. should give more
attention to undocumented Indonesian workers in the US. One way would be to establish labor attachés to assist and help the workers who suffer work related accidents or other critical situations in their workplaces, so that they would receive fair compensation from their employers.

I think the most important change would be to provide legal rights for undocumented workers. They contribute to the US economy just as documented workers do, and often work harder for lower wages. Because of this, they should receive the same benefits as documented workers. In such situations, they could not be discriminated against just because they are undocumented workers. Their human rights as workers should be guaranteed, and equal benefits should be provided, whether they are documented or undocumented workers.

Findings from this research are consistent with other research on undocumented workers in the USA in which undocumented workers experienced difficult situations in their workplaces. However, the contribution of this research is that this is a first-hand and in-depth look at undocumented Indonesian workers in this country. Compared to similar research on Chinese, Mexican, and Vietnamese workers, this research posits an early research that provides an original narrative about working conditions of undocumented Indonesian workers in this country.

While other workers from Mexico, China, and Vietnam have gained attention, assistance, and support from non-government organizations (NGOs) in the USA, undocumented Indonesians do not receive the same treatment from NGOs. These institutions should begin to give attention to undocumented Indonesian workers who also
need support and assistance to get the same human rights as other workers in this country.

Besides NGOs in the USA, NGOs in Indonesia should also start to pay attention to problems of undocumented Indonesian workers in the USA. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, there is no NGO in Indonesia that pays attention to problems of undocumented Indonesian workers in the USA. They mostly pay particular attention to Indonesian workers in other countries, such as Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, and South Korea.

Finally, this thesis suggests topics for further research. One question concerns undocumented IMWs who marry and have children in the USA. The uncertainty about life leads to questions about how to raise children. American culture is different from Indonesian culture, especially regarding how parents should educate their children. For example, it is common in Indonesia for parents to force their children to do what they think is best for them. However, in the US the influence of culture on children makes them disobedient and harder for parents to control. Other questions concern the experience of undocumented IMWs who return to Indonesia: “Are they happy going back to Indonesia after living in the U.S. for so many years?” and “Would they return to the USA or another country to work if they face financial hardship in Indonesia?”
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: LIST OF QUESTIONS

Life Background
1. Where are you from in Indonesia?
2. What is your educational background? What are your previous jobs?
3. What are your reasons for working in the USA?
4. Why did you choose working in the USA rather than in another country?
5. When did you immigrate? How did you come to the United States? Had you ever immigrated before?
6. Did you immigrate directly to Philadelphia? If not, from where did you emigrate?
7. Did you know anyone already living here in Philadelphia or in the USA?

Working Conditions
8. How did you get jobs? Through friends, families, or employment agencies?
9. What is your job title? Could you describe what you do for your job?
10. What product do you make? What is it used for?
11. Is there training before handling a job like yours?
12. How long have you been working in Philadelphia?
13. How stable is your employment? Have you ever changed jobs?
14. Do you ever worry about lay-offs?
15. How many employees are there in the factory you work in?
16. What kind of problems do you face in your work?
17. How do you solve these problems?
18. If you compare yourself with other foreign workers in your company, do they also face problems?
19. What is the role of the Indonesian embassy in helping Indonesian workers with their problems?
20. How well do you like the actual work you do?
21. How much do you earn in a month? How do you spend your salary? Do you send a significant proportion of your earnings back home?
22. What is your plan if you lose your job in the USA?
23. Is there an Indonesian workers’ union or association? Do you participate in this union?
24. What are the activities of this union? Do you benefit from this participation?

Community Life
25. Do you have regular holidays and weekends?
26. What do you do on your weekends or holidays?
27. How do you communicate with Indonesian fellows?
28. How do you communicate with other communities?
29. Do you plan to stay in the USA for the rest of your life?
30. Do you plan to return to Indonesia?
APPENDIX B: MAP OF PHILADELPHIA


Map 1: Map of Philadelphia.
APPENDIX C: MAP OF SOUTH PHILADELPHIA


Map 2: Map of South Philadelphia.
APPENDIX D: MAP OF INDONESIAN COMMUNITY

Map 3: Map of Indonesian Community.