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Thai migrant women in the Netherlands : cross-cultural marriages and families

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**Thai Migrant Women in the Netherlands:
Cross-Cultural Marriages and Families**

Panitee Suksomboon

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Thai Migrant Women in the Netherlands: Cross-Cultural Marriages and Families

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Introduction

On a return flight from Bangkok to Amsterdam in January 2008, I noticed that many Thai women and their Dutch husbands were passengers on this plane. I sat next to one couple, Samon and Floris. They had been visiting Samon's family in Udon Thani, in the North-east of Thailand. Samon had been living in the Netherlands for five years. She had left a seventeen-year-old son behind, who was born by her former Thai husband, with her mother in her home town. In the course of our conversation, she began to ask me how long I had been in the Netherlands, in which city I resided and why my Dutch husband had not accompanied me. She apologised for her misapprehension when I told that I am single and was studying in the Netherlands. She said that I was the first Thai student she had met. Most of her Thai friends and acquaintances in the Netherlands had married a Dutch man. On this plane I also made the acquaintanceship of Ruud, who is in his early fifties. He had just visited his Thai girlfriend in Buriram, also in North-eastern Thailand, and had stayed with her for a month. They had met each other while he was on holiday in Thailand two years earlier. He planned to bring her to the Netherlands the following year.

The accounts of Samon and Ruud are comparable to the stories about the 'cross-cultural marriages' of Thai-Dutch couples which I have heard since my arrival in the Netherlands in 2002.¹ There seems to be a similar trend in which Thai women marry a spouse from Germany (Pataya 1999; Prapairat 2005), Denmark (Lisborg 2002) or Switzerland (Ratana 2005). On 2 March 2004 the newspaper *Matichon*, for instance, had a column with the headline 'The village of the white, Western sons-in-law.' Various Thai women from this village in Suphanburi, Central Thailand, had married a Western man, the majority of them from Germany. At the Songkran festival (traditional Thai New Year on 13 April), this specific village was thronged with Thai-German couples who visited the wives' families. As a consequence of these common scenarios, Thai women in Europe are often supposed, both by Thais at home and overseas, to be a *phanraya*

¹ The term 'cross-cultural marriage' is used here to specify that the marriages of these Thai women mainly occur in the form of marrying a Dutch (or European) man, who belongs to a different culture. Although this term has a specific connotation in my research, to avoid repetition, the words 'cross-cultural marriage', 'cross-border marriage', 'mixed marriage', and 'intermarriage' are interchangeable. It should also be noted that I do not perceive the concept of 'culture' in the sense of a fixed and static entity.

farang.² This may be a reason that Samon had at first mistaken my marital status. Why do the Thai women move to the Netherlands (or Europe) through a marriage, rather than through labour migration or by following their families? How are they able to marry a foreign spouse? What events in recent history have made them migrate overseas?

The Thais does not form a large portion of all immigrants in the Netherlands (and Europe) and the cross-cultural marriages of Thai women with a Dutch (or European) man may not in fact be a frequent occurrence. The logical consequence is to ask: Why is marriage migration of the Thai women to the Netherlands (or Europe) so remarkable? Unquestionably, this sort of marriage does constitute a specific vehicle which the Thai women utilise to move to the Netherlands (or Europe). Even a cursory examination reveals that its occurrence is no coincidence. What any superficial glance shows that it is a recent phenomenon which is ineluctably associated with globalisation and the improvement in communications and transport.³ Three pivotal conditions: the popularity of tourism to Thailand, the high value of the Euro currency and the relatively cheap air fares, make it possible for European men of all social standings to travel to Thailand. Inevitably, such a trip generates encounters between *farang* men and Thai women, which later smooth the way for their opportunity of marriage migration.

As a general rule, gaining contact with a potential foreign partner does not necessarily imply that women from poorer countries are eventually able to marry and consequently move. A relationship with a foreign spouse might not be welcomed and is indeed even prohibited for religious reasons in some societies. In the particular case of Thailand, the teachings of Thai Buddhism do not exercise any strict control over marriage to a partner of a different religion. This means that one obstacle has been removed and the desire to go abroad is also fuelled by the fact that at the moment Thailand is also enthralled by a certain idealisation of Westerners. Even though the intrusion of European power has unavoidably led to some political and socio-cultural transformations in Thai society, Thai people never had the negative experience of being

² The word *phanraya farang* literally means the wife of a *farang* man. *Farang* is the general word Thai use to refer to such white Western men and women as Europeans, Americans or Australians. It should be noted that throughout this thesis Thai words are romanised according to the official Royal Institute System.

³ This differs from the earlier immigration flows to Europe from such other countries as Indonesia, India, Turkey and Morocco, which were likely a result of colonial ties, labour participation during the European economic boom in the mid-1950s, and family re-unification. However, this does not mean to say that these immigrant groups have never moved to Europe through marrying a European man.

colonised by any of these Europeans. The absence of this sort of experience of subjugation means that they are less likely to form strong, negative cultural, religious and political attitudes to the Europeans. In the social sphere, a bilateral kinship system and the Thai women's vital economic role in the family permit the women a certain degree of freedom to move geographically. As a consequence, from the religious, political and social points of view, the women's marriage to a *farang* husband, which leads to international migration, is relatively acceptable in Thai society.

Despite this relatively untroubled course, there can be problems emanating from the divergent cultural ideas of family and marriage in Thai and Dutch societies which do inevitably affect the occurrence and the course of Thai-Dutch marriages. The system of bilateral kinship which governs Thai society implies that, even after marriage, the women retain their responsibility to their parents' family. Besides this filial duty, some women have to care financially and emotionally for their children from a previous marriage. These filial obligations encourage the women, especially those from rural and lower-class backgrounds, to marry and move. In contrast, the much less traditionally organised Dutch side is coloured by far fewer obligatory relations between an individual and his/her parents and the idea that marriage is an individual's choice allows the Dutch men a certain degree of freedom in choosing to marry a Thai wife.

On a supra-national level, the serious restrictions laid down in the immigration policies in the European Union (EU), especially since 1960, also play a part. While the internal movement of citizens of the EU member states became freer, control over the mobility to Europe of non-EU citizens has been more restricted (Kofman and Sales 1992; Kofman et al. 2000). The EU employment regulations make it even more difficult for migrants from countries outside the EU with low working skills to enter this destination on the basis of a work contract.⁴ Whereas a group of Filipino women with a college degree and fluency in English have left their husbands and moved to such countries as Italy or Spain to work in the domestic sector (Parrenas 2001; Van den Muijzenburg 2002), most Thai women with little education and inadequate English have

⁴ Under the EU labour law, the non-EU citizen is only entitled to pursue employment in the EU when no qualified applicants can be found in the host and other EU member countries (Federation of European Employers 2007). Only a few countries in Europe such as Spain or Italy provide a number of migrants from outside Europe a work contract for participation in paid domestic labour (Parrenas 2001; Penninx 2006).

been unable to compete on this global labour market.⁵ Marrying a European citizen is one of the best possible ways for them to acquire legal entrance and residence in Europe. Therefore, all these determinants have combined to make marriage migration an accessible means for many Thai women to migrate to the Netherlands (and Europe).⁶

In my analysis I bear in mind that the term 'class' is vague, since after migration migrants may perceive themselves as having moved up to a higher social class or may want to hide their former status. Whatever the case may be, some scholars (Ten Brummelhuis and Stengs 2007), my own observations and the migrant women themselves recognise a variation in the socio-economic backgrounds of the Thai women in the Netherlands. Both local and global media and several studies (Lisborg 2002; Pataya 2002a; Prapairat 2002) have frequently underscored the engagement of Thai migrant women in sex-related jobs in Europe. In contrast, my more wide-ranging study takes into account the women's differences in education, occupations, class and economic status.

The aims of this research are the following: my first objective is to examine how the women come into contact with their Dutch partners, what shapes their motivation for marriage migration and what role the family plays in this decision. Having achieved this, my second goal is to gain a comparative insight into the cultural ideas of family and friendship in Thai and Dutch societies, as these will ineluctably affect the couple's marital relationship and the women's everyday contact with in-laws, relatives and friends in the Netherlands as well as family and neighbours in Thailand. Finally, my research explores the impact of marriage migration and transnationalism on the women's life-cycles, family care and their local communities in Thailand. In what follows, I elucidate the historical and social background of the contemporary Thai international migration in general and of the Thai to the Netherlands in particular.

⁵ It appears that Thai migrant women work as domestic or factory workers in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. Although Pattana (2005) primarily studied male migrant workers from North-eastern Thailand in Singapore, he suggested that the number of domestic and other Thai female workers was minimal and their presence rarely reported. Most of the Thai women he encountered during his fieldwork were housewives married to working or middle-class Singaporeans or other foreign expatriates.

⁶ Similar to what Ten Brummelhuis and Stengs (2007) has observed earlier, during my fieldwork I noticed that not only Thai migrant women, but also a number of Thai homosexual men or trans-gendered persons have moved to the Netherlands through marriage with a Dutch partner.

Thai migrants in the Netherlands

In contrast to migrants from such other Asian countries as India, China and Indonesia, the Thai began to participate in overseas migration relatively late (Sobieszczyk 2002; Supang 1999). In the 1960s, only a small number of Thai professionals mainly doctors, nurses and engineers, moved to the United States. The major flux of Thai migrants began in the 1970s. It was driven by external political and economic factors and involved mainly male labour migration. The withdrawal of the American troops from Thailand after the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 caused a high rate of unemployment, especially in the construction and service sectors.⁷ Attracted by the opportunities offered by the oil and construction booms in the Gulf region in the 1980s, it was estimated that around 262,343 Thai workers were recruited for low- and semi-skilled work in the Middle East (Amara 1968). Most of these workers were married, middle-aged men from rural areas, particularly from the North-east, and they left their Thai wives and children behind in Thailand. Later, the number of male migrant workers in these destinations dropped from 87,748 in 1989 to 27, 478 in 1990, as a result of the political instability in the Gulf region and an increased demand for unskilled labour in many East Asian countries such as Japan, Hong Kong or Taiwan (Pattana 2005; Supang 1999).

The mainstream of Thai international migration to Europe began in the late 1970s. In the Netherlands, one exception was the first small overseas movement of the group of so-called ‘Siamese Brides’, who in 1945—after the Second World War—had married Dutch prisoners-of-war and later moved to the Netherlands or Indonesia (Ooms 2007; Ten Brummelhuis and Stengs 2007). The second wave commenced in the late 1970s and consists in much higher figures than the former group.⁸ This movement was propelled by local and global economic constraints. Economic difficulties in agriculture and an increased labour demand in the industrial and service sectors in the 1970s prompted peasant women, especially from the North-east, to move to cities

⁷ Thailand had become a military base of the American troops during the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s.

⁸ My research focuses only on the second wave of Thai migration after the 1970s to present, excluding the group of ‘Siamese Brides’.

in search of employment.⁹ The entertainment and tourist businesses were one of the spheres which absorbed this female labour and created opportunities to meet and marry a *farang* man. As a consequence of this contact, rural women with little education constitute the main group in this second flow.

Recently, the flow of Thai migration has diversified rather more. Whereas, the rural and less well-educated women still constitute the majority, educated, middle-class women have also begun to participate in this mobility.¹⁰ Regardless of their social and economic status, cross-cultural marriage is still the most common means to which women resort to move to the Netherlands, although the ways they initiate the contact with their potential partner have become more varied.

By marriage to a European man, contemporary Thai migration to European countries such as Germany (Pataya 2002a; Prapairat and Piper 2003), Denmark (Lisborg 2002), and Switzerland (Ratana 2005) in general and the Netherlands in particular has become highly feminised. For example, there has been a steady increase in the numbers of Thai women residing in Germany, from 988 in 1975 to 26,443 in 1998. This number of females accounts for 84 per cent of all Thai migrants to Germany (Pataya 1999; Prapairat 2002). The figures of Thai migrants to Denmark have also increased rapidly, from 1,497 in 1990 to 4,172 in 1999. Here too, Thai women form the majority, 83 per cent (Lisborg 2002). In the Netherlands, we see a similar tendency. In 2008, the total number of Thai migrants was 14,281 and 10,225 of them were women.¹¹ Between 1996 and 2008, the number of women has slightly increased—from 69.3 to 71.6 per cent. Among first generation migrants the share of women is even higher and has increased from 3,091 persons

⁹ Thailand is roughly divided into four main regions; the North, the North-east, Bangkok and the Central region, and the South. Because of its infertile geological composition, the North-east is the poorest region. Economic difficulties and landlessness in this region are among the most prominent factors which push both men and women to move to other parts of Thailand seeking for a job. During the peak period of the economic boom in Thailand between 1987 and 1993, unmarried rural women began to move into Bangkok at rates generally equal to those of their male counterparts (Mills 1999:4).

¹⁰ There are no exact figures which indicate the socio-economic status of the Thai migrant women in Europe. According to studies on Thai women in Europe (Lisborg 2002; Pataya 2002a; Prapairat 2005) and also my own observations in the Netherlands, women from rural areas with a low level of education seem to form the main group of Thai immigrants both in Europe as a whole and in the Netherlands in particular.

¹¹ These numbers include both the first and the second generation. According to the Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (2008), the first generation refers to persons born abroad with at least one parent born abroad. The second generation encompasses persons born in the Netherlands with at least one parent born abroad. These statistics exclude Thai who possess Dutch citizenship and those who live illegally in the Netherlands.

(78.2 per cent) in 1996 to 8,260 persons (81 per cent) in 2008 (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek 2008).

In contrast to migrants to the Netherlands from Morocco, Turkey and other South-east Asian countries, only the numbers of Thai and Filipino women considerably exceed their male counterparts. When entering to the Netherlands, the majority of the Thai women were between their middle twenties and their late forties, an age suitable for marriage (Figure 1).

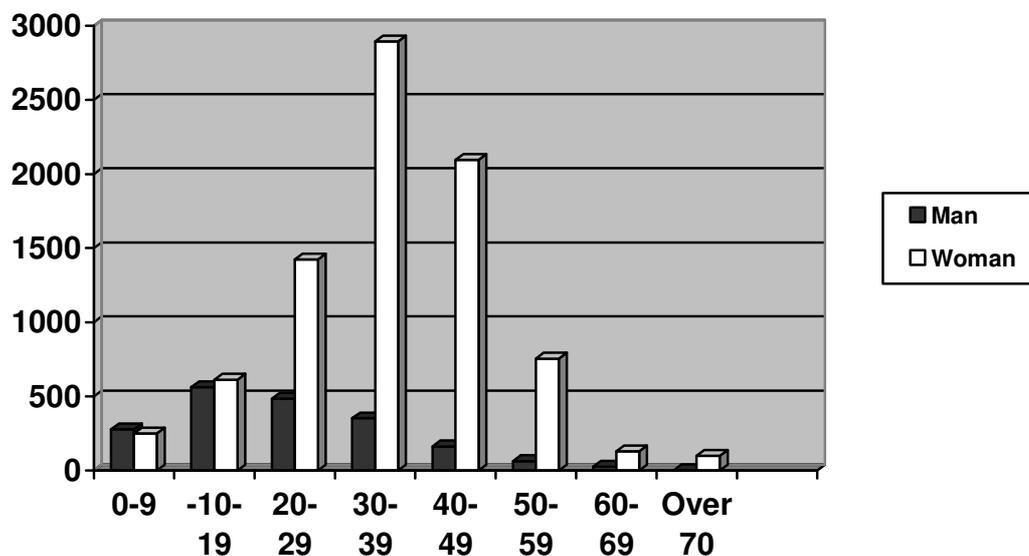


Figure 1: The first generation of Thai immigrants to the Netherlands according to sex and age in 2008

Immigration flows to the Netherlands

My research deals with the Netherlands as the destination country of Thai women. To put their migration into perspective, a general overview of immigration flows into Dutch society is therefore presented here. After the Second World War, the flows of immigrants into the Netherlands can briefly be distinguished into three major types. The first category was composed of repatriates and migrants from such former Dutch colonies as Indonesia, Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles. In this case their movement was related to the processes of decolonisation

(De Valk 2006; Penninx 2006; Penninx et al. 1994). The second group was euphemistically known as ‘guest workers’. As a result of the economic boom and a labour shortage in the industrial and service sectors in the mid-1950s, unskilled labourers from such Southern European countries as Italy, Spain and Portugal were recruited to the Netherlands.¹² The economic and industrial expansion in their own countries of origin prompted many of the guest workers from Southern Europe to return to their home country. As labour was still scarce, the recruitment was aimed at labourers from Turkey and Morocco in 1963 and 1969 respectively, in the expectation that they would remain temporarily. Instead of leaving the Netherlands, the Turkish and Moroccan male migrants preferred to opt for permanent settlement and undertook the requisite steps for family re-unification (Muus 2001; Stalker 2002).¹³ After the oil crisis and the economic recession of 1973, the borders of many countries in Northern Europe were closed. Thereafter the primary reason for migrants to enter Europe was family re-unification and therefore the proportion of women migrating to Europe increased (Kofman et al. 2000: 5). The third group was based on the immigration of refugees or asylum seekers from such Eastern European countries as Hungary or Czechoslovakia from the 1950s until the beginning of the 1970s. After the 1980s, this migration flow was transformed and became more differentiated and very diverse. More refugees came from outside Europe from such countries as Somalia, Iraq, Ghana, and Afghanistan. There were also a number of women who moved to Europe from other countries either as a result of marriage or to participate in the service sector (Kofman et al. 2000; Vermeulen and Penninx 2000).

Theoretical approaches

In this research, the following theoretical perspectives and concepts have been taken into account as the starting point for compiling the research questions as well as collecting and analysing the

¹² Rather than being countries of emigration, Italy, Spain and Portugal have transformed into countries of immigration, specifically after they have become members of the EU in the 1980s (Vermeulen and Penninx 2000).

¹³ The number of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants continued to increase after 1973 because the newcomers migrated to the Netherlands under family re-unification (De Valk 2006; Vermeulen and Penninx 2000).

data: (1) a gendered approach to migration and life-course perspective; (2) social network theory; and (3) international migration and transnationalism.

Gendered approach to migration and life-course perspective

Explanations of international migration have been dominated by varied economic perspectives, which exhibit both strengths and weaknesses. At first glance, neo-classical economics suggest that differentials in income and employment situations between countries and a cost-benefit evaluation of a rational individual are a major cause of migration (Borjas 1989; Todaro 1969). The migrants' possibilities of movement are also determined by their ability to compete in the labour market, the resources available to cover migration costs and the legal environment between two countries (Borjas 1989: 460-461). This theory does have limitations, primarily in its overemphasis of the rationality of an individual migrant and its disregard of the involvement of other social actors in the process of migration decision making.

The new economics of migration have shifted the unit of analysis to the household level. Instead of an individual, the household reduces risks by diversifying the allocation of household resources and labour into the markets (Stark and Bloom 1985; Stark and Levhari 1982; Taylor and Wyatt 1996). In this case, international migration is grasped as a survival strategy of the household in its efforts to cope with uncertain or changing economic conditions, both in the sending and receiving countries. Nevertheless, this theory overestimates the household as a utility-maximising, risk-minimising and capital-accumulating unit and is blind to conflicts within the household.

The historical-structural approach, which emerged in the 1950s and reached its peak between the 1960s and 1970s, focuses on the inter-relationship of migration and the macro organisation of socio-economic relations, the geographical division of labour and global political power (Massey et al. 1998: 35). The work of such dependency theorists as Frank (1967) and such world system theorists as Wallerstein (1974), for instance, link international migration to the increasing penetration of the capitalist mode of production into more peripheral countries. This invasion is accompanied by new demands for cheap labour in the core countries and the rapid globalisation of economic and financial markets. However, such an explanation relegates

migrants to passive agents who are forced to move at the whim of global economic and political system.

Strikingly, all these theories lack a gendered perspective and disregard the cultural concept of the family. They ignore the gender position within the family, which influences the divergent migration experiences of men and women and assumes that women are more likely to stay behind or to be dependent on the men for migration.

Notwithstanding, some scholars do take a gendered perspective into account and have argued that, in some situations, the women take the initiative in migration (Cerrutti and Massey 2001; Chant 1991; Gulgur and Ilkkaracan 2002). There is evidence of an increased participation of women in international migration in many receiving countries and their movement occurs not only in the guise of family re-unification, but also in the form of participation in the global labour market (Kofman et al. 2000; Sharpe 2001). Apart from the economic incentive, other key factors which drive or hinder the women in taking the step to initiate migration are the pressure on local marriage, conflict within the household and family responsibilities (Alicea 1997; Harzig 2001; Ortiz 1996). Quite correctly, some scholars caution that examining migrant women means talking about a heterogeneous group, since women experience international migration differently according to their socio-economic background and occupation (Pedeaza 1991; Sharpe 2001).

Social network theory

An emphasis on economic influence and the household's decision, as described earlier, can certainly to some extent elucidate why people migrate, but are insufficient to explain why people from some sending areas move to a specific receiving area and why other people are immobile. The social network theory has been developed to fill such a gap. Social networks are defined as a set of interpersonal ties which connect migrants, former migrants and non-migrants in both origin and destination countries through ties of kinship, friendship and shared community (Choldin 1973; Faist 2000; Massey et al. 1987: 42). From this perspective, pioneer migrants provide non-migrants with economic assistance, information on migration regulations, employment and housing as well as crucial emotional support. These social networks reduce the financial and psychological risks likely to be incurred during the process of migration and therefore enhance

the opportunity of the non-migrants to move. Over time, chains of migration from the sending to the receiving country are created (Massey et al. 1993). The drawback of this approach is that it tends to overstate the supportive role of migrants' kinship and friendship networks, while it ignores the conflicts which can flare up among migrants.

International migration and transnationalism

One of the most influential views on the migrants' livelihood and linkages with other social actors in the receiving and/or sending country is the assimilation theory, which was initially developed in the 1920s by such scholars as Robert E. Park (1928), Milton Gordon (1964) and their students in the Chicago School. During the early twentieth century, it was applied in many classical studies of immigrants' experiences in American society. In general, it assumes that, after arrival, the newcomers pour all their efforts into adapting to the new environment, settling into the host society permanently and ultimately blending into the 'dominant' culture of the receiving country.¹⁴ The stumbling block to this approach is that it overlooks the possibility of multi-ethnic societies and the migrants' ability to maintain relationships with others social actors between countries and cultures.

Processes of globalisation, increased capital flow, the advances in communication and such drastic global political transformations as decolonisation have inexorably had implications for the complexity and prevalence of transnationalism (Basch et al. 1994; Kennedy and Roudometof 2001; Schiller et al. 1999).¹⁵ Specifically, transnationalism shifts the fixed and rigid perception of space from sharp and bounded boundaries to 'a fluid and multidimensional global space with unbounded, often discontinuous and interpenetrating sub-spaces' (Kearney 1995: 549).

¹⁴ Changes have been made in the conceptualisation and understanding of the process of immigrant incorporation from a single process leading to the eventual assimilation of all immigrants into the dominant culture of the host society to assimilation into different existing cultures (Heisler 2000: 78).

¹⁵ Globalisation is defined as social, economic, cultural and demographic processes which take place within nations but also transcend them. In other words, it is the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice-versa (Basch et al. 1994:11; Kearney 1995). Transnationalism differs from globalisation since the former overlaps the latter, but typically has a more limited purview. Whereas global processes are largely decentred from specific national territories and take place in a global space, transnational processes are anchored in and transcend one or more nation-states (Basch et al 1994: 5).

When the concept of transnationalism is applied to the study of contemporary migration, it refers to the process by which immigrants build social fields which are linked with both their origin and destination countries; developing and maintaining familial, religious, organisational, economic and political relations across borders (Basch et al. 1994; Schiller et al. 1999).

Academic interest has moved from the implication of transnationalism on the macro to the micro level. The term 'transnationalism from below' has been proposed to refer to a multifaceted, multi-local process which affects power relations, cultural constructions, economic interactions and social organisation at the level of locality (Guarnizo and Smith 2002: 5). Adoption of this idea means that globalisation and transnationalism do not ultimately result in a single, homogenised global culture. Quite the contrary as there is evidence of resistances 'from below' in the form of cultural hybridity, multi-positional identities and transnational business practices by migrant entrepreneurs who try to escape domination 'from above' by global capital and the state (Cohen 1996; Guarnizo and Smith 2002).

Only a few studies have focused on what the impact of transnationalism has on the migrants' and their families' life transition by stressing the dilemmas and highlighting the choices with which migrants are confronted in their attempts to sustain ties with the family back home or elsewhere (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002), their arrangement of family care while coping with a great distance (Baldassar 2007; Erel 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997) and their complex perceptions of belonging and 'home' (Armbruster 2002; Salih 2002).

Research questions

In relation to the theoretical perspectives reviewed above, I have formulated my main research questions in the following:

- (1) What encourages or hinders Thai women's motivation for and decision about marriage migration?
- (2) What are the ideas about family and inter-generational relations in Thai and Dutch societies which influence the couple's marital and familial relations?

(3) In what ways are kinship and friendship networks among Thai migrant women established, maintained or fractured?

4) How do marriage migration and transnationalism affect the women's and their families' life trajectories and their communities of origin?

Taking into account that gender is connected with such other aspects of social status as class, education, ethnicity and nationality, the Thai women in my research occupy various social positions simultaneously. They are women—either from lower or middle class and low- or well-educated, daughters, sisters, mothers, wives and (Thai) migrants. It should also be noted that my study focuses mainly on the experiences of the Thai migrant women from their own perception.

Outline of the dissertation

My thesis consists in an Introduction, five chapters and a Conclusion. Chapter One unfolds the first research question. Initially it analyses both the economic and socio-cultural specificity which is relevant to the possibility of the Thai women's marriage migration to the Netherlands. This part is followed by a review of the underlying cultural codes of family and marriage in Thai and Dutch societies and their determinant influence on family involvement in mate selection and on the couple's experience of the different marriage rituals. Apart from the more obvious material benefit and migration opportunity, the women's marriage motivation may unquestionably also be shaped by other factors. This chapter addresses the couple's adherence to the distinctive ideals of marriage preference and the influence of their socio-economic status on their actual choice of marriage partner.

Chapter Two is relevant to the second question. It underlines that cross-cultural marriage is associated not only with an inevitable geographical movement; it is also likely to be fraught with the clash of family cultures in everyday life. In this context, the ideas of family, sibling-ship and inter-generational relations in Thai and Dutch societies and the couples' negotiation of the Thai wife's economic obligation to her family in Thailand are explored. This chapter also deals with the women's encounter with the distinctive ways in creating, enacting and maintaining

relations, which one can coin ‘sociality’,¹⁶ with their Dutch-in-laws and their adaptation to these differences. As the couples read from different family scripts, the Dutch husbands feel uneasy when their Thai wives send remittances to their families in Thailand. This is the outcome of the various forms of household financial arrangement between the spouses, a process which is finally examined here.

Chapter Three is related to the third question, which criticises the enduring attributes of kinship and friendship networks among the Thai migrant women in the Netherlands. In this context, it is important to have knowledge of the different ways of ‘creating kin and friends’. It is not always easy to find the appropriate concepts to convey local meaning and nuances. One of the reasons lies in the—at times—Euro-centric bias in the existing kinship terminology, which has been subjected to criticism in the discipline (Schneider 1984; Strathern 1992). Therefore, I use the recently introduced term ‘relatedness’,¹⁷ (Carsten 1995; 2000; Schweitzer 2000), as a concept which help to open new spaces in which to think about and express the local meanings given to kinship and friendship by my informants. Traditional kinship terms tended to say little about the intimate, everyday space in which kin-relations were enacted; ‘how one kinship functions as a way of including people and/or as a way of excluding people’ (Schweitzer 2000: 209) or how kin obligations and care are observed and undertaken over large geographical distances. This tentative concept provides me the space to investigate the more open and dynamic features of Thai long-distance kin-relationships, in which such bonds can become conflictive, are renewed and/or terminated. When the women are away from home and unable to have frequent face-to-face contact with their natal families; their friendship with other female counterparts is more important and substantial than it would be if they had remained in Thailand. This chapter compares Thai and Dutch ‘sociality’ in terms of establishing and continuing friendships and

¹⁶ Sociality refers to the way of making and keeping company. In a given society, people are socialised to the cultural ideas of how they should behave in relation to their family and in-laws, how they create and maintain friendships, and what they should do when they meet acquaintances. Sometimes, they may not be aware of this as they tend to perceive it as part and parcel of their life. Immigrants and people who have lived in other societies may realise these differences and experience difficulty in sustaining everyday sociality.

¹⁷ Such concepts as ‘relatedness’ are not conclusive. The purpose of their creation is to provide space to express difference. For example, Charles Stafford’s analysis of Chinese patriliney and the cycles of *yang* and *laiwang* highlights how *yang* is not just about patrilineal descent, it also affirms the presence or absence of a certain lived experience of relatedness, which allows actors to reshape relationships—even in the absence of descent (2000: 51-52).

reveals the couples' misinterpretations of the Thai wife's sustaining of mutual assistance with her Thai friends. Apart from kinship and friendship networks, 'weak ties' (Granovetter 1973), that is occasional contacts involving less emotional attachment with Thai and non-Thai acquaintances, are finally analysed.

Chapter Four and Chapter Five provide answers to the last question. Chapter Four focuses initially on the women's experiences with and coping strategies to overcome the transition in their living conditions, careers and social mobility caused by marriage migration. Geographical distance does not mean that the women's care responsibility ceases. Their arrangements for family care and their often adroit adjustment to the simultaneous demands of caring for their husbands and children in the Netherlands and their elderly parents in Thailand are outlined. Many women have left their offspring born from a previous marriage in Thailand. This chapter draws attention to the women's adaptation to taking care of their children from a distance and reveals the varied ideals and practices of motherhood and mothering in Thai and Dutch societies. Other forms of child-rearing the Thai-Dutch couples arrange are also examined. This chapter ends with an exploration of the women's prospects of receiving care when they grow older.

Chapter Five emphasises the women's experiences and perceptions of community and 'home' shaped by their daily consumption, recreating 'Thai' culture and maintaining ties with family in Thailand. This chapter also studies the impact of remittances on transformations in the rural communities and the influence of local social values on the use of remittances. Thereupon, the consequences of 'social remittances'—flows of ideas, symbols and codes of behaviour from the receiving to sending country (Levit 2001)—on the local community are discussed. As goods, values and contacts move back and forth between places, I suggest the term 'reversal of social remittances' to refer to the attitudes and cultural practices which flow from the sending country back to the receiving country, affecting the life-styles of the hosts who have a contact with the immigrants. Currently, a spatial mobility of retired Dutch men, who after retirement go to Thailand with their Thai wives, is beginning to emerge. The couples' experience of (re)settlement, having more face-to-face contact with the Thai wife's family and sustaining social networks across borders are illustrated in the last section.

The concluding part sums up the major findings of my research and its contributions to the study of the women's marriage migration. It gives an insight into the inter-relationship between socio-economic factors, ideas of family, the women's life-courses and their marriage migration. This conclusion also accentuates the women's maintenance and negotiation of their 'relatedness' with their Dutch husbands, in-laws, relatives and friends in the Netherlands, as well as family and neighbours in Thailand, which shape the women's lived experiences within transnational spaces.

Contributions and limitations of the research

The first contribution of this study is to attempt to present a subtler analysis of the women's marriage migration. It criticises the limitations imposed by an exclusively economic explanation and highlights the necessity of also taking other historical, social and cultural factors as well as a gendered perspective into account. Furthermore, the economic approach which stresses an individual's own decision about migration and the ideal which views marriage as an individual choice have exerted a powerful influence on many studies of marriage migration. In contradistinction, my research questions such assumptions and gives a more nuanced insight into the participation of family in marriage migration decision making.

The second contribution of this study is to shed light on the comparative study of family values and the inter-generational relations among the cross-cultural marriage spouses, which have so far received only fleeting academic attention. This study underscores the clash of the family concepts and ideals of filial responsibilities the couples hold and their adaptation and negotiation of such differences. It is in this context that I use the term 'cross-cultural marriage' to highlight that the couples, especially the wife, cross not only a geographical border, she also has to transcend a socio-cultural boundary, particularly in the realm of family relationships. My research also proposes a new approach to studying kinship and friendship networks among migrants. The prevalent assumptions of the immutable attributes of kinship and the supportive role of friendship are criticised. One of the principal vehicles of this criticism is making use of the conceptual space by employing the terms 'relatedness' (introduced by Carsten 1995; 2000)

and ‘sociality’ (everyday ways of keeping company, see the note above) to examine the flexible, social aspect of the migrants’ kinship and friendship in everyday life.

The third contribution is to gain more knowledge about the under-researched field of the influence of migration and transnationalism on the women’s and their families’ life transition. The migratory experiences of the women have tended to be overwhelmingly projected as an isolated and static phenomenon, both when earning their living independently in the host society or returning (temporally) to their country of origin. This thesis attempts to fill this gap by focusing on how the processes of marriage migration and transnationalism continuously shape the women’s careers, family care, a sense of belonging to community and ‘home’ and prospects of receiving care when they are old. Furthermore, it criticises the overstatement of the empowering implications of migration and transnationalism on the women’s and their families’ life-courses and the sending communities and reveals their conflictive and uneven consequences.

Finally, this research provides a useful methodological contribution to the study of the migrants’ family and community in relation to transnationalism, what is known as multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995). It allows the researcher to understand that the migrants sustain contact and negotiations with other social actors in many geographical locations and that the migrants and non-migrants also play a part in responding to the influence of transnationalism, which reveals both global and local interaction.

One limitation of my research is that I interviewed mainly Thai women and their Dutch spouses who are concentrated in the Dutch cities. Similarly, I limit the scope of my exploration to Buddhist Central, Northern and North-eastern regions in Thailand. I am aware that the family ties with natal kin and in-laws both in Thai and Dutch societies may vary slightly by region, sub-cultures and ethnic groups. Furthermore, I followed only four couples on their visits to the Thai wife’s home town and stayed a few days with each of them during my three months field research in Thailand. Hence, the data I gathered can present only a general overview of the women’s linkages with their families and non-migrants in the rural villages. Finally, my study included neither the experiences of the group of Thai males, homosexual or trans-gendered migrants who have also migrated to the Netherlands as a consequence of marrying a Dutch partner. Although

they constitute a much smaller number, their relationship with their spouses, in-laws and Thai friends may differ from those of their female counterparts.

Research methodology and data collection

Knowledge of the theme of my study and the relevant theoretical perspectives are based on such secondary data as Thai and English textbooks, published research, as well as periodicals such as newspapers and some Internet websites. In my methodology and data collection, I have opted for a qualitative approach and ethnographic research methods. My data draw primarily on in-depth and open-ended interviews with forty-five Thai women and thirteen male spouses (eleven Dutch, one Surinamese and one Norwegian).¹⁸ To accumulate information about the ideas and practices of the Dutch family and marriage between Dutch-Dutch couples, I also interviewed a group of undergraduate Dutch students and a few Dutch men and women in the late forties and fifties.

All interviews were conducted in Thai or English.¹⁹ When I had won the women's trust and they felt they could be interviewed by me, I asked them to recall their life-histories, which were tape-recorded in sessions lasting from one to four hours. Such aspects of participant observation as sharing food with the women, shopping with them and participating in Thai festivals enabled me to conduct informal interviews and to acquire more specific data in day-to-day situations. I pay attention not only to what happened to the women personally, but also how they defined and experienced the daily relationships with their husbands, in-laws, friends and their families in Thailand. Initially, I felt that it was much more difficult for me to interview the Dutch men than the Thai women. I was uncertain about what sorts of questions are polite or impolite and how far I could probe into such aspects of their private lives as occupation and past marital experiences. Aspects of participant observation such as attending the parties at the houses of the Thai-Dutch couples helped me become more familiar and consequently more at ease with the Dutch men and permitted me to acquire more data.

¹⁸ Two women had had a Dutch boyfriend before, but their relationship had ended. Later one lived with a Surinamese man who had received Dutch citizenship and has been in the Netherlands for thirty years, whereas the other started a relationship with a Norwegian man who had resided in the Netherlands for seven years.

¹⁹ As my command of Dutch is not at all fluent, I conducted the interviews with the Dutch men in English.

I began with three months fieldwork (pilot-test) from September to December 2004 to explore some more general information pertinent to my research. One year of intensive fieldwork was conducted in 2005. One of the first facts I noticed was that Thai migrants reside in all parts of the Netherlands, but tend to be highly concentrated in Amsterdam. I began by interviewing various Thai women and their Dutch spouses who live in Amsterdam and other big cities in what is known as the 'Randstad' (the highly urbanised, densely populated area along the Western seaboard) such as Leiden, Haarlem, The Hague, Delft, Rotterdam and Utrecht. Because their social ties extended beyond the borders of this bounded area of the Western Netherlands, I utilised a snow-ball technique by asking the women to introduce me to their kin, friends or acquaintances. By these means, I was able to enquire how the women established and maintained social networks with female counterparts in such other cities in the Netherlands as Leerdam, Groningen, and Wageningen and/or such other European countries as Germany, Belgium and France. I also diversified the informants by considering their various attributes including age, past marital status, educational level, class, duration of stay in the Netherlands, (past) occupation and so on.

My research deals with the phenomena of transnationalism and transnational practices, hence, I conducted a multi-sited ethnography in both the Netherlands, some other countries in Europe and in Thailand. In May 2005 and in June 2006, I attended the annual meeting of the Thai Women Network in Europe (TWNE) in Switzerland and Italy respectively. Furthermore, from December 2005 to February 2006, I accompanied four Thai-Dutch couples on visits to the women's home towns in Chiang Mai (the North), Khon Kaen (the North-east), Phang Nga and Krabi (the South) in Thailand. During these trips, I had the opportunity to meet their families, to observe their life-styles, and to participate in the Buddhist ceremonies observed by their local communities. Even when I had commenced writing my thesis, I could still interview the women when I felt a need to do so in order to clarify some questions which had arisen. I also developed friendships with a few women, socialised with them and occasionally visited their parents when I visited Thailand.

The position of the researcher in the field: insider or outsider?

Before I began my research on the topic of cross-cultural marriage of Thai women in the Netherlands, I assumed that it would not be difficult for me to conduct the fieldwork and to initiate contacts with Thai migrant women. After all, my interviewees and I share some common ethnic and social characteristics. My status as a Thai woman who lives abroad—albeit temporarily, understands ‘Thai’ culture and has Thai as her mother tongue would allow me a relatively easy access to them, compared to the difficulties which might be faced by non-Thai researchers. Later, I realised that my assumption was not entirely correct. Many women first refused outright or hesitated to be interviewed since they did not trust me enough and their status as an immigrant made them feel to some degree vulnerable. Ruang, for instance, mentioned that, if her story were to be published in a Dutch newspaper or a magazine, she would not give me an interview.

Some women agreed to be my interviewees, but they also assumed the role of being my interviewers. They bombarded me with many questions, such as why I chose the Netherlands as a place to pursue my study, how long I had been here, and if I planned to stay in the Netherlands permanently or not. They also wondered about my marital status. Those who learned that I was single advised me about the positive and negative aspects of a marriage to a Thai or a Dutch man, allowing me to gain a deeper insight into their own marital experiences. They also teased me, saying that if I wished to marry a Dutch man, they could help to make the contact.

My experiences with such situations raised questions about my position and identity in the field research. Am I an insider or an outsider? I acknowledged that I myself as a Thai woman share the same ethnic and cultural origin with my informants, but I am also different from them. I am a student, educated, and from a middle-class background. I am also a researcher who is interested in their experiences of marriage migration. The women I interviewed also recognised this difference. They considered me a young and unmarried girl away from home. This aroused in many of them, who were much older than I, a sense of protectiveness. Some even cautioned me to be careful about leading my life overseas alone. This made me feel more comfortable during the interviews. Therefore, these circumstances are indicative of an interpretation of such aspects

of social status as gender, class, age, occupation, educational background, marital status and nationality between the researcher and the interviewees.

Being both a partial insider and a partial outsider has had a great impact on my access to the data. Unquestionably, being a partial insider by sharing the same nationality, language and the situation of living abroad creates a sense that 'we are all in same boat', which allowed me to develop a close relationship with the women fairly quickly. This would have been impossible, if we had been in Thailand. I initially succeeded in convincing the women to participate by assuring them that I must use fictive names and that their generosity in giving interviews would contribute enormously to my studies. After a few months of getting to know each other, many of them were willing to give me interviews. Some said that 'we are Thais who live overseas, so we should assist each other', whereas others reasoned that their lives were 'normal' and that they had no need to hide 'anything'.²⁰ In the case of women who worked in sex-related jobs, it took several months before they were prepared to be interviewed. Undoubtedly also, as my role was that of a partial outsider this provided me with an opportunity to ask many questions of a private nature. After keeping in contact with each other for months, those who worked in Thai massage parlours or Thai restaurants felt relatively free to discuss all kind of topics with me. They and their colleagues were afraid of gossip and jealousy and avoided conflicts by not sharing all their stories and secrets with each other. They sometimes expressed their anger with a colleague to me simply because there was some degree of distance between us.

Management and negotiation are required to become acquainted and simultaneously keep a distance during the field research. It stands to reason that keeping in contact and frequent visits increased the familiarity between researcher and interviewees; the women gradually talked to me more openly. Nevertheless, in some situations I had to be aware of not becoming too close with them. If, for instance, I became a close friend of a woman working as a waitress in the restaurant where I did my fieldwork, other waitresses might suspect that she gossiped about them to me. Members of the Thai community usually know each other and tend to exchange news through

²⁰ Some Thai women had worked in sex-related jobs when they were still in Thailand and later married and moved to the Netherlands. Other Thai migrant women believe that this group of Thai women had an 'unusual' life-story and might tend to conceal it. However, this is not always the case. When I had known them for a few months, some revealed, either directly or indirectly, that their former occupation in Thailand or the Netherlands had been a sex-related job.

gossip. I had to be careful to avoid being saddled with a bad reputation since this would have caused trouble for my research and my life in the Netherlands. Furthermore, if I were to maintain my friendship with the women, knowledge about obligations among friends was required. I enjoyed gathering with the women who had become my friends and appreciated their generosity, especially when they gave me emotional support and Thai food. However, I sometimes felt guilty when I could not respond to their invitations to join their parties every time. Were I to refuse too often, they might prefer to decrease contact with me.

Socio-economic background of the women and their spouses

The ages of the forty-five Thai women I interviewed ranged from twenty-four to fifty-seven at the time of the interviews. The majority is around thirty to forty. In origin, they come from all the regions of Thailand. The majority was born in the North-east (twenty-two persons), whereas fifteen women came from Bangkok and the Central region, four from the South and four from the North. Twenty women were single; twenty-five were divorced or separated from a former Thai partner. Twenty women have children who had been born to a former Thai husband. Eleven had finished primary school, twenty-one had completed at a secondary or vocational school, nine had acquired a Bachelor's Degree at a university in Thailand, and only four had received a Master's Degree in Thailand, the USA or the Netherlands.

Thirteen women have a marriage certificate, three have a marriage contract and the rest live together with a Dutch man without a contract or marriage certificate. Seven women had lived with a Dutch man and separated later. All of these had a new partner. At the time of the research, the duration of their residence in the Netherlands ranged from one to twenty-five years and the length of their marital relations with the Dutch spouse varied from one to seventeen years.

The ages of the Dutch partners range from twenty-nine to sixty-five. Twenty-four men had finished vocational school, sixteen had completed a Bachelor's Degree and five had acquired a Master's Degree.²¹ Their past marital experiences had been varied: eight men had been single

²¹ Since the Dutch educational system is rather diversified, I distinguish three levels: vocational level, Bachelor's degree and Master's degree.

and the rest had been married or had lived with a Dutch, Italian, English, Indonesian, Thai, Surinamese, Norwegian or African woman. Seven of them have children who were born to their former partner. The occupations of the Dutch husbands are diverse, including lawyer, pilot, computer technician, office manager, electrician, shop-keeper, security guard, factory worker and construction worker. A few of them have already retired.

More general demographic information and the basic migratory backgrounds of the women are presented in Appendix A. The names of all informants I mentioned in this research are fictitious. It should be stressed that the data from a small number of the women and the Dutch men I interviewed may not be sufficient to allow for a generalisation of the findings, but they provide a deep understanding of daily experiences and perception of the women and their Dutch partners.

Chapter One

Cross-Cultural Marriage: A Case of 'Love' or of Economic Gain?

'I believe that if I were to go abroad, I would have a better life. I thought that Western countries would resemble "paradise". I had seen some of my female fellow-villagers who had gone to Germany or Switzerland send remittances back home to build a new house. I wished that one day my dream of going overseas would come true. After I had followed my Dutch husband to the Netherlands, I finally realised that the "reality" of living in Europe is completely different to what I had imagined. But I am already here. What else can I do? I just work hard and put up with all the difficulties. If I don't I shall have to return to Thailand with nothing.' (Phloen, interviewed in November 2004).

'Thai men might be afraid of marrying me because they see me as a highly educated woman. I also didn't want to marry a Thai man who was unsuitable for me [in terms of education and economic status]. As I wanted to have my own family, I weighed all this up before I married Geert and moved to the Netherlands. Initially, my parents didn't approve of my decision to marry him. They were also concerned about my career. I had worked as a highly placed government official [in Thailand]. I had to resign from my job, to travel far away from my parents, and to leave behind the social life with which I was familiar, in order to follow him to the Netherlands.' (Pla, interviewed in August 2005).

When a bride from an economically poorer global location and a groom from a wealthier one are married, there is a tendency for three assumptions to be made. First, because of the distinctive economic disparity between their countries and the high probability of the woman following her spouse, material benefit and the opportunity for migration are asserted to be her major motivations. Second, the society from which the groom originally comes tends to be viewed as 'modern', whereas the original country of the bride will most likely be considered 'traditional' and less developed. From one point of view, it is believed that the bride's family mediates

marriage migration and the bride remains quite dependent. Conversely, the groom is assumed to have made his own decision on mate choice and his family remains uninvolved. Third, marriage as an instrument by which to ensure economic and social mobility seems to be irreconcilable with the modern ideal of a love-based marriage. As economic gain and the chance of geographical mobility are recognised as the main incentives, the women from less developed countries are assumed to have opted for cross-border marriage for such reasons.

Nevertheless, the interviews quoted above question such assumptions. The sentiments of both Phloen and Pla about their marriage are ambivalent. Economic betterment may have been an incentive which encouraged Phloen to marry and move, but it is obvious that the reality of her experience of living in the Netherlands contradicts what she had dreamed about a life overseas. If the women married because of the opportunity such a marriage offered for geographical mobility and economic benefit, why was Pla reluctant to marry and to move to the Netherlands? Were both families involved in marriage migration? Does the presence of economic and social gain exclude the fact that the women married for 'love'? How should the term 'love' be understood cross culturally?

The goal of this chapter is to answer the primary research question: what facilitates Thai women's motivations for and decisions about marriage migration. The first section deconstructs the simplistic and mechanistic explanation of an exclusively economic approach and explores other social, cultural and historical determinants affecting marriage migration. The second part underlines the interaction of inter-generational relations in the process of marriage migration decision. Classical anthropological studies of marriage and kinship and their limitations in relation to this study are briefly reviewed. Contributions derived from historical and gendered perspectives are taken into account. After this, the degree to which the family is involved in marriage of the Thai-Dutch couples is discussed. The third section questions the modern North-Western European concept of marriage, which ideally is primarily based on 'love', and its transference to other societies. This chapter finally ends with an investigation of the different meanings and practices of marriage rituals and transactions, and of the way in which the couples handle such differences.

What shapes marriage migration of Thai women to the Netherlands

Many theoretical perspectives have been developed to explain why people opt for marriage migration and what influences their motivation and decision. As reviewed in the Introduction the economic approach was initially limited to the level of micro-analysis. In this context, marriage is regarded as an individual's rational choice, in which the person decides to marry at a point at which this state offers more utility than remaining single (Becker 1991; Gorny and Kepinska 2004: 355). Caution is advised as this view overstates an individual's independence and ignores the engagement of family members in the decision making about marriage migration.

The economic paradigm extends its unit of analysis to the macro-level, claiming that economic gain and an opportunity for spatial mobility present crucial incentives (Borjas 1989; Todaro 1969). It also underlines the role of the push-pull factors (Borjas 1989; Lee 1966). According to this perspective, economic difficulties and the women's relatively low competence in well-paid occupations in the country of origin may push them to migrate. However, the high cost of international migration and the more heavily restricted immigration and employment regulations in the receiving country may hinder their migration and participation in the global labour market. Marrying a groom who resides in a well-developed, prosperous country therefore appears to be the best option by which these women can gain entry to such destinations and be granted the requisite legal residence which will subsequently give access to employment opportunities (Fan and Huang 1998; Humbeck 1996). This perspective does exhibit some limitations: it unequivocally prioritises economic benefit and it perceives the women as a homogeneous group, which they quite definitely are not. There is abundant evidence to show that, in the context of restrictive migration policies which provide migration opportunities to only a few highly qualified migrants with a high income, marriage might also be an easier option to gain legitimate entrance and social mobility for relatively educated women, among them certain groups of Eastern Europeans (Capussotti et al. 2007), Filipinas (Mckay 2003; Parrenas 2001) or Vietnamese (Thai 2005).

A growing amount of literature is linking the economic approach with geography in order to underscore the interplay between geographical hierarchy and economic disparity between the

two countries, as both these factors can facilitate or limit the marriage market. In other words, males from wealthier countries can attract women from poorer locales (Abelmann and Kim 2005; Lively 1991; Li and Lively 1995: 293). However, this explanation ignores other possible socio-cultural determinants which can affect the flux and form of marriage and migration. Moreover, cross-border marriage is often thought of in terms of what is called 'hypergamy' in anthropology, in which such a marriage form opens the way to the upward social mobility of the bride. On closer examination this presumption is too facile. It requires further examination on 'how, for whom, and in what sense such marriage represents upward mobility' (Constable 2005a: 10). Under some circumstances, the educated, middle-class women from a less developed country may experience what is called 'paradoxical hypergamy' in the sense that their moving to the more developed destination offers them upward geographical mobility. However, in the process they may also face downward class mobility, as the socio-economic status of their in-laws may be viewed as lower than what theirs was in the sending area (Constable 2005a: 10; Freeman 2005: 98).

A gendered approach is introduced into the field to analyse the impact of gender differences on the women's decision to opt for marriage migration. Constable (2005a:3-4), one of the first authors to discuss gender and migration, argues that rather than focusing purely on economic motivation, 'marriages that cross the border of nation-states form marriage-scapes that are shaped and limited by existing and emerging cultural, social, historical and political factors'. Some scholars add that the way in which women experience their family obligations differently from men may actually motivate the women to marry and to move (Harzig 2001; Sharpe 2001). Furthermore, the women may use marriage migration as a way to deal with pressure on local marriage constraints, to resist gender oppression at home or to escape from family control (Ortiz 1996; Pedraza 1991).

This perspective in particular helps in an examination of how gender specificity and differences in socio-economic standing affect the women's experience and perception, both before and after marriage migration. Pessar and Mahler, for example, draw on the concept of 'gendered geographies of power' to demonstrate that 'gender operates simultaneously on multiple spatial and social scales (e.g. the body, the family, and the state)' (2001: 5-8). They emphasise

the role of ‘social location’—a person’s position within power hierarchies created by historical, political, economic, geographical, and kinship-based factors—in shaping the migrants’ motivation, experience and perception. They go on to stress the importance of the ‘type and degrees of agency’ people exert given their social location. In other words, people’s accessibility to resources and their migration are both shaped by their social location. However, they can simultaneously also be an initiator of their action and of such cognitive processes as the imaging, planning and designing strategies which they employ.

In what follows, I shall explore what facilitates the marriage migration of Thai women to the Netherlands by taking economic, social and cultural determinants and a gendered perspective all into account.

The popularity of tourism to Thailand

In the absence of colonial ties or refugee-related flows, Thai migration to Europe was negligible before the 1970s. Tourism and entertainment have been the most major significant means which have created encounters between Thai women and foreign men and initiated the women’s subsequent flows of marriage migration. The emergence of these related industries is inextricably linked to the Thai contact with American troops during the Vietnam War in the 1960s and the 1970s and the government strategy adopted since the 1980s of promoting tourism as a means by which to earn foreign exchange. During the Vietnam War, Thailand served as a major destination for the R&R (‘Rest and Recreation’) holidays of American servicemen. This, it transpired, was one of the significant determinants which generated the growth of prostitution and an entertainment industry.²² Some interaction between Thai women and American servicemen occurred under the rubric of *miachao* (hired wife)²³, in which servicemen lived with local women and received sexual, emotional and housekeeping services in exchange for money, upkeep and/or

²² The demand of the local Thai men in this sphere should also not be overlooked.

²³ *Miachao* literally means a ‘hired wife’. At first, it connoted the relationship between white or African-American soldiers who lived with a local Thai woman during the Vietnam War. Later, the definition gradually changed and signified the temporal relationship of foreign male tourists who hire a local female escort partner to accompany them during their trip to Thailand. They pay all expenses such as travelling costs, accommodation and meals for the women, combined with providing the women some extra money, depending on what they have agreed beforehand.

gifts (Jeffrey 2002). The servicemen usually left their Thai wife and *luk-khrueng*²⁴ children in Thailand when they returned to the United States. The withdrawal of American troops at the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 brought a high level of unemployment in its wake, particularly in the North-east where the air bases had been located. Bereft of a source of income, a group of peasant women from this region who had been former *miachao* or prostitutes migrated southwards and some of them began to work in the expanding sphere of sex-related tourism.

Economic difficulties in rural areas and an increased demand for female labour in the industrial and service sectors during the economic boom in the 1980s are other forces which pushed the rural women's migration in search of employment in Bangkok or other cities (Mills 1999; Pasuk 1982). Combined with the government encouragement of Thai tourism, including such promotions as the announcement of the Visit Thailand Year in 1987 or the Amazing Thailand Year in 2000, the tourist- and sex-related businesses unavoidably became one of the spheres which absorbed female labour and generated chances for women to meet foreign men, perhaps ultimately leading to marriage and migration.

The data acquired during my research demonstrate that the popularity of Thai tourism also certainly opened up the chances of marriage migration of Thai women to the Netherlands. Twenty of the women I interviewed reported that they met their Dutch partner during his holiday in Thailand. Of these twenty women, six met their potential partner by chance and seven became acquainted with each other when the women were working in a hotel, a restaurant or a travel agency in such popular tourist attractions as Bangkok, Chiang Mai in the North or Phuket in the South. Seven other women implicitly said that they made contact with their prospective Dutch spouse when they were employed in such sexual entertainment establishments as a massage parlour or a bar. For instance, Tong had been working in a beer bar in Pattaya, in Chonburi province, near the Gulf of Thailand, for three months, when she met Adriaan, her Dutch husband, in 2002:²⁵

²⁴ *Luk-khrueng* refers to children of mixed parentage.

²⁵ Pattaya is one of cities which had earlier served for the 'Rest and Recreation' holidays of American servicemen during the Vietnam War in the 1960s. After the withdrawal of the American troops in 1975, it was transformed into a popular and well-known tourist destination for sexual entertainment and services.

He was travelling with two Dutch male friends. He visited the bar where I worked. We talked together and got along well. He asked me to keep him company for nine days with an agreement to pay all my expenses and to give me an extra sum of 700 Baht [15 Euro] a day.²⁶

Some Dutch men kept contact with the women by telephone or e-mail after they returned to the Netherlands. The women who could then speak only a little bit of English overcame the limitations of their language-skills by mixing both Thai and English when speaking with their boyfriend on the telephone. Alternatively, they paid somebody who ran an Internet shop to reply e-mails on their behalf.²⁷ Some women received allowances, regular or irregular, from their Dutch potential husbands, ranging from 4,000 to 10,000 Baht (80 to 200 Euro) a month.²⁸ The men revisited the woman in Thailand and some acted as guarantor for the woman's application for a tourist visa and sponsored all expenses for her to visit them in the Netherlands. Later, they took care of the procedures required for her migration to the Netherlands.²⁹ Tong had this to say about her relationship with Adriaan:

We kept in touch even after he had gone back to the Netherlands. When my daughter [who was born to a former Thai husband] fell ill, he sent 5,000 Baht [100 Euro]. He was kind and genuine in his dealing with me. Three months after we first met, he visited me again in Thailand. I was still working as a bar girl and went out with other male clients. He told me he loved me and asked me to stop working at this bar. He would compensate me by giving me a monthly allowance of around 8,000 Baht [160 Euro]. After our relationship had lasted for a year, he brought me to the Netherlands.

²⁶ The previous Dutch currency was the Guilder. In 2002, it was replaced by the Euro. The women interviewed who had arrived in the Netherlands before 2002 sometimes mentioned the Guilder. For the sake of convenience, however, I have calculated the amount of money into Euro throughout my thesis. According to the exchange rate in January 2009, 1 Euro is around 48 Thai Baht.

²⁷ Kung mentioned that to reply her Dutch boyfriend's e-mail in English, the owner of the Internet shop charged her nearly 50 Baht (around 1 Euro) per email in 2006.

²⁸ Ten women reported that their Dutch boyfriend had sent them money regularly when they were in Thailand.

²⁹ It is also possible that some couples maintain a long-distance relationship, in which the Dutch men do not bring their Thai wife to the Netherlands. Instead they travel back and forth between the Netherlands and Thailand to visit her.

Although the tourism and entertainment industries are a major area in which Thai women and their potential foreign husbands may come into contact, such meetings are certainly not always the case. Large-scale investment by transnational companies during the period of economic growth in Thailand in the 1980s also provided opportunities for male foreigners to make contact with the local women. Four women with a high standard of education who worked in business companies, universities or with the government met their Dutch spouses during the latter's employment or internship in Thailand. For instance, Pla, who was a government official, met her husband through an introduction by her friends after he had been working in Thailand for three years. Phen worked as a librarian at a university in Northern Thailand. She met her Dutch partner, who had studied agricultural sciences at Wageningen University, when he was doing his internship at the university at which she worked. The generalisation that the prospective couples made contact in places for sex entertainment obscures the diverse life-stories of other women and the heterogeneity of their social and economic backgrounds.

Improvement of computer technology and transport

As well as tourism, globalisation and the advent of high technology in telecommunications have also recently enhanced the chances for prospective partners to establish and maintain a long-distance relationship, which can eventually promote the flow of marriage migration. Six of the women interviewed initiated contact with their potential Dutch husband through dating service websites or Internet chat rooms.³⁰ Both the men and women can apply on a website by placing their picture and filling in a short résumé specifying name, age, place of residence, occupation and hobbies, coupled with a short explanation of the kind of person for whom they are searching. Later, they send their respondent an e-mail to introduce themselves. If the other person replies, the contact between them begins. The women may also chat in an Internet chat room with many men who are from such various countries as the USA, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Australia and Japan and the men do likewise with many European, African or Asian women. At the later

³⁰ Some websites are created on a non-profit base; the men who want to contact and to obtain information about the women to whom they are attracted can find their e-mail address directly on the websites. In the case of profit-making sites, the men have to pay the website owners by credit card before they obtain the information about a particular woman.

stage, the multiplicity of their contact is cut back because they limit their correspondence to those few with whom they enjoy talking and share similar interests. As the frequency of the chat room conversations or the e-mails increases, more personal communications via telephone or web camera begin.

It is unavoidable that the negative connotation of the word 'mail-order bride' is connected to a relationship created through a dating website and that the women are regarded as a commodity, a female who is bereft of agency (Constable 2005b: 173). The women I interviewed were aware of such connotations, but they seemed to stress the advantage of a contact through Internet and were convinced that they were well able to make their own choice. In this cyber space, they met new Western male friends without exposing their personal lives during the first stage of communication and enjoyed receiving such trifling gifts as a bottle of perfume or a small package of cosmetics from these men. They were also able to decide with whom they would keep up or terminate contact. Lan pointed to her own and her friend's experiences in getting in touch with Western men through a website as follows:

It had a great deal of fun showing the photos of these new male friends and informing each other about our conversations. One of my friends talked to an Italian man. During their contact [which lasted about one year], he visited her twice. Now, she lives with him in Italy. I myself put my brief résumé on the Dutch dating website with the help of my female Thai friend [who had lived with a Dutch spouse in the Netherlands]. Afterwards I received various e-mails from a number of Dutch men. I chose to talk to two men whose ages were similar to mine. They were polite to me. Whenever, I met crude men who talked about sexual issues, I immediately ended the contact.

Others perceived chatting with *farang* men as an opportunity for international migration, if their relationship were to flourish and grow more committed as Nipha's story shows:

A Thai woman went to an Internet shop with her American spouse during their trip to Thailand. In the shop, she started a conversation with me. She asked 'Do you often use

Internet? Why don't you talk to a *farang* man? If you are lucky enough to meet a good one, he may take you to live overseas'. She gave me the name of two dating websites. At that time, I was bored with my job. I had worked [as an accountant] for five years, but my salary had barely been raised. I applied to be a member of this website. Afterwards, I received a host of e-mails from many *farang* men. I also contacted Lucas, who later became my partner.

After communicating between several months to a couple of years, some men may consider making a trip to meet the woman face-to-face in Thailand. The economic inequality between Thailand and the Netherlands and the lower cost of living in Thailand enable the Dutch men to afford such trip plus their accommodation expenses and to treat their Thai girlfriend during their holiday in Thailand. If their relationship has survived, the Dutch man may decide to bring the woman to the Netherlands.

Physical attraction and fantasies about gender, affluence and modernity

Marriages between Thai-Dutch couples are also moulded by physical attraction and imaginations of gendered stereotypes of 'Asian' women and 'Western' men. The different features of Asian women—their hair colour, eyes and skin—possibly contribute to making them appear attractive to the Western men.³¹ Thai or Asian women also tend to be considered tender, 'submissive' and 'traditional'; traits which allure the European men in search of these qualities, since the women in their own countries considered as too liberal and more demanding (Panitee 2007).³² Marcel responded to the suggestion that the images of a traditional woman played a part in his expectations of Chit:

³¹ This relates to the divergent concepts of beauty in Thai and Dutch society. In Thailand, a fair skin is considered beautiful and a symbol of wealth. The rural women, who work in the fields or outdoors, have a tanned skin which tends to be thought of as beautiful by Dutch and other European men.

³² After the Thai-Dutch couples have lived together for a few years, some Dutch men are however convinced that their Thai wife does not conform to the stereotype of a 'typical Asian' woman. She is instead more independent and enterprising.

Chit takes very good care of me. She has a sense of consideration and is very helpful. She sees and does everything without having to ask this. Before I have to ask her to do something for me, it is already done. Many Dutch women just do what they want and do not care much about their spouse.

This does not apply just to the Dutch men, Thai migrant women themselves also foster these images of 'Asian' women in their minds. During my fieldwork, I often heard jokes in which Thai women exaggerated the difference in gender role between 'Thai' and 'Dutch' women. In a house of a Thai-Dutch couple, the wife prepares breakfast before her husband leaves for his work. When he returns home, she serves him a beverage and later dinner. Conversely, in a Dutch couple's house, when the husband says: 'Could you make a cup of coffee for me?' The Dutch wife may reply 'What is wrong with your hands? Why can't you make your own cup of coffee?'

Conversely, the stereotype of a *farang* man attracts the Thai women. Many women (nineteen persons), especially those from the lower socio-economic background, reported negative marriage experiences with a Thai man, citing irresponsibility towards his family, addiction to alcohol and gambling. In contrast, they imagined Western men to be good-looking, liberal and well off because they come from wealthier countries and are able to lead a fabulous life during their trip to Thailand. The imagination of an affluent, modern Western society is reinforced by both the local and the global media. Thai and Western television programmes, magazines and Hollywood films frequently portray scenes of featuring large houses, luxurious cars and the technological advancements of Western society. Such illustrations reinforce the formation of a Thai social value which sees *yu mueang nok* (living abroad, especially in Europe, America, Australia and Japan) as a symbol of higher social mobility and privilege, because only the wealthy can afford these (Panitee 2005; Pataya 2002b). Marrying a *farang* man is, therefore, beneficial because it is imagined as an opportunity to live with a (financially) responsible man, to live overseas, and to enjoy economic betterment and a modern life-style.

A shift in opinion toward marrying a farang man

The changed perception of a relationship with a *farang* man and of having *luk-khrueng* children in Thai society facilitates a mixed marriage between Thai women and *farang* men. As cited in the Introduction, Thai Buddhism does not prohibit marriage with a spouse from a different ethnic and religious background. Instead, it was the relationship between the American servicemen and the local Thai woman in the form of *miachao* (hired wife) or prostitute during the Vietnam War which caused intermarriage with a *farang* man to be stigmatised. *Luk-khrueng* children were unacceptable, which was reflected in the term '*khao nok na*', rice seedlings which have fallen outside the dikes surrounding the rice-fields, a symbol of their illegitimacy (C. Reynolds 1999: 269). During that time and in subsequent periods, a Thai woman with a *farang* husband was more likely to be suspected by other Thais to have been a former *miachao* (hired wife) or a prostitute and having *luk-khrueng* children was considered undesirable.

This stigma has waned slightly, especially since marrying a *farang* partner has recently been perceived as an opportunity leading to international mobility and a means of achieving higher socio-economic status. The women and their foreign spouses are more likely to be welcomed by the women's relatives and the local authorities since the remittances they send home improve their families' well-being and contribute to the development projects in the local community, an issue I shall illustrate in more detail in Chapter Five. *Luk-khrueng* children have also acquired a privileged place in Thai society, particularly in the field of advertising and entertainment, where the Thai notions of beauty are being transformed (C. Reynolds 1999). They are popular on Thai television as singers, actors, models or national beauty contestants.³³ For example, Phloi's son aged eighteen visited Thailand for a holiday in 2005. A modelling agency persuaded him to be a model in an advertisement on the television. She proudly mentioned that her relatives in Thailand were excited about seeing him on television. Among many Thai women,

³³ In 1988 Phornthip Nakhirankanok, for instance, won the Miss Thailand and Miss Universe contests. Although she was not born to a *farang* father, she grew up in the Thai diaspora in Los Angeles, had a figure similar to a Western-Thai half-blood, and spoke English with a perfect accent. Later, several young women who were half-bloods born to a Thai mother and a Western father have increasingly participated in beauty contests in Thailand. Another example is Worarat Suwannarat, the Miss Asia Pacific 1997, who has an Irish father and a Thai mother and was raised in Britain (C. Reynolds 1999).

therefore, marrying a *farang* husband and having *luk-khrueng* children have become acceptable, even preferable.

In short, the popularity of tourism to Thailand is one of the major reasons which have opened up a greater possibility of contact and later marriage between Thai women and a prospective Dutch husband. The improvement in computer technology and transport is another factor which enables potential couples to maintain a long-distant relationship during the initial period of their acquaintance and has facilitated the recent and varied flow of Thai marriage migration to the Netherlands. Furthermore, the option of such cross-cultural marriage is sponsored by the idea embedded in Thai Buddhism which legitimates a marriage with a partner from another religious group and by the changing attitude towards Thai-*farang* marriage among Thais which has become less censorious than in the past. It should also be underlined that the women's motivation in marriage migration is not shaped purely by financial gain in itself, but is also prompted by the Thai perception of an affluent, modern Europe combined with the fantasy about a good-looking, (financially) responsible Western man. The interview with Phloen quoted above, in which she expressed her disillusionment with the gap between her fantasy and the real living conditions in the Netherlands, testifies that economic motivation is deeply influenced by Thai cultural ideas of marriage, migration and Europe.

Cross-cultural marriage and the role of the family

The aim of this section is to explore the role of families in decision making about marriage migration by taking Thai-Dutch couples as an example. It commences with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of anthropological research on kinship and marriage as the point of departure for the analysis of my own data. After this, a brief overview of changes and variations in family and marriage in Thai and Dutch societies is sketched. This information provides an understanding of how marriage is constructed and legitimised and how the wider cycles of family are conceived. Within the given different cultural codes of marriage in Thai and Dutch societies, it specifically examines how Thai women, their Dutch spouses and the families on both sides engage in decision making in a cross-border marriage.

Studies on kinship and marriage

Apart from descent, marriage is a relationship which creates kinship ties and entitles its members to rights, claims, obligations and sentiments. Traditionally, kinship and marriage have been core topics studied by anthropologists. The followers of 'structuralism' and 'functionalism' focused their interest in the knowledge of the kinship system and marriage in primitive societies by delving into their structure and the manner in which they functioned. The structuralism approach illustrated how marriage generates a rearrangement of social structures, in which certain existing relationships are changed and new social relations are established, not only between the husband and the wife, but also between in-laws (Radcliff-Brown 1950). Many studies between the 1950s and the 1970s applied this approach to examine the system of kinship and marriage by studying kinship terminology, prohibited/preferential mating, marriage rituals, post-marital residence, and rules of descent (Morgan 1877; Radcliffe-Brown 1952). They also demonstrated how these systems relate to social, economic and political structures in a specific society (Evans-Pritchard 1950).

In its emphasis on function, the classical anthropological view perceived marriage as a mechanism by which to forge social, economic and political alliances among affines. The anthropological studies showed that, in some primitive or tribal societies, the practice of descent group exogamy and exchange of women was present. Inter-marriage between groups was the prescribed ideal and each group provided a wife for a man of the other (Levi-Strauss 1970; Mauss 1954; Radcliffe-Brown 1950). The ideal of this practice was, according to their analyses, based on the principle of gift exchange, namely whatever was received has to be returned. Gifts and counter-gifts did not necessarily have to be equivalent nor did they have to be reciprocated in a similar form or at the same moment. Consequently, exchanges of women between two kin groups generated moral obligations and mutual reciprocity. Over generations, co-operation and solidarity between groups were developed and sustained.

More recently, the structural-functionalist theory on kinship and marriage has been widely criticised and the study of kinship had lost its central ground in anthropology by the end of the twentieth century. The first objection was that it tended to perceive kinship and marriage as static entities, into which researchers entered just for the period of their fieldwork to discover its

characteristics. A historical perspective fills this gap and allows anthropologists to see how kinship and marriage undergo changes and are (re)constructed through time in a given society (Coontz 1992; 2005). This approach also examines how state policy, economic change, religion, colonialism, and nationalist discourses might affect shifts in kin ties and marriage (Brettell 2001; Risseuw and Palriwala 1996).

The second objection raised is that the classical anthropological approach was very likely to leave the position of the women under-analysed. It elaborated the relationship, rights and obligations between husband and wives, parents and child, and the couples and their in-laws in a specific society. However, in the analysis, the women were conceived of as merely a part of these kin networks, whose main role was to be exchanged in marriage. Moreover, it seemed to highlight those social norms and regulations attached to kinship and marriage in forging social order, rather than including evidence of how an individual could exercise agency. The introduction of a gendered perspective brought the revival of the anthropological study of marriage and kinship by shifting the analysis from rights and obligations to the inequality of power relations embedded in kin ties and marriage. Instead of perceiving kinship as a rigid or inflexible form of social organisation, a gendered approach analyses how individual people conceive of family in their daily life and how kinship and marriage are utilised to subordinate women and as strategies to gain power (Lamphere 2001; Moore 1988). It also represents the 'voices' and autonomy of women and how they negotiate or resist these dominant cultural ideologies and practices (Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Stone 2006).

The third demer was that, in their analysis, the classical anthropological studies of marriage and kinship assumed a demarcation between 'advanced' Euro-American societies and the exotic primitive 'other', in which the 'modern' industrialised societies with a nuclear family are contrasted to kin alliances and an extended family (Stone 2001: 1). On the basis of this assumption, marriage also tended to be dichotomised as either 'traditional' or 'modern'. In the so-called primitive or less industrialised societies, marriage was considered an arrangement based on its initiation by kin, whereas in the more modern, developed countries, marriage was based on an individual own choice. This Euro-centric assumption has had profound implications for

previous and current studies on kinship and marriage because it generated such two clear-cut, divergent approaches.

An overview of family and marriage in Thai society

Ideally marriage in Thai society does not merely signify a legal, social and intimate relationship between two individuals. It is also viewed as an affair of the wider family and consequently it establishes relations, rights and obligations between two families. The family also plays a significant part in legitimising the couple's union. It is the custom that the parents of a groom or some of his senior relatives approach the parents of a bride and ask for her hand. This action proves to the family of the bride that the groom's family acknowledges and approves the future relationship of the couple (Sumalee 1995: 35).

Although the parents' authority over the mate choice of their offspring has enjoyed a social and legal acceptance for a long time, generally speaking Thai women are allowed to choose their own spouses. A certain level of independence can be explained by taking kin relations and the women's position within the household into consideration. Bilateral kinship which accords equal importance to the relatives of both mother and father predominates in Thai society.³⁴ The cultural rules regarding the continuity of the descent line, inheritance and post-marital household formation are flexible. Forms of post-nuptial residence, for example, vary by region and are a respond to socio-economic necessity and the individual's relationship with his/her spouse's family. The traditional characteristic of matri-local residence is to be found among the majority of peasant villagers particularly in the North (De Young 1966: 58; Potter 1977: 62), the North-east (Pasuk 1982: 2; Whittaker 1999: 45), and some areas of the Central Plain (Piker 1975: 304).³⁵ After marriage, a groom moves into his bride's family and puts his

³⁴ According to this idea, the children of both sexes acquire permanent membership of both father's and mother's descent group. However, the children's relations with relatives on the mother's side are likely to be stronger than those on the father's side, as the mother tends to mediate ties between her children and her relatives. If the mother dies or the parents divorce, offspring often remain in the care of the maternal relatives. This situation also happens among the Thai migrant women who have frequently left their children in care of their mother or female kin after their separation from a former Thai husband and their later migration to the Netherlands.

³⁵ Scholars have suggested that the pattern of post-marital residence can also be found in some Thai-Buddhist villages in the South, while the practice of a daughter-in-law moving into the house of her parents-in-law and a relatively stricter control over the women's geographical mobility may be observed among the Thai-Muslim groups (Vibul and Golden 1954).

labour to use in the household of his in-laws.³⁶ Under this construction, the women do not lose their rights to sharing resources and property and can claim social support from their natal family after marriage. The women also play a significant role in the economic production of the household by assisting in both farming and trading (De Young 1966; Dube 2001). Consequently, bilateral kinship, the flexibility of post-marital residence and the women's vital economic role have long contributed to permitting rural women to acquire a certain degree of participation in the household decision making as well as a degree of independence in a marriage choice.³⁷

The upsurge in capitalism, the waxing industrialisation and the national economic development plans which have concentrated mainly on urban development have widened the socio-economic disparity between the rural and urban areas. There has been an influx of young adults migrating from the countryside to cities where there is a high demand for labour. From the 1970s, the growing demand in the export and service sectors has led to a shift in the sex ratio of the migrants; rural women now outnumber their male counterparts (Darunee 1997: 187; Mills 1999: 4).³⁸ This phenomenon has produced a shift in the village economy from being household-based to wage-labour and to a transformation in matri-local residence, courting practices and gender relations between villagers (Pasuk 1982; Whittaker 1999). Previously, the parents were in a better position to scrutinise the relationships of their daughter, since courtship occurred at the house of the woman's parents, when the potential couples worked together on the farm or when they participated together in festivals (De Young 1966; Lyttleton 1999). It stands to reason that

³⁶ Although the extended family is found, this does not mean that the family composition in Thai society necessarily assumes the rigid form in which three generations live permanently in the same residence. Instead, the family composition varies in response to changes in the family's life-course. For instance, in the traditional, rural parts of the North, the North-east and the Central Region, the new couples may move out to establish their own house when their first child is born, when they are able to buy a piece of land or when another, younger sister gets married (Darunee 1997; Potter 1977; Shigetomi 2004). Therefore, the idea of extended family in Thai society is quite relevant to a sense of extended household in which the members (especially the women) still pool and share resources with their parents and/or siblings after their marriage, no matter whether or not they share the same residence.

³⁷ Scholars have argued about the ambivalent gender position of Thai women. In general, the Thai women have acquired a certain degree of independence in the household and in economic activities, but not in the political and religious spheres. They also face greater control over their bodies and sexuality, compared with the Thai men (Darunee 1997: 173; Sumalee 1995: 26-27).

³⁸ As cited in the Introduction, the proportion of females in the age group 15-19 years surpassed the males by 2:1 during the 1970s and the 1980s (Darunee 1997; Mills 1999). These rural women were employed as housemaids, some worked in a factory, and others were engaged in sex-related jobs.

when their daughter earns their livelihood in the cities, the parents have less control over their daughter's courtship and sexual relations.³⁹

Among the small circle of the aristocracy in such urban areas as Bangkok a tradition has appeared in which the bride may initially move into the groom's family or that the groom's family builds a house, which is also located in the same compound, for the couple (Vibul and Golden 1954: 383). Unquestionably, the parents' authority over the children's choice of a partner has deep roots among the elite families in Thai society. Whereas, being subject to an informal customary law, the rural women from lower classes have the advantage of greater freedom in mate choice, women from a well-to-do family are more heavily subjected to the control of their parents' authority as sanctioned by formal law. For instance, a section of the 1805 Law of the Three Seals (*Kotmai Tra Sam Duang*, a collection of the ancient laws of Thailand) stated that if parents objected to the cohabitation of their daughter with her lover, the law would no longer accept this couple as husband and wife. In 1865, this ancient law was changed and a peasant woman over the age of twenty could marry a spouse of her own choice and the parents could not repudiate her decision. However, to protect family honour, the women from an aristocratic family could not marry without their parent's consent.⁴⁰ Later, under the 1935 Code, Thai men aged seventeen and older and women of fifteen and older, regardless of the socio-economic background of the family, could legally marry without the approval of their parents (Sumalee 1995: 31-32).⁴¹ Nevertheless, the changes in family law have not meant that parents are no longer involved in their children's choice of marriage. At present, the adult children in upper- and middle-class families can make their own decisions. However, if the parents feel that a potential spouse is not suitable for their child economically and socially, they may interfere directly or indirectly or repudiate the marriage plan outright. These adult children are also quite dependent on their parents because they remain at home longer with their parents and are given both

³⁹ This does not mean that the parents are no longer involved in the marriage of their daughter. If their daughter might already have lived with her boyfriend, they may ask them to arrange a fairly modest marriage ceremony.

⁴⁰ The 1865 Law continued to be in force during the first three decades of the twentieth century. In 1935, the ancient marriage law was superseded by Thailand's first Civil and Commercial Code (Barmé 2002; Sumalee 1995).

⁴¹ The new Civil and Commercial Code of Thailand, which was enacted in 1976 and is still in force, raises the marriageable age of the bride to 17. Apart from the age change, the articles on marriage are similar to those of the 1935 Code (Sumalee 1995: 32).

educational and financial support by them.⁴² Those from a wealthy family may expect to inherit their parents' possessions. As a consequence, the parents are able to exert a certain degree of authority over their children's mate selection.

Marrying a Dutch man: marriage choice and the involvement of the family

As just stated, Thai women can select their own prospective partner, but marriage is still conceived to be a family's matter. In the case of marrying a Dutch man, my findings reveal that the level of the parents' involvement is influenced by the women's life-cycle stage and the socio-economic standing of their families. The rural, less-educated women have to contend less with intervention from their families and have the freedom to make their own decisions. Thirty women interviewed stated that they had migrated internally to seek wage employment when they were in their late teens and some had lived with a Thai boyfriend who came from the same village or was a co-worker in a factory or on a construction site. These women are quite independent, since they have had to make their own decisions while living away from home and assuming the role of a major financial supporter of their family.

Because of their experiences with internal migration, their previous relationship with a Thai man and their increased independence, the women's later choice to marry a Dutch man did not tend to be heavily influenced by their parents' approval. The life experiences of these women contrast with the prevalent portrayal of migrant women as being dependent females, who lack any degree of agency to make their own choice for marriage migration. Twenty-seven of the women I interviewed finally did inform their parents, but did not consult them at all when they made the decision to follow and to marry a Dutch husband. Phloen, for instance, did not ask the opinion of her parents when she married Daniel (her now former Dutch partner), nor did she do so when separated from him, and nor again when she recently joined Ronald, her new Dutch spouse:

⁴² In Thai society, educational opportunities are unequal since the state does not make higher education accessible to everybody. If parents have a low income, they cannot afford higher education for their children.

I finished only six years of secondary school. I had to struggle and work on my own, even when I was young, so I always made decisions which cropped up myself. I moved to Bangkok to work as a saleswoman in a department store when I was twenty [in 1992]. Later, I worked in a garment factory for three years. While there I had lived with a [Thai] man who was my colleague. After a year into our relationship, he refused to take any responsibility when he found out that I was pregnant. I resigned from the job and returned to live with my parents to have the baby. After a year, I left my son with my parents and moved to Bangkok to seek employment. [In 2000] I worked as a masseuse at a hotel located near the border between Thailand and Cambodia. Then, I moved to work [as a masseuse] at a hotel in Suratthani, in the South [in 2002]. There I met Daniel during his holiday in Thailand and we began a relationship. I simply informed my mother that I knew Daniel, but I didn't ask her any permission before I followed him to the Netherlands [in 2004].

In the case of rural, divorced women who have children from a previous relationship, the parents even support their daughter's decision. They expect that this marriage migration will offer the women's children and the entire family economic betterment as stated in the following account of Suwipha:

After Jos had visited me in Thailand on many occasions, during the last visit he asked me to marry him and to follow him to the Netherlands. I was separated and had two daughters. I thought about their future. I had had bad experiences with two Thai men. Jos was serious about the relationship and he sent me a regular allowance around 10,000 Baht [200 Euro] a month. When I mentioned his proposal to my mother and aunt, they supported my decision. They said 'A good chance does not come often. If I refused, I might regret it later'.

By contrast, for the young, single women with a good education, the option of marrying a Dutch partner is more restricted and does entail parental influence. In most instances, the women's

parents are initially worried about their daughter's relationship and disagree with her choice. They are concerned that their potential Dutch son-in-law may not commit himself to the relationship and that their daughter will have to resign from a prestigious or skilled career and give up her social life. If they cannot come to an agreement, difficulties between them will ensue. However, if the daughter insists and the Dutch man proves his commitment, the parents ultimately may have to conform, as Phai experienced when her parents at first rejected her choice:

My parents totally disagreed with my decision. From their point of view, I was well educated and I was young [twenty-two]. I never had faced any economic hardship and my parents' economic status was quite good. On the other hand, Frank was forty-two, had divorced his [Dutch] wife, and had two children by her. If I did have a boyfriend, they thought, why did I not select someone more suitable for me? I understood my parents because it was pretty risky to commence a relationship with a divorced foreign man. Anyhow, I spent three years getting to know him better and found we rubbed along well together. In the end, my parents approved as he was serious about the relationship. We finally decided to marry [in 1991]. We have lived together for fifteen years now. This has proved to my parents that I made the right choice.

Certainly, when the upper- and middle-class women are somewhat older and they have had experience of separation or divorce, the decision to remarry and the choice of a spouse is less likely to be influenced by the parents, as in the case of Thian, who is now in her early fifties. She is from a middle-class family and had worked as an actress in Thailand. She married her former Thai husband when she was twenty-three years old. Her husband was a prosperous business man. He provided Thian a large sum for monthly expenses, coupled with a car with driver and maids to do the housework. After several years of living together and having had three children, he took mistresses. They had marriage problems:

I had to put up with this for several years because I was concerned about my children. When my eldest daughter was nearly twenty, I thought that they were grown up enough. Then, I decided to separate from him. Later, I visited one of my sisters who had married a Dutch man and lives in the Netherlands. We went out to a restaurant and there I met Piet by sheer chance. He worked as a manager in a communications company. After we had kept in touch for a year, I moved to the Netherlands. My mother did not object to my decision, since she realised that I was unhappy in my former marriage. I was not a young girl and I already had three children.

The life-stories of the Thai women I have discussed above and their decision to marry or remarry a Dutch man challenge the view that the women from developing countries will suddenly grasp at cross-border marriage as a chance for economic gain and migration. The concept of ‘gendered geographies of power’ (Pessar and Mahler 2001), which emphasises the role of social position in influencing women’s decisions and experiences of marriage migration, provides a more nuanced interpretation.⁴³ The rural and less-educated women, who have had an experience of internal migration and a previous marital relationship, acquire much more independence in their cross-border marriage decision making. They suffer few or no qualms and are willing to marry and move to the Netherlands. In contrast, initially the young, unmarried and educated women from middle-class families may not appreciate the economic gain to be derived from marriage migration and have to face their parents’ objections. However, they acquire a greater independence in partner choice as they grow older and have had previous marital experience. Hence, I argue that, instead of emphasising only an economic motivation, Thai cultural ideas about marriage and such factors in the women’s socio-economic backgrounds as age, past marital experience, education and status of their family must be taken into account, since these determinants have a great impact on their perception of and decision about marriage to a Dutch man and the degree of family control over mate choice.

⁴³ See the explanation of this concept in an earlier section in this chapter.

An overview of family and marriage in Dutch society

Family life and marriage in the Netherlands have undergone changes over the centuries in response to what have been to some extent regional variations.⁴⁴ During seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as described by historians, the emergence of what has been called ‘the conjugal, nuclear family involving relatively little contact with extended relatives, a free and affection-based partner choice, and a certain degree of equality and intimacy between spouses and between parents and children’ was observed, particularly in the urban areas, which is referred to as the ‘Randstad’ (Haks 1985 cited by Risseeuw 2005: 76; Ishwaran 1959).⁴⁵ An exception has been found among the elite families, in which wider kin networks have been maintained and the parents still continue to exercise their power over the marriage choice of their adult children.

Compared with other regions in the Netherlands, since an early date the ‘Randstad’ areas have been involved in international trade, urbanisation, and industrialisation. In contrast, until the nineteenth century the rural Eastern and Southern parts of the Netherlands were geographically and socially isolated and relatively poorer than the ‘Randstad’. The household here was a basic unit both of production and consumption. The family economy was based on farming and kin relations had a more extended family orientation, in which the three generations lived in each other’s vicinity, maintained daily contact, and shared the labour involved in farm work (Ishwaran 1959: 40-41).

The growing industrialisation, urbanisation, and increase in wealth, inclusive of a better income for industrial labourers at the end of the nineteenth century, led to the spread of a nuclear family and turned the Netherlands into a country with pronounced middle-class tendencies (De Valk 2006; Ishwaran 1959: 41).⁴⁶ Importantly, religion, which has been heavily affected by the

⁴⁴ Various scholars (Goody 2000; Reher 1998; Stone 2006) also illustrate the fact that religion (Roman Catholicism and Protestantism), the rise of capitalism and the industrial revolution had an impact on the regional variation in family life and marriage in Northern Europe. They also stress the similarities and differences in family ties, household size, inheritance system, and age of marriage between the North and the South or between the West and the East of Europe.

⁴⁵ As already mentioned in the Introduction, the ‘Randstad’ is the area in which the largest cities, Amsterdam, Haarlem, Leiden, The Hague, Delft, Rotterdam and Utrecht are located.

⁴⁶ Because of the small size of the country and the well-developed transport system, it is difficult to distinguish between the rural and urban areas. Yet, the influence of industrialisation and urbanisation on Dutch society should not be overgeneralised. Although the Netherlands as a whole has witnessed industrialisation and urbanisation, this process has affected people living in the different regions variously.

pillar system (*'verzuiling' or 'pillarisation'*) in the Netherlands, played an important role in determining social organisation, family life and marriage, especially between 1900 and 1950.⁴⁷ People tended to join the club and/or the church as well as to send their children to the school run by the denomination to which they belonged. They chose their own partner, but in accordance with their religious background. Although class distinction in the Netherlands was neither rigid nor prominent, class endogamy was practised really only among the wealthy in the urban environment and such rural districts in the provinces of Groningen, Friesland and North Holland, where social tensions between farmers and farm labourers have rumbled on over the centuries.⁴⁸ In the East and the South of the Netherlands in such provinces as Drenthe, North Brabant and Limburg, marriage was not just a matter of concern to the prospective partners; it was also an affair of the family and was considered to unite members of two households (Ishwaran 1959: 41-50).

Considerable transformations in family, household and marriage characterised the 1960s. These changes have been claimed to be the result of an increased process of secularisation, emancipation and individualism. Religious control over family life and marriage has declined. The nuclear family, which consists of the two spouses and their minor children, was no longer the only norm. Such diverse forms of partnership emerged as non-marital partnership, gay marriage, mothers who chose to remain single, and new forms of shared living, coupled with the availability of anti-conception methods and freer sexual relations (De Valk 2006; Ganesh 2005; Risseeuw 2005: 84). The economic interdependence between family members has been transformed. Rather than relying on the agricultural activities of the household, each individual earns his/her own income from labour employment. The younger generation has increasingly migrated to the cities for study or work—concomitantly with relatively more independence. The

⁴⁷ The principal churches in the Netherlands are: Roman Catholic, Dutch Reformed, Reformed Churches, Evangelical Lutheran, Mennonite and Remonstrant. The Roman Catholics are mainly concentrated in the provinces of North Brabant and Limburg. The Dutch Reformed Church found its strength in the sixteenth century Reformation. The Dutch Reformed Church and the Calvinistic Church have a common ideological background in the doctrine of Calvin. The strict Calvinists raised objections to the Dutch Reformed Church and founded their own church, the Gereformeerde Kerken, in 1834. The strict Calvinists are spread over the provinces of Groningen, Friesland, Drenthe and Overijssel (Ishwaran 1959:15-17).

⁴⁸ It is difficult to delineate a clear-cut class hierarchy in Dutch society. Nevertheless, the Dutch do more or less recognise class differences incurred by education, occupation, location of the residence and manner of speech.

idea of ‘individualism’ has become prevalent.⁴⁹ This concept gives an individual space to develop his/her personal life-course. The nuclear family codes tended to be based on the idea that the young grown-up children are mainly responsible for their own life such as finding employment and someone to marry (found mainly in England, Northern France and urban Holland). As the parents grew older, the children were expected to be of some support—but in no way controlled by their parents. Ideally, parents should love their children without wanting too much in return. These inter-generational relations were ideally conceived to be based on altruistic love (Risseeuw 2005). To a certain degree, these economic and socio-cultural transformations implied a change in the idea and practice of marriage in contemporary Dutch society, on which I shall elaborate in the following section accompanied by an analysis of my own data.

Marrying a Thai woman: marriage choice and the involvement of the family

Although there are regional variations as mentioned before, marriage in contemporary Dutch society (and some parts in the North-western Europe) is ideally perceived to be based on an individual’s free choice, rather than as a result of the parents or kin’s intervention. This individual freedom in mate choice is related to the idea of an ‘independent individual’, according to which a person should be responsible for taking his/her own decisions and handling his/her own problems. I found that this idea was reflected in the decision to marry a Thai wife of almost all the Dutch men I interviewed, as Jos explained:

It is my own decision to marry Suwipha and my mother had no problem with it. If my mother had said she didn’t agree with my choice, I would have replied: ‘Okay it is up to

⁴⁹ Scholars point out the inter-relationship between the development of individualism, landownership, family life and marriage. For instance, Macfarlane (1978: 64-73) argues that the idea of individualism had already taken its root in many parts of England as far back as the seventeenth century. Legally, at that time land was no longer common property shared among family or kin group, it became instead individual property. There was considerable geographical and social mobility; the children left home at a young age in search of employment both on farms and in towns. The young tended to marry at a later age (middle to late twenties) and were relatively free to choose their own partner. This similar trend in family life and marriage was also already noted in many parts of North-western Europe in the seventeenth century (Goody 2000: 101-102). This analysis contradicts the assumption that the growth of industrialisation and capitalism led to the development of individualism and the European nuclear family in the eighteenth century.

you, but I love her and I want to live with her'. Then, I would have married her. In Holland, you are expected to begin to make up your own mind and make your own decisions when you are eighteen. This is the way people here are taught to be.

However, the high priority which is placed on individual responsibility in constructing his/her own life does not mean that the family plays no role in marriage. To ensure social acceptance, an adult son or daughter should introduce his/her potential partner to the parents. The parents feel obliged to accept their children's choice and to welcome the prospective partner of their offspring. Some Dutch men initially did not tell their parents about their relationship with a Thai girlfriend, but introduced her to their parents only when she visited the Netherlands as a tourist or even when she had already moved to the Netherlands permanently. A few men did not inform their parents about their marriage at all and later the parents found out about it themselves. This latter instance can be viewed as a quite unusual event among the Dutch. It probably reflects the nature of marriage migration in which the bride is a person who moves to an unfamiliar physical and social environment; she is situated in a relatively vulnerable position. She may not have a full knowledge of the marriage customs of the country to which she follows her spouse. Furthermore, the final decision to migrate lies with the potential husband because he is the person who has to guarantee her residence permit. He can treat her in a way which is 'convenient' for him and the bride has not much power to oppose.⁵⁰

It is also possible that the Dutch parents or siblings are concerned about the choice of their children or brothers and do not automatically agree with it, especially in the case of intermarriage. Marloes, whose youngest brother married a Thai woman, expressed her family's initial concern:

At first when I heard about my brother's relationship with Manee, I felt angry. He had not told me earlier. My mother and I were really anxious about their relationship. My brother

⁵⁰ This does not signify that the migrant brides are either passive or a victim. Throughout my thesis, I underline the Thai women's a degree of independence, exemplified by their adaptation to different cultural ideas of family and friendship and their strategies in dealing with the difficulty of finding a skilled occupation. Nevertheless, it is the women's position as an immigrant and the immigration policy of the receiving country which make the women vulnerable to a certain extent. This issue will be illustrated in Chapter Four.

[who is forty-five] had divorced his [Dutch] wife and he might have been feeling lonely. Manee had been separated from a former Thai husband for years and had a teenage daughter. They had known each other only six months when they married and Manee moved to the Netherlands. Manee could speak neither English nor Dutch, how could they communicate together? We wondered whether their relationship would work.

Even though family members are concerned about mate selection, the cultural codes of the parent-child relationship and of an 'independent individual', as described above, do not allow much room for any opposition by the parents to their son's marriage choice. To avoid a conflict within the family or a breakdown in their relationship with their son, the parents themselves acknowledge that, to a certain degree, it is inappropriate to interfere in the courtship and marriage of their mature children. Instead of expressing their objections directly, the parents acquiesce in their children's choice. Maria, a middle-aged Dutch woman, illustrated the role of the parents in the partner choice of the children and how the parents have to work to maintain a continuation of the relationship with them when disagreement in partner choice arises:

There is a kind of custom in which the potential couple visits each other's parents, when they are serious about the relationship. If the parents don't agree with the choice of their child, they may show it subtly. They will not forbid him/her outright. Mostly, the parents don't want to put too much pressure on their child. If they do, the child might stop seeing them. The parents want to maintain a good relationship with their child. Although they don't like the choice their child makes, they just have to accept it.

PS: Would it be difficult for the parents to accept if the partner of their child comes from another country?

The parents wouldn't mind, but they would be a little bit concerned that it could rise to some problems in the marriage. They may warn their child in the sense that a different culture and upbringing can create some trouble in understanding each other.

The Dutch men's decision and the level of family engagement in marriage vary according to their past marital experience and age. Several men had had the experience of separation or divorce from a girlfriend or a wife before. Others, in their forties or fifties, reported that their parents had already passed away when they commenced their relationship with their Thai wife. They had little contact with their siblings and other extended relatives; their decision depended on themselves alone as in the following account from Henk:

It depends on how old you are. If you are young, parents may be very concerned and influence your decision. But if you are older, they will not do so. I was forty-three when I met Amphai. I took my own decision to live with her. My parents had already died several years earlier. Of course, I informed my eldest sister. She was a bit little concerned about me. But my decision did not depend on her opinion.

In conclusion, both families are concerned and engaged in their adult children's decision of cross-border marriage, although in different ways. On the Thai side, it may be presumed that marriage is embedded in interdependent kin relations and that the parents exert full authority over their daughter's marriage. Notwithstanding, what has been described above testifies that bilateral kinship and the women's independence permit them a certain level of autonomy in choosing their match. On the Dutch side, the choice of a partner is more likely to be based on an individual preference and, as a consequence, the Dutch men acquire a considerable freedom in deciding on their union. A closer examination shows that the family actually still appears to be concerned. Consequently, it must be the rigid and dichotomous perception of 'traditional' (Asian) or 'modern' (European) marriage which obfuscates a certain level of the Thai women's independence in partner choice and of Dutch family involvement in marriage. Furthermore, the interactions of individual and family in the decision of cross-border marriage are guided by underlying cultural prescriptions pertaining to marriage which are linked to gender and inter-generational relations. The extent of family involvement also varies with the socio-economic standing of family and life-stage of the Thai-Dutch couples.

Is ‘love’ the only primary basis for marriage?

As discussed earlier, economic gain is assumed to be a main incentive which drives a bride from a poorer country to marry a groom from a more prosperous one. This economic reason is incompatible with the relatively recent Northern European ideal of a ‘modern’, ‘real’ marriage which is founded on ‘love’ and individual happiness. The upshot of this is that a certain amount of scepticism prevails about the marriage motivation of a bride from a less-developed country. Under the circumstances of Thai-Dutch marriages, can the women’s considerations about the opportunity of migration and increased well-being as a consequence of marriage migration be interpreted as a calculated move—made purely materially without any of the feelings of love? This also leads to the question of what the place of ‘romantic love’ is in marriage and whether it forms the main reason for the Dutch man to take a Thai wife.

Why do the Thai women marry a Dutch husband?

Marriage in Thai society is ideally regarded as a combination of pragmatic, contractual and emotional aspects. Nevertheless, in practice variations can be found. The differences in marriage preference and norms tally with the women’s social status and the stage of their life-cycle. Among the young, single, educated women from upper- and middle-class families, the choice of the partner comes first and a chance of international migration comes later. As already mentioned above, these women have a skilled profession in Thailand and their family is not worried by economic hardship. As the most suitable partner for them, they hope to find a man with whom they can develop mutual affection and who can offer them socio-economic stability. In some cases, the high value placed on living overseas among Thais may also accelerate their motivation for marriage migration. Tum, who graduated with a Bachelor’s Degree in Business and worked in an administrative job in a private company in Bangkok, recalled how she formed her relationship with Arjan and why she decided to marry him:

Initially, I didn’t expect that I would marry a foreign man and I really didn’t try to achieve this. I had a Thai boyfriend. I knew Arjan through Internet chat. After we had remained in

touch for a year and he had occasionally visited me in Thailand, we started to fall in love with each other. I visited him in the Netherlands for a month to see how he lived and whether we could get along. After our relationship had lasted for one and a half years and I was convinced that he was a good chap and has a steady job, I wanted to marry him. It would also be in the nature of an adventure to live in the Netherlands and to travel to many European countries.⁵¹

Class endogamy, in which people tend to marry a partner with a similar socio-economic status, is practised in Thai society. This excludes the less-educated and peasant women from the possibility of aspiring to social and economic improvement in a local marriage. Moreover, their low educational attainment hinders them in gaining access to well-paid employment, as an education is one of the crucial instruments through which to accomplish social mobility in Thai society. Among young, single, uneducated women from rural areas, an opportunity for international migration and overseas employment, which will improve their families' economic position, are the primary reasons for marrying a Dutch man. A few added that their fantasies about intimacy with a white, foreign male also motivated their decision.

Local marriage constraints stimulate the educated women in their late thirties or early forties to accept marriage migration. Their choice of a partner is limited by Thai cultural norms of hypergamy, in which the women are expected to choose a spouse from similar or slightly higher economic status and education. Given this ideal, Thai men with a lower socio-economic standing are less desirable for women with a higher education and from the upper or middle classes. Similarly, well-educated women who are successful in their career and reach the unmarriageable age of over thirty-five are possibly deemed too liberal and clever by the local men; hence they may be an undesirable potential partner. As marriage in Thai society is defined as a necessity rather than an option, remaining single is more or less stigmatised.⁵² The highly educated women in their late thirties may face a dilemma when they themselves and their parents wish them to

⁵¹ This interview gives the impression that Tum initially might not have thought about the differences in family life when she made the decision to begin a relationship with Arjan. This reflects the tendency that people tend not to be aware of other forms of family responsibility and in-law relationship, a theme I shall examine in Chapter Two.

⁵² Recently, many women with a higher education and from urban areas have been tending to remain single, but the ideal that a person should marry and establish his/her own family is still deeply embedded in Thai society.

marry and have great difficulty in finding a local suitable match. Conversely, there is relatively less concern about a proper marriageable age in Dutch society and physically Asian women look younger than their real age, especially in a European context. Marrying a Dutch husband offers these women an alternative to circumvent local marriage pressure, since it gives them a chance to establish their own family as in the case of Pla, which is quoted at the beginning of this chapter. This marriage migration is also acceptable because it allows the women to marry up as a consequence of upwards geographical mobility, moving from a less developed country like Thailand to a developed country like the Netherlands.⁵³

Turning now to another group, marriage is often an instrument for migration for many divorced or separated women. Some women have had a negative experience with a former Thai husband. They considered marrying a Dutch man an option which would allow them to build up a new life and to escape the pressure from kin and friends harping on their previous unsuccessful marriage. Other women, particularly from rural and lower-class background, have children from a previous marriage and have to shoulder the burden of their financial responsibility after divorce. Marriage migration offers them a chance to enter to the Netherlands and later participate in employment in order to earn an overseas income to support their families and children. Furthermore, the stigma which is attached to separated women reduces their chance of remarrying a local man.⁵⁴ They discover that the past marital experience of a prospective partner is not considered to be a major hindrance to marriage by Dutch men. Therefore, the chance to begin a new marital relationship, the burden of family responsibility and the stigma adhering to divorced women in Thai society are prime considerations prompting these women to seek and achieve marriage migration.

⁵³ As already mentioned in this chapter, such scholars as Lavelly (1991), Constable (2005a) and others focus on geography, migration and gender and apply the anthropological concept of 'hypergamy' to analyse marriage migration of a bride from poorer country to a groom from a wealthier one. Upward mobility in this sense refers not only to social and economic conditions, but also to geographical location.

⁵⁴ The Thai perception of female sexuality expects that a 'good' woman retain her virginity before marriage, avoid allowing more than one man to have access to her body and exercise considerable self-control in sexual expression (Barmé 2002; Harrison 1999; Knodel et al. 1999). Women's sexual experiences and the control over female sexuality vary according to social class. The upper- and middle-class women are more strictly regulated in their behaviour, compared with those from lower social classes.

Marrying a Dutch man to gain an opportunity for migration, to be able to fulfil filial obligations and to overcome local pressure on marriage, however, are not considerations synonymous with the jaundiced interpretation that 'love' plays no role in the marriage of Thai women. My intention is to underline that affection is not idealised as an exclusive reason for marriage in Thai society. It also does not simply signify that the women married for 'love', since love may not necessarily be a primary condition for Thai marriage. It is possible that love is instead an outcome. A few women mentioned that, initially, they did not feel much affection for their Dutch spouses. Certainly, they felt sympathy for them, since they lived alone or were separated from their former Dutch wives. Some women appreciated the financial responsibility that their Dutch potential partner initially showed while they were still in Thailand. He did not keep a mistress, a great difference from their former Thai husband. Intimacy with the Dutch spouse may develop gradually, after the women have lived with him for a few years.

These women's opinions of the differences between their past and current marital experiences reflect the distinctive cultural ideas of Thai and Dutch manhood. In Thai society, men are regarded as being possessed of strength and endowed with a strong innate passionate drive with a preference for frequent sexual outlet and variety.⁵⁵ These characteristics can be cultivated through masculine activities: chief among them getting together and drinking within a male peer group and having sexual experiences both before and occasionally outside marriage (Knodel et al.1999: 96; Mills 1999: 97). This perception allows married men a certain level of freedom to socialise with their male friends and occasionally visit sexual establishments (Chanpen et al. 1999: 81).⁵⁶ Moreover, it is not uncommon for the practice of having a mistress (*mia noi*) to be tolerated as long as the husband does not slack on his financial responsibility to

⁵⁵ The idea of male and female sexuality in Thai society constitutes a double sexual standard. Men's sexual experiences both before and after marriage are valued, whereas the women's premarital sexual relations are regarded as having polluted her body. Their engagement in extramarital sex also indicates their infidelity.

⁵⁶ Although this practice is still prevalent, it is gradually changing, especially among the urban, middle-class families. The term 'middle-class' may be problematic and difficult to conceptualise precisely. However, historians point out that by the early 1920s, the emergent middle class shared heterogeneous attributes in terms of educational achievement and income levels. They began to gain increasing power in politics and the economy, which had previously been dominated by the elites. They formed a middle-class family life, which values a monogamous and committed relationship between spouses and the husband's responsibilities towards the family economy, housekeeping and child-rearing (Barmé 2002: 9; Jeffrey 2002: 97).

his principal wife (*mia luang*) and children.⁵⁷ By contrast, being a proper husband in Dutch society is grounded on the traditional notion of his gender position in the family and the ideal of a monogamous marriage.⁵⁸ Ideally, both husband and wife are bound by affection, a sexual relationship and mutual understanding. Extramarital sex is regarded as immoral and unfaithful. The Dutch man is expected to be a responsible husband and father who provides his conjugal family with both affection and financial support. He has to discipline himself and not to squander his earnings on frequent outings and carousing.⁵⁹ He should also spend his leisure with his wife and children.⁶⁰ These ideas are still prominent, although Dutch family values and marriage have changed. Therefore, the differences in conceptions of manhood in Thai and Dutch societies are another determinant which influences the women's marriage choice and the development of their affection for their Dutch spouses.

Why do the Dutch men marry a Thai wife?

Almost all the Dutch men mentioned 'love' and physical attraction first as their motivation for marrying a Thai wife. Their response has been guided by the modern Northern European marriage, which is fundamentally based on love, mutual attraction and emotional attachment between two individuals. Frank described this as follows:

PS: Generally speaking, among Dutch people is the socio-economic status of their partner important when they decide to live together?

⁵⁷ Polygyny, the practice of having more than one wife, was legal and had been traditionally observed, particularly among the elites in Thai society. Even though Thailand was not colonised by European powers, it could not escape their cultural influence. During the latter part of the nineteenth century, Europeans criticised polygyny as evidence of backwardness and inequality. To reform the legal system along Western lines, polygyny was finally outlawed and monogamy was adopted into Thai family law in 1935 (Barmé 2002; Darunee 1997; Loos 2002). However, it seems that the practice of polygyny has still persisted, though it has changed into the form of having a mistress.

⁵⁸ The Christian Church has exerted an influential power in changing and controlling family life in Europe for centuries, including the promotion of strict monogamy, the prohibition of marriage between close kin, and a ban on divorce and children born out of wedlock (Goody 2000; Stone 2006).

⁵⁹ Calvinism took root in Holland in the sixteenth century. Its doctrines and practices have been overwhelmingly known for their strictness and for simple, unadorned churches. These have also influenced the Dutch life-style by the encouragement of leading a simple life, self-discipline and frugality.

⁶⁰ 'A rise of the bourgeois family' occurred during the first half of the twentieth century (Risseuw 2005: 79). It became part of family life among the middle-class and later also among part of the working class.

Well, usually this [similarity of socio-economic status] does not play a major role. In the first place I would live with my wife because I love her and I am happy to be with her. I have also taken into consideration whether we can get along well and whether we understand each other or not. The social background only occurs to me later. If she should be a highly educated woman but I don't love her, I don't think that I would want to live with her.

It should be noted that the cultural ideal of 'romantic love' and an individual's fulfilment as a basis for marriage is a social construction of the modern Euro-American marriage pattern, which has been gradually evolving since the late eighteenth century and has become prevalent in the modern period (Coontz 2005; Stone 2006). Indeed, marriage ideals and practices in these societies have fluctuated through the centuries. The heritage of Greece and Rome in interaction with the evolution of the Christian Church, for example, created a unique form of political marriage in Medieval Europe. A series of political, economic and social changes in the seventeenth century encouraged individuals to choose their mate on the basis of personal affection. And, since the end of the eighteenth century, the ideal of free choice and marriage for love have become the norm across Western Europe and North America (Coontz 2005: 7-8).⁶¹

When taking account of the socio-economic attributes of the Dutch men, it appears that for some of them 'love' was not the primary and sole basis for marriage with a Thai woman as they had first claimed. Instead, pragmatic reasons have also loomed fairly large. Some men who are in their late middle age valued the physical and emotional care they expected they would gain from a Thai wife. Others who had had a negative marriage experience with a Dutch wife were satisfied with a Thai woman who is perceived to be tender and undemanding, although she might be uneducated and from a rural background. Those of lower economic status who faced great difficulty in finding a Dutch girlfriend, expected a Thai woman to provide them with sexual pleasure, emotional fulfilment and care. They were able to accept a woman who had previously

⁶¹ Coontz (2005) elaborates in detail how people through the ages did form relationships based on affection, but that they did not consider love to be a principal reason for marriage. Moreover, modern marriage which is primarily based on love is prevalent among the white middle-class. Members of the lower classes or immigrants in the USA may not conform to this ideal and practice.

worked in a sex-related job.⁶² Lucas, who had travelled to Thailand many times, gave the following comments:

In the Netherlands, if you simply stay at home and don't go out, you will not meet anybody. Here, people live alone and they are lonely. Some Dutch men go to Thailand for the first time and visit sex entertainment places. There, they meet many bar girls. A woman takes care of him and pays him plenty of attention. This makes him feel special. He may fall in love with her and bring her to the Netherlands.

Even though love is ideally central to a marriage, practically speaking the economic and social compatibility of the couple also enjoys some significance in Dutch society.⁶³ Dutch people may not perceive the socio-economic background of their prospective partner to be a major hindrance to marriage, but this does not mean that they do not take this into account. This is also found in the cross-cultural marriage couples. A few Dutch men who are educated and have acquired a skilled occupation realise the importance of the social and economic distinction between the Thai women in the Netherlands. They mentioned proudly that their wives were different from most Thai migrant women in the Netherlands, because they are highly educated and come from a middle-class family. Although the Dutch men are unaware of the local Thai prejudice against Isan⁶⁴ people and are not very sensitive to the socio-economic status of their Thai wife, some are cautious about making an over-hasty decision about marrying a Thai woman as Bert described:

⁶² It would be wrong to generalise and say that all the Dutch men who married a Thai woman are rather older, from a lower socio-economic background and have proved to be unattractive partners for Dutch women.

⁶³ The consideration of this matter varies by generation and class. According to interviews with a group of Dutch people, the young, educated people may give priority to their happiness with the partner and socio-economic compatibility may be considered later. None the less, people tend to socialise with persons from a similar socio-economic background. This may create a relatively high possibility of intimacy and marriage between them. On the other hand, people in their late middle age agreed that the search for affection is an initial reason for marriage, but simultaneously they did emphasise their concern about the similarity of social class and educational level of their potential spouse. The primary reason is that such wide differences can generate difficulties in the relationship.

⁶⁴ Isan refers to the North-east sub-culture and region, which is considered to be the poorest region of Thailand. Among the Thais of the Central region, there is a stereotype of and prejudice against Isan people who are stigmatised as poor, less-educated and backward.

I don't think that it is wise to bring a Thai woman to the Netherlands if the Dutch man has known her just a few months. One of my friends met his Thai wife at a bar in Pattaya [located in Chonburi province, near the Gulf of Thailand]. There they fell in love. After six months of contact, he brought her to the Netherlands. They experienced a lot of problems and difficulties in communication and adaptation to each other.

To conclude, cross-cultural marriage is entered into by both Thai women and Dutch men to fulfil their own economic and/or emotional security and, in the situation of the Thai women, the well-being of their families in Thailand is also never far from their thoughts. Their motivation and need to marry or remarry are inextricably linked to and consequently vary according to the stage of their life-cycle and socio-economic status. However, the modern Northern European ideal of marriage, which is basically grounded on 'romantic love' and the individual's happiness, disguises the other components of marriage. This idea is only one of the many culturally different forms of marriage, but it tends to be universalised and to be applied to judge the marriages of people in other societies. From the perspective of a love-marriage, social and economic mobility, which are a pragmatic dimension of Thai marriage and considered by Thai migrant women to be cogent reasons to marry, are simply interpreted as marrying out of 'love'. The sentiments the women develop, both before and after their marriage with the Dutch spouse, are downplayed.

Sinsot: returning a debt or the purchase of a woman?

Since the foundation of their discipline, anthropologists have studied marriage and its connection with marital transactions and rights of inheritance between husband and wife and the two kin groups concerned. Gifts, services and movable or immovable possessions are transferred between the two families in exchange for rights to people (wife and children), labour and property, acquired through marriage. Some research underlines the way in which the system of production is interwoven with the different practices and the institution of marriage exchange in a given community. The well-known anthropologist Jack Goody (1973), for instance, differentiates between bride wealth and dowry and their linkages with agricultural patterns, marriage forms and

inheritance in pre-modern and pre-colonial African and Eurasian societies.⁶⁵ Studies of the interconnections of marriage transactions, inheritance and type of production, however, tend to overemphasise the economic element and the formation of economic and political coalition between groups. There are only a few studies of women's position in any given kinship system, which is related to bride payment and their rights in controlling it. A feminist perspective argues that, rather than perceiving marriage payment in terms of creating relationships between kin groups and relating it to production, it would be more useful to examine in greater detail how the women are subordinated within this system, at what point in their life-cycle they can obtain access to this property, and to which extent they can control it (Moore 1988: 68).

Anthropological studies pay little attention either to the practices and meanings of marriage rituals or to payments made in the context of contemporary marriage migration and transnationalism. The aim of this section is to contribute to filling this gap. I shall briefly compare how marriage in Thai and Dutch societies is socially and morally legitimised through marriage rites and demonstrate its transformation. I shall go on to examine how the practice of bride payment in Thai society is a source of tension and causes a difference in interpretation among the Thai-Dutch couples, and how they cope with this.

To acquire social acceptance and legitimacy in Thai society, a marriage ceremony and the handing over of a bride payment, *sinsot*—which is given by the groom's to the bride's family—, are required before the union of the couple can be solemnised. Among the rural villagers who practised matrilineal residence, *sinsot* was traditionally transferred to the family of the bride in exchange for the groom's rights to a share in the household and farming land with his parents-in-law after marriage.⁶⁶ The out-migration of young peasants, landlessness, and the change in

⁶⁵ According to Goody (1973), bride wealth (or bride price), which is allocated by the kin of the groom to those of the bride, is related to hoe agriculture, less stratified classes and polygamy in African societies. By contrast, dowry, in which parents give to a daughter at her marriage as a resource for the new couple and to be inherited by the children, is linked to plough agriculture, class division, and monogamy in Eurasian societies. However, it is also possible that in some Eurasian societies certain dowry items (clothing and jewellery) are regarded as the bride's personal property and other parts of dowry may be distributed to the kin of the groom (Stone 2006).

⁶⁶ As already mentioned, many studies in the 1960s and the 1970s on peasant kinship in the North and North-east noted the practice of matri-local residence, in which a groom's kin gives bride price to the bride's family and the groom moves into the house of the parents-in-law after marriage (De Young 1966; Potter 1977). Property is divided equally among all children, except that the house is given to the youngest daughter, who is expected to remain with the parents and to take care of them in their old age. Other scholars (Dube 2001; Sumalee 1995) illustrate that there

production from agriculture to wage labour, particularly since the mid-twentieth century, has led to the decline in the pattern of matri-local residence and a transformation in the meaning of bride payment. *Sinsot* is no longer transmitted to the bride's parents directly in exchange for the rights of sharing the household and land as before, but as a custom required to legitimise the union. The forms of payment have shifted from goods, cattle or even the labour of the groom to cash, frequently in combination with gold jewellery (Lyttleton 1999; Whittaker 1999). For middle- and high-class families, paying *sinsot* is still a means of maintaining class-endogamy, expressing the socio-economic status of the two families and showing the respect of the groom's for the bride's family.⁶⁷

The amount of the bride price varies in relation to the socio-economic status of the couple's families and is negotiable. Usually, the bride's parents do not specify the magnitude of bride payment. The parents of the groom have to estimate it on the basis of the economic status and class of the bride's family. The sexual and marital experiences of the women are also taken into account in defining the amount of payment. The idea that a woman should remain a virgin before marriage is still valued, although it is not as strict as it was in the past.⁶⁸ If the potential partners have already lived together before marriage, the groom can give the bride's parents a smaller bride price to repair the lack of respect shown by cohabitation. It is possible to opt not hold a marriage ritual and offer *sinsot*, especially when the women are divorced and have children from a former relationship. There is also no rigid rule about whether the women's parents keep the bride payment completely, take some of it and give the rest to the newly-weds, or return the full amount to them.

In Northern European societies there was a form of marriage transaction involving a transfer of wealth from the kin of the groom to those of the bride in the early Middle Ages

is no exact traditional custom of inheritance in Thai society. In general, parent's property is divided equally among all their children. The inheritance, nevertheless, may differ slightly in proportion and vary according to situation and region. One of the children, mostly a daughter, will take care of the elderly parents and she will receive more, whereas those whose education was supported by the parents or a son whose bride price has been paid by the parents may inherit less.

⁶⁷ If the women are from a well-off family, the amount of bride payment may be substantial and can sometimes include jewellery, a house, a piece of land and a car.

⁶⁸ This is related to how being a woman and a man is perceived in Thai society. See the explanation earlier in this chapter.

(Goody 2000: 86; Stone 2006: 244). Later, the custom of bestowing property on the bride herself by the groom's kin emerged. In some regions and during some periods, there were also various combinations of marriage payments, but gradually a shift to full 'direct dowry' took place throughout Western Europe.⁶⁹ Bilateral societies, strict monogamy and dowry characterised this region for many centuries. By the beginning of the twentieth century, dowry had declined in importance and practice (Goody 2000: 137; Stone 2006: 244). In Dutch society, according to my interviews with some Dutch people, the family of the bride traditionally paid for the wedding, since the groom's family already had invested in their son's education and he was expected to become the main breadwinner of his conjugal family after marriage. The women brought the kitchen utensils, cutlery, bedclothes and some furniture when the couple established their own residence. The women from lower-class families began to work and save as much of their own money as they were able to afford these things for their future household, whereas the women and the parents from middle-class families might choose to give priority to their daughter's education rather setting aside money for her marriage.

Nowadays, marriage and family institutions in Dutch society have undergone a marked change and this affects cultural prescriptions and practices of marriage ritual. In the wake of the emergence of various forms of partnership and increased freedom of sexual relations outside marriage since the 1960s, marriage is no longer viewed as an obligation and a social contract which must be performed before witnesses. A low-level of commitment and an egalitarian partner relationship characterise married life, particularly among the young adults (De Valk 2006). The partners are free to stay together first and to marry later. Since the couples tend to marry late, usually they earn their own income and can afford to pay for their own wedding. Occasionally, there is no wedding ceremony or marriage registration at all.

The distinctive social norms and practices employed to legitimise marriage in Thai and Dutch societies inevitably influence the different interpretation of marriage rites and payments held by the Thai-Dutch couples. For the Thai women and their families in Thailand, the marriage

⁶⁹ Some scholars define the marriage payment which the groom's family gives to the bride or to the father of the bride and later passes in most cases to the bride as bride wealth or bride price. But Goody (1973: 20) calls this 'indirect dowry', which differs from 'direct dowry', the goods or valuables the parents provide their daughter at her marriage.

ritual and bride payment must be performed sooner or later, even though the couples have already lived together.⁷⁰ The registration and a marriage certificate from the Netherlands, which entitles the couple to legal rights and responsibilities, is less important to the Thai women's parents than the marriage ceremony and bride payment, since these create the moral legitimacy of the couple and open the door for their social acceptance among kin and neighbours in the local community in Thailand. Providing *sinsot* is also expected because it is a way for the groom to express his respect towards his in-laws and symbolises the clearance of a debt to the parents of the bride incurred by the upbringing of their daughter. Phloen and her new Dutch boyfriend, Ronald, have been together for a year without any formal marriage and he has never visited his parents-in-law in Thailand. She explained how her parents perceived this situation:

My parents do not demand a big marriage ceremony. They would rather like us to follow Thai custom and show them our respect by visiting them, arranging a small ceremony, and offering a small amount of *sinsot*. My parents considered my former [Dutch] husband a 'real' son-in-law because he followed the Thai marriage traditions.

In contrast, the Dutch men consider marriage a private relationship of two individuals and fail to recognise how socially and morally important marriage rites are to a Thai wife and her kin. Because they believe the ideal that marriage is based on love, they view the offering of a bride payment as an obsolete practice which implies gender inequality and devalues a woman to the status of a commodity in a system in which men can easily acquire a wife by paying money. They also perceive such a payment as financially unreasonable.

The differences in practices and meanings of the marriage ritual and payment can cause misinterpretations, even the termination of the relationship between the potential partners, particularly in situations in which no negotiation and agreement are possible. This is reflected in

⁷⁰ In Thailand, the couple can have a legal marriage by registering their marriage at any district office and they will then receive a marriage certificate, which guarantees some legal rights of and obligations to the husband, wife and their children. Some people from a rural, lower-class background first live together, and may afterwards arrange only a small Buddhist marriage ceremony without any marriage registration. Among the group of the wealthy, a marriage ceremony and bride payment must be organised because they signify the social acceptance of the couple, their parents and wider kin. To avoid financial conflicts in the case of divorce, some couples may not apply for marriage registration.

the experience of Lan, who first contacted two Dutch men, Tim and Mark, through Internet chatting. She could get along well with Tim and he visited her parents:

My parents are conservative. If their children want to get married, we shall have to follow Thai marriage customs, in which the groom is expected to give them *sinsot*. Tim told my parents that he wanted to marry me. My parents asked him for a bride payment of about 300,000 Baht [6250 Euro]. He replied 'No problem'. He would prepare it and return to Thailand to marry me.

After three months, he informed Lan that he could not afford such a big amount of money. Lan explained to him that he could take his time to save money and by adding her saving they could pay for the bride payment. He did not agree to this and relinquished his intention to marry her:

He just said 'Sorry' to me and nothing else. It was very painful and embarrassing because he told all my colleagues about our marriage plan. But later he reneged. I don't know why he changed his mind. He might have thought that it was strange to pay a large sum of money to my parents and might not have understood that this is a 'Thai' way.

Lan told her whole story to Mark, who later became her husband. After their relationship had lasted for a year, he proposed to marry her.⁷¹ He had no problem with accepting the bride payment. Finally, he gave Lan's parents a bride price of 200,000 Baht (4166 Euro), plus another 50,000 Baht (1000 Euro) to arrange a small marriage ceremony. Lan let her mother keep the whole amount.

To fit the divergent cultural scripts and practices of marriage prescribed in Thai and Dutch societies, various ways of negotiating and compromising between the couples about the volume of bride payment and the marriage ritual are required. At the simplest level, some couples just cohabited without a wedding ceremony, a marriage certificate and bride payment. Although the women might wish to conform to Thai marriage customs, the husband refuses, being unaware

⁷¹ Mark is originally from Surinam and has lived in the Netherlands for thirty years.

of its significance. The women know if they keep on nagging about this, it might cause conflict between them or make the Dutch men hesitate about bringing their Thai girlfriends to the Netherlands. In some cases, a wedding ceremony may be delayed and arranged much later, after the couples have lived together for a few years. Nipha and Lucas, for instance, have lived together for four years. They plan to hold the wedding ceremony in Nipha's home town, after they have collected enough savings to fund this. Sometimes, the amount of the bride price may be bargained implicitly or explicitly as in the situation of Siri and Marco. Siri initially anticipated that Marco would offer her parents *sinsot* worth about 200,000 Baht (4100 Euro) and gold jewellery with a value of 120,000 Baht (2500 Euro), coupled with an amount of money to cover the expenses of the marriage ritual. Marco was hesitant. Suwipha, a friend in the Netherlands, suggested to Siri that she was no longer a single woman and had already lived with Marco for three years. Her parents would also invite many relatives and villagers to attend the ceremony, which would cost him a large sum of money. This could lead to conflicts between them and harm their relationship. Eventually, Siri compromised by requesting that, in the marriage ritual, Marco had to provide her parents with a bride payment of the amount that she expected, but on the condition that her parents would later return him the money and keep only the jewellery.

Overview, the cross-cultural marriage couples do encounter and have to find ways of dealing with disparate ideals and practices of marriage, particularly bride payment (*sinsot*) and the marriage ritual itself. Providing bride payment and arranging marriage rites in Thai society are the means to create moral and social legitimacy for the couple and give them a definite position in their kin groups. However, such practices are perceived by the Dutch husbands as obsolete, financially unreasonable, since marriage in Dutch society is idealised and believed to be based on love, individual own choice and an egalitarian relationship between the spouses. The constructed ideal of the wealthy Europe among Thais shapes not only the women's motivation of marriage and migration, this imagined vision also arouses greater expectations that the Dutch son-in-law will sponsor an acceptable marriage ritual and give a large amount in bride payment for his Thai parents-in-law, causing great difficulties and misunderstandings among the Thai-Dutch couples. To maintain their relationship and to avoid tension, they attempt to compromise and negotiate in various ways. Although the lower intervention of the family in the marriage of

the Dutch men and a certain degree independence in the Thai women's mate choice help encourage the possibility of the cross-cultural marriage of Thai-Dutch couples, the difference in meanings and practices of marriage rites in Thai and Dutch societies is the hindrance to their marriage, especially when the potential partners are unable to reach an agreement, as in Lan's situation.

Conclusion

In attempting to understand in the ins-and-outs of these problems, inevitably an economic view alone is insufficient to explain why the women move and why intermarriage is feasible. Any solution is impossible without taking account of the historical, social and cultural determinants. The popularity of Thai Tourism, the advent of communications technology, imaginations about gender and an affluent Europe and an increased acceptance of marrying a *farang* man all combine to shape cross-border marriage as a specific way for Thai women to migrate to the Netherlands. Inter-generational relations, which are associated with the cultural norms of marriage, are another influence which reinforces the marriage migration of the Thai-Dutch couples. In Dutch society, the family is undeniably concerned about the marriage of its family members. However, less hierarchical relations between parent and child and an ideal of an 'independent individual' combine to decrease the authority of the family to interfere in mate choice; a condition which enhances the possibility of Dutch men marrying a Thai wife. On the Thai side, the relatives can exert moral authority, particularly in the case of upper- and middle-class families, but a certain degree of independence among Thai women, permitted by the ideas of Thai Buddhism, bilateral kinship and their vital economic contribution, allows them relative freedom of spatial movement and choice in such an intermarriage.

A neo-classical economic perspective which stresses material benefit as a major motivation for marriage migration is oversimplistic. I argue that the social positions and life trajectories of the women and their families also play an essential part in influencing marital and migratory decisions of the Thai women. The young, middle-class and educated women, who are suitable marriage candidates for a local Thai man and are able to obtain a well-paid profession in

Thailand, may not value monetary gain as the major reason. Initially, they are hesitant to embark on marriage migration and may encounter their parents' rejection of their plans, although the high value of living abroad and fantasies about *farang* men may eventually motivate them to marry and to move. For those women who are divorced, have faced difficulties in finding a local match and can offer few economic prospects for their family, marrying a Dutch man is perceived as a favourable option. This economic perspective also disregards the interconnectedness between the women's social position and the extent to which the family engages in partner choice, which may encourage or hinder cross-cultural marriage.

An exploration of the marriage decisions and motivations of the Thai-Dutch couples indicates that cross-border marriage is indeed one of their strategies by which to secure their welfare, both economically and emotionally. Notwithstanding, the assumptions that economic gain is the main marriage motivation of a bride from a poorer country and that love and an individual choice join to form the primary basis for 'modern' and 'real' marriage downplay the combination of a pragmatic and emotional dimension in a cross-cultural marriage and also obscure the involvement of the family in marriage decision making.

This chapter has provided an insight into why the women decide to marry and to move and what role family plays in the process of marriage decision making. After the women have crossed geographical borders, they have to contend with relocation in a new physical and cultural environment. The women entertain distinctive ideas about kin relations and friendship, which they have to attempt to understand and to which they have to adapt in some ways. The purpose of Chapters Two and Three is to reveal these issues. In Chapter Two, I shall delve into the cultural codes of family and inter-generational relations which highlight filial responsibility in Thai and Dutch societies and evaluate how these differences affect the marriage relationship between the couples and relationship between the women and their Dutch-in-laws. Chapter Three contains an examination of the dynamic and social attributes of kinship and friendship among Thai migrant women and analyses the adjustment to and negotiations about the different ideals and practices of friendship of the Thai-Dutch couples.

Chapter Two

Cross-Border Negotiation of Marriage and Family

‘It is “usual” [in Thailand] that the children provide their elderly parents with money. If my brothers or sisters have financial troubles, I also can’t ignore this. I work here and earn more than they do. I feel I really have to help them. I don’t see any problem in sending remittances to my parents and, occasionally to my siblings, but at first Jaap didn’t understand and wouldn’t accept this.’ (Nit, interviewed in November 2004).

‘If you [a Dutch man] take a Thai bride, you have—in a sense—married her whole family. Her family members’ affairs are her affairs. Phai’s family consists of her parents, siblings, grandparents and other extended relatives. You have to accept—although at first you might not understand it—that your Thai wife provides her family in Thailand with regular material support. But, both of my parents have already passed away. I have only one brother whom I hardly ever see.’ (Frank, interviewed in September 2005).⁷²

An economic perspective on labour migration tends to place a heavy emphasis on an individual’s experience of spatial movement and his/her encounter with a country of destination which has a different physical environment and employment situation. By contrast, in the situation of marriage migration an immigrant—especially a bride—experiences not only geographical mobility; she also faces the different family values embraced by her in-laws. In the case of my study, the Thai-Dutch couples are obviously confronted with two distinctive sets of moral meanings and cultural practices pertaining to family relations and responsibility. Invariably, the Thai women’s relationship with their parents and natal kin is maintained and in-laws are now

⁷² Frank is sixty-seven years old and has been married to Phai for seventeen years. He has two children by his former Dutch wife. In 1988, he moved to Thailand to work as a quality controller in a Dutch international company in Bangkok. There he met Phai who was his colleague. Three years later they were married and opened their own import company. Because of the economic crisis in Thailand in 1997 they closed their business and moved to the Netherlands. Currently Frank is retired.

simultaneously included as members of what is called *khrop khrua* (family). After marriage, this idea means that the woman continues to share rights with her parents' family and is supposed to contribute to their well-being. Conversely, marriage in Dutch society implies a much narrower sense of 'family'. The Thai wife finds herself married into a family unit termed a '*gezin*'. This consists of a separate residence and an independent economic unit shared by the two spouses and young offspring, which supplants all other descent ties.

As a consequence of these divergent family values, the couples initially experience great difficulties in making sense of their relationships to each other's family members. Many Thai migrant women in the Netherlands (and in other European countries) still observe their filial obligation by sending remittances to their family in Thailand. Nevertheless, it transpires that this financial commitment, which is considered morally 'proper' by the Thai wife, is unfamiliar to the Dutch husband, as described in these reflections of Nit and Frank.

The Thai bride also finds that she is subjected to different cultural codes of in-law relationships. If she had married a Thai spouse who was imbued with the same ideas about family and inter-generational relations, she would know how to behave towards her in-laws and be well acquainted with what the duties and obligations between them should be. Thrown headlong into Dutch society it will be difficult for her to follow its unsaid rules. As the woman is living far away from her home, she also expects that her Dutch parents-in-law will be one of the crucial sources of her day-to-day social networks. In this she is disappointed, as it seems that the Dutch in-laws fail to assume this role. Why is this so? Are they not prepared to provide daily assistance to their Thai daughter-in-law?

The main objective of this chapter is to delve into the cultural prescriptions of family relationship which are embedded in Thai and Dutch societies, and to examine how these different norms affect the marital relationship of the Thai-Dutch couples and the women's relationship with their natal family and in-laws. It commences with a review of both the strengths and the limits of the relevant research on the family in order to provide a basic theoretical background for my own study. In the second part, it moves on to examine the differences in cultural perception, meaning and practice of the family in Thai and Dutch societies. These ideas provide a tool by which to investigate the spouses' experiences of the misunderstandings about divergent filial

obligations and to understand the compromise they will have to work out in their cross-cultural family. This process is elucidated in the third part. The fourth section examines the dynamic component of family responsibility by investigating how the women either do still sustain their commitment to their family at home or choose to ignore their financial requests. The fifth part highlights the cultural differences in in-law relations in Thai and Dutch societies and the experiences of the Thai women with their Dutch in-laws when the unwritten rules are transgressed. The nub of this stumbling-block is that the women are obligated to provide material support to their family in Thailand, but their Dutch spouses do not accept their Thai brides allocating the economic resources of their conjugal families (*gezin*) to their parents' families (*khrop khrua*) in Thailand. Finally, the ways in which the cross-cultural marriage couples manage their household economy and how the distribution of finances between *gezin* and *khrop khrua* is negotiated are explored.

Research perspectives in family studies

Over a period of time, the family as an institution has been studied using various, different theoretical approaches. The sociological theory of functionalism stresses that society consists of social institutions which perform the well-defined function assigned to them. As a consequence, social order and solidarity are sustained. From this perspective, the family is perceived as a basic social institution and functions in reproducing, socialising and providing its members with physical and emotional care (Goldthorpe 1987; Nye and Berardo 1973). To achieve this goal and to function properly, family members perform roles which are ascribed to them on the basis of their position in the family.

Between the 1940s and 1960s particularly, functionalism was influential in studies of family in Western societies. It was utilised to classify family forms and the sexual division of labour between husband and wife within the household. Parsons (1956), for instance, has strongly argued that the nuclear family should be regarded as a universal human grouping and the basic unit from which more complex forms are compounded. The prevailing form of the nuclear family is suited to the economy of industrial societies, since it is movable and can adapt to the needs of

the labour market. Parsons also made a distinction between instrumental leadership expressed in the breadwinning role of the husband/father and expressive leadership represented by the homemaking role accorded to the wife and mother.⁷³

Symbolic interactionism has, among other changes, shifted the analysis from the structure and function of the family to the social interactions between family members. It argues that functionalism views social actors as being constrained by social norms and disregards the ability of social actors to interpret and influence their social world (Ritzer 1992; Wallance and Woolf 1995). Family life is conceptualised as a dynamic process in which members are socialised to learn 'the proper way to behave' towards their family members. Nevertheless, they are simultaneously able to shape, adapt and interpret a situation and its meanings, which combine to guide their actual actions. Applying this analytical model, Finch and Mason (1993: 9) conducted research on the family responsibilities of people in Britain by examining how people responded when they were given or received support within their kin group and how they excused themselves when they refused to assume these family responsibilities. Finch and Mason concluded that there are no clear rules setting out family obligations, but people seem to acknowledge certain 'guidelines', in the sense of considerations about when it is appropriate to step in and provide assistance. The rub is that neither functionalism nor symbolic interactionism emphasises the cultural meanings and contents which underlie family relations. Both perspectives also tend to perceive the white, middle-class Western nuclear family as universal and normative.

Anthropology has claimed kinship as one of its major domains. Recent anthropological studies question the universal and 'natural' characteristics of the nuclear family in Western societies. They point out diverse and alternative living arrangements, household structures and family relationships, both in Western and non-Western societies. They stress the way people reconcile their daily experience of family life with the sometimes contradictory expectations exacted by dominant family norms (Lamphere 2001; Stone 2001; 2006). A study of changing trajectories of family and friendship in urban areas in the Netherlands (Risseuw 2005: 100-102), for instance, highlights the transformation in Dutch family values and structures over time. It

⁷³ Feminist anthropologists have criticised the dichotomous gender division of labour and challenge this idea as a Western bias grounded on biological sexual differences, especially the male and female difference in reproduction (Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Stone 2001).

delves into the cultural codes of inter-generational relations and of individual independence which both have a hand in shaping and limiting the giving and receiving of care of the elderly. Biological ties between family members are no longer an assured care resource; people also experiment and initiate new cultural meanings and practices of family when the need of care arises. In this context, the need to develop new concepts to enable the naming of more subtle practices and expressions of 'being related' has been formulated (Carsten 1995; 2000).⁷⁴

Even though the universality of the ideal of the white, middle-class nuclear family in particular and that of the naturalness of the family as a group have been criticised, they still exercise a powerful influence on research on migrants' families in two ways. First, they are assumed to be the reference point in defining the migrants' family life. Studies and policies, particularly between the 1940s and the 1960s, believed that the family life-styles of migrants which diverged from those of the white, middle-class nuclear family were 'unusual' or 'deviant' and an impediment to their assimilation into the dominant society (Cheal 2002; Goldthorpe 1987). Only a few studies have attempted to challenge such an assumption by analysing the families of migrants in terms of gender, race and ethnicity. These studies have focused on the dynamic and adaptive features of migrant families in their attempt to survive and overcome the socio-economic constraints and disadvantages confronting them in the receiving countries (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; T. Reynolds 2002).⁷⁵

A second impediment to studies of the family is that family life seems to be taken-for-granted, both by people in general and by some scholars in particular. As members of a specific society, people acknowledge their own concept of family, but they are rather less aware of different ideas of family prevailing in other societies. In the academic field, family tends to be assumed as something self-evident and hence unproblematic, which results in a lack of comparative research. Only a handful of studies have attempted to capture the difference in the cultural scripts of family and inter-generational relations between host and migrant or between different ethnic groups of migrants in shaping a life-path such as partner choice and marriage (De

⁷⁴ See further discussion of this concept in Chapter Three.

⁷⁵ It is suggested that black, female-headed households in Britain and USA should not be perceived as pathological families. Instead this is one of the many stages of family life the black women continue to move through during their lifetimes and is indicative of the women's rational and strategic responses to specific social and economic conditions (T. Reynolds 2002: 75).

Valk 2006; Timera 2002), labour commitment in a family-run enterprise (Catarino and Oso 2007) and the perception and actual practice regarding care of the elderly (Burr and Mutchler 1999; Schans and De Valk 2007). However, cross-cultural studies which compare the different concepts of family relations existing among the intermarriage couples and which examine what difficulties these spouses experience in the 'creation' of their cross-cultural family tend to be overlooked.

Sending remittances: a confrontation of different family values

After the women interviewed had been in the Netherlands a few months to a year and found employment, almost all of them—regardless their socio-economic background—began to send their family in Thailand remittances, either regular or irregular, ranging from 100 to 700 Euro a month. The frequency and magnitude of these remittances vary according to the amount of income the women earn and the economic status of the family in Thailand. The rural women from lower-class families are more likely to remit a regular amount since they are in a better position to earn a high income than other family members in Thailand. Some of them are also responsible for providing their children from a previous relationship with financial support. The overseas income they send home becomes a principal economic resource of their parents or sometimes of the entire family. The educated, middle-class women may provide relatively smaller amounts of remittances or some may offer their parents irregular financial contributions, depending on the economic needs of the latter, the amount of savings they may have accumulated and the availability of alternative financial sources from other adult children. It is not uncommon that women from middle-class families, who are able to earn a high income in the Netherlands, provide their parents with a regular sum, although their parents are not faced with any economic hardship. Should some urgent need such as medical expenses required by their elderly parents suddenly present itself, women of both the lower- and middle-classes will remit extra money.

It has to be said that the material contributions made by Thai wives to their natal kin are liable to cause their Dutch husbands feelings of unease. The majority of them also resent their Thai wife demanding a monthly allowance from them, whereas she might be saving her own income to send back home. These situations raise three interesting questions. Why do the women

provide their parents or sometimes their whole family in Thailand with financial support? If the poverty of the kin left behind is the main reason, why do women from a well-to-do and middle-class family also remit money home? Why does such a practice, considered so 'normal' by the Thai migrant wives, prove unacceptable to their Dutch husbands?

The Thai women's obligation to their family in Thailand and the difficulties the Thai-Dutch couples encounter because of the sending of these remittances should be understood in the context of the socio-cultural prescriptions of the family in Thai and Dutch societies. Specifically, the Thai wife and their Dutch spouse hold distinctive moral sets of values prescribing parent-child relationship, family structure, sibling ties and the welfare system. It should be noted that the objective of this section is not to generalise and dichotomise Thai and Dutch families. Its purpose is to do no more than delineate the different cultural ideologies pertaining to the family in Thai and Dutch societies. An examination of these disparate ideals reveals how family responsibilities are constructed and how they shape different expectations and obligations towards family members. The distinctive ideas of family are compared and contrasted in the following pages.

The inter-generational relations of 'bun-khun' versus the ideal of altruistic parental love

Filial obligations between the parents and child in Thai and Dutch societies are governed by divergent ideals of inter-generational relations. Ties between parents and child in Thai society are heavily characterised by an asymmetrical reciprocity and the morality of *bun-khun* relations, the children's gratitude to the parents. This idea prescribes that the parents confer their *bun-khun* (meritorious acts of compassion, sacrifice, and beneficence) on their children by giving birth to them and caring for them in infancy and childhood. In return, children owe their parents not only gratitude and respect but also—and increasingly as they become adult—their actual support. The adult children are expected to offer finances, physical care and emotional support as the parents grow older. These ideals of the *bun-khun* relationship place all children in a position of life-long obligation to their parents, which can never be entirely repaid (Mills 1999: 76; Pasuk 1982).⁷⁶ If

⁷⁶ Even after the death of the parents, the child must continue to care for their spirits by performing periodic merit-making Buddhist ceremonies (Mills 1999; Pasuk 1982).

the children fail in their obligations, it is feasible for the parents to complain to or to make a request of their children.

A distinction in gender is inherent in this *bun-khun* relation since sons and daughters are required to repay the moral debt to the parents in different ways. Before his marriage, ideally a son may repay his debt through ordination as a monk, regardless of the length of the period he may remain in the order. By being a monk, he creates and ritually transfers a store of merit to his parents. This does not imply that in practice a son no longer has an obligation to his parents after his ordination and that ordination is the only means to return the debt to his parents. His responsibility to his parents has to be maintained, but the pressure is relaxed. In other words, the parents will be delighted if their son gives them financial support and affection, but they do not expect too much of him.⁷⁷ The daughter's position is quite different as she cannot return the debt to her parents through ordination.⁷⁸ She can fulfil *bun-khun* obligations to the parents by her contribution to the physical, emotional and material well-being of the latter. Furthermore, the Thai family ideal defines the daughter as a main source of care of the elderly; the parents place higher expectations on their daughter than on their son. The daughter also feels deeply obligated as from very early in her life she has socialised to undertake this life-long care responsibility to her parents. The expectations of the Thai migrant women in the Netherlands are no different. They maintain this filial obligation by sending remittances to ensure their parents' welfare and simultaneously to symbolise the gratitude of a dutiful daughter.

In contrast, inter-generational relations in Dutch society involve much less formalised relations between parents and child. This freedom is linked to the idea of an 'independent

⁷⁷ The parents' low expectation of care from their son has also been influenced by the idea of gender and marriage practice in Thai society. The traditional practices in the rural areas, especially in the North and the North-east, included the presumption that men sometimes would leave their parental home and travel to another village or city for months. While they were away from home, their financial support to the parents might be lessened or discontinued. Moreover, the traditional practice of matri-local residence, in which the man tended to move in with his wife's family and contributed to his in-laws' household, lessened his own parents' expectations of him. Even though the practice of matri-local residence has declined and the rural-urban migration of both men and women is now very pronounced, the idea of a son who wanders and can less readily be approached for family tasks, compared with daughter, has persisted.

⁷⁸ There is an intermediate category of women who become *mae chii*, nuns, a ritual status substantially inferior to that of monks. Women who become *mae chii* are often viewed as trying to escape from such personal problems as an illness or a failed romance, rather than pursuing a positive route to spiritual development. By assuming on the status of *mae chii*, moreover, a daughter does not earn a large store of merit for her parents (Mills 1999: 78; Whittaker 1999: 52).

individual' and the nuclear family value. It is expected that the individual should be responsible for living his/her own life and that the relationship between spouses is prioritised above the relationship with the parents on either side. The parents provide their children with love, care and other needs until they become adult. After this stage has been reached, they remain concerned and can supply support when needed. Nevertheless, no comparably strict duties of reciprocity between the offspring and the elder generation are articulated. In other words, the parents should not be too demanding of their children. Indeed, they should allow their children to 'make their own lives' and support their conjugal families. As discussed in Chapter One, this parent-child relationship can be interpreted as an ideology of altruistic parents who do not want to burden their mature children with heavy responsibilities towards them (Risseuw 2005). Likewise, the adult children's relationship to their parents tends to involve emotional and voluntary aspects. They provide their elderly parents with affection and, sometimes, care. Only when their parents are in real need, may financial assistance be offered. Brought up in these cultural ideas, the Dutch husbands take it for granted that the parent-child relation flows downwards and is not reciprocated or flow up from the child to the parents. They have enormous difficulty in appreciating the desire of their Thai wife to redeem her moral debt by providing her elderly parents with regular remittances and in accepting the fact that her parents ask her for financial support.

Khrop khrua versus gezin

Quite obviously, the Thai-Dutch couples hold different concepts of the family, its structure and formation. These two concepts, *khrop khrua* and *gezin* operate as potential moral guidelines for what 'family' ideally means, who will be included within the family circle, and which family members should be given priority. Among the Thai, *khrop khrua* (family) encompasses both natal family and in-laws, although ideally the former tends to be given greater priority than the latter. Establishing a conjugal family does not end the membership and obligations of the women in their natal family. Nor are they cut off from sharing a common economic household with their

parents—though the women have their own independent residences.⁷⁹ The bonds between and the attachment of children to their parents are expected to take precedence over those between husband and wife, and between a daughter-in-law and her parents-in-law. According to the ideal of *khrop khrua*, after their marriage the Thai migrant women should still maintain a strong obligation to their parents and they may also at times assist their extended kin financially, particularly members of their natal families, if they manage to earn a higher income than their relatives in Thailand.

Diametrically opposed to this, Northern European concepts of family tend to distinguish between consanguineal and conjugal relations, which obviously separate residence from the sharing of resources. Each marriage sets up a new independent residence and household, in which only the husband, wife and young children share daily life and economic resources (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002; Goody 2000; Stone 2006). In Dutch society, these distinctive family relationships are reflected in two different terms, *gezin* and *familie* (Ganesh 2005: 125). The former denotes the conjugal family, which consists of the parents and minor children, whereas the latter is composed of extended relatives. Quite clearly, in this definition, elderly parents do not belong to the *gezin* but are included in the *familie*. Members of the *gezin* rarely share economic resources and a residence with those of the *familie*. The *gezin* has been constructed as an important social unit and as the first priority of a married couple. A person can spend his/her earnings on his/her own purposes, but the Dutch-Dutch couples observe the unspoken rule that in the first place their income should be spent on their own *gezin*, rather than on their *familie*. Since, the cultural scripts of *khrop khrua* in Thai society and of *gezin* in Dutch society are pretty incongruous, the practice of remitting money to the family in Thailand is usually evaluated as ‘improper’ from a Dutch perspective. It is also beyond the stretch of the imagination of the Dutch husbands that the ties and obligations of their Thai wife include not only her husband and children, but also her parents and other extended family members. This unawareness of cultural differences, for instance, led one of my informants, a Dutch psychologist who had married a Thai wife, to interpret her

⁷⁹ I differentiate between ‘residence’ and ‘household’. The former term refers to the physical location in which the family members live together and share their daily lives, while the latter is defined as an economic unit in which family members do not necessarily share the same residence, but pool and share common resources.

financial obligations to the parents in Thailand along the lines of a psychological disorder involving a fixation on the parents.

Relations and responsibilities between siblings

Although it stands central, the parent-child relationship is not the only such bond in Thai society. *Khwam pen phi nong* (being each other's brother and sister) is an ideal widely observed and deeply valued in Thailand. Sibling bonds entail hierarchical relations and a sense of reciprocity. In other words, siblings are expected to share resources and support with each other in day-to-day life, even though they have already established their own conjugal family and have a separated residence. The elder siblings, particularly the sisters, may feel more responsible than the others. It is a relatively common practice for an elder sister or brother to provide financial support to pay for the education of the younger siblings should the parents be unable to afford this. Sisters may also develop a closer relationship and share more material sources, especially when they rely on each other for support in child-rearing and care for their elderly parents.

The contractual aspect of Dutch kinship is comparatively much less prominent. The emotional character of family ties and the notion of a 'pure' relationship which is not contaminated by material interests are certainly highly valued (Ganesh 2005: 127). The relationship between brothers and sisters is oriented towards voluntary reciprocation and less to mutual obligations. Moreover, the ideal of an 'independent individual' (citizen) also includes a person's independence in managing his/her own finances. Dutch people are frugal and aware that they should not request material aid from others outright, even if they are siblings. On rare occasions, it is possible for siblings, particularly the elder sister or brother, to offer material assistance to younger ones who are in dire need. However, it is considered very shameful and unacceptable to ask for help if a person gets into financial trouble because of his/her extravagance. The different obligations between siblings and the ideal of economic independence in Dutch society combine to produce the Dutch spouses' difficulty in accepting that their Thai wives provide material assistance to brothers or sisters and that these middle-aged siblings who have their own career keep asking them for money.

The differences in welfare provision

Relationships and responsibilities among family members are also inextricably linked with the welfare system. In Thailand, there are no state subsidies for the unemployed, nor is there the compulsory requirement of a health insurance⁸⁰ and no universal state pension for the elderly, unless they have worked as a government official. After their retirement, older people depend totally on their adult children for economic support and care, particularly when they have not earned sufficient income to have accumulated some savings during their employment. Without the provisions of a welfare state, financial assistance from and care of family members—defined by the cultural scripts of *bun-khun* relations (the children's gratitude to the parents), *khrop khrua* (family) and *khvam pen phi nong* (being each other's sibling)—serve as the crucial source of informal welfare in Thai society, an issue I shall discuss further in Chapter Four.

In the Netherlands, the welfare state is based primarily on the cultural scripts of an 'independent individual' and of a conjugal, nuclear family (*gezin*)—a male breadwinner, a housewife and young offspring. It accords little recognition to an individual's relationship with his/her wider kin networks (*familie*) and his/her reliance on them for support of care.⁸¹ A universal old age state pension (*Algemene Ouderdoms Wet* or AOW), for instance, provides every Dutch citizen of 65 and above with an allowance. This permits the elderly parents to be financially independent to some extent.⁸² Because of these disparate (informal and state) welfare systems in Thai and Dutch society, and their relation to the different cultural codes of family, at

⁸⁰ In 2001, the Thai government launched a medical care policy, in which the patients pay only 30 Baht to cover all medical costs when they visit a public hospital. However, the quality of medical treatment and the attention the doctors pay to the patients are lower than in private hospitals, where the medical services and expenses are much higher.

⁸¹ The specific formation of the welfare state in Europe reflects economic, religious, political, and cultural interpretations. In the case of the Netherlands, see also the perceptive study of Robert H. Cox (1993).

⁸² The Dutch pension system constitutes three pillars: the universal old age state pension (AOW), the work-related pension, and the private commercial pension provision. The basic state pension (first pillar) is provided to all Dutch citizens at the age of 65 in the form of a flat-rate pension benefit which in principle guarantees 70 per cent of the net minimum wage. Although there is no obligation for employers to make pension commitments to their employees, the vast majority of those employed in the Netherlands (over 90 per cent) participate in an occupational pension scheme. If the collective labour agreement lasts for 35 to 40 years, the total pension benefit will be around 70 per cent of the final salary, including the first pillar benefit. The third pillar of the Dutch pension system consists of the individual pension provisions. These are obtained from insurance companies offering schemes for individual pension provisions. They can be obtained through annuity or endowment insurance (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid 2008).

first the Dutch men do not recognise how important remittances to the family members of their Thai wives are and why a filial obligation binds them to elderly parents.

Creating a cross-cultural family

The perception that ‘creating a family’ is something ‘natural’ constitutes a powerful point of reference in making sense of a person’s family life. The cross-cultural marriage partners initially tend to take their own family ideas and practices for granted and they take their own family ways as a point of reference in trying to understand each other. Moreover, family norms are largely unwritten and an integral part of a given society. People acquire and learn to acknowledge them through socialisation. It is not always simple for the partners in a cross-cultural marriage to discern the differences in each other’s family values and to be aware of the meanings of the unsaid rules to which their partner adheres. As a consequence, many Dutch husbands initially have difficulty in comprehending the filial obligation of their Thai wives expressed by sending remittances back home. They tend to adopt different attitudes and display contentious reactions. Some husbands can accept the practice that their wives allocate part of their income to support their family on the condition that it should not happen several times a month. A few disagree, but cannot object because the remittances are made from their wives’ own income. Others are adamantly against it, even though their wives send money from their own earnings. In the rare case in which women are housewives, a husband with a high salary might generously provide them with enough money for the remittances.

To avoid marital conflicts and simultaneously fulfil their filial obligation to the family in Thailand, the women, both consciously and unconsciously, have developed many coping strategies and negotiations. Many women prefer to earn their own income in the Netherlands; consequently, they do not have to count on their Dutch husbands, when they send remittances to their natal families. Those who are from a rural, lower-class background referred to the poverty of their parents to legitimate their obligations. Some argued that they were morally bound to give financial support to their children from a previous relationship, as in the example of Tong, who

worked informally as a cleaner in a Thai restaurant five days a week from noon to 3 p.m. Her total income was around 500 Euro a month:

The bulk of my income [around 200 Euro per month] is allocated to my parents and my daughter. I have also saved some money to pay for the renovation of my parent's house. I explained to Adriaan that my parents are farmers and have a low income. Without my support, their living conditions would be poor. I had to support them, including my daughter.

The women with a good income tend to illustrate to their Dutch spouse that now they have a well-paid career and can enjoy a much better life. Irrevocably, they would like to share this comfortable life-style with their parents. The total monthly expenses they incur in the Netherlands are many times higher than what they offer their parents in Thailand. For instance, Faas and Phloi own three Thai restaurants in Amsterdam and earn a high income. Although Phloi's parents have no economic difficulties, she still feels obligated to offer them regular financial support:

Faas and I sometimes have dinner in a restaurant and we pay nearly 50 to 70 Euro. Or we make trips to many countries in Europe where we spend large sums of money. I give my parents only 200 Euro a month. It is small amount here [in the Netherlands], but it has a great value for my parents. I told Faas that we have a good life here. I want to share it with my parents. He shouldn't complain about this.

If the Dutch men forbid the remitting of money several times a month, the woman may go ahead and send remittances without the knowledge of the husband—either from her own income or from the allowance the husbands give her. None the less, some husbands may be suspicious about what is going on.

After they have lived together for years, the exposure of the Thai-Dutch couples to different cultural family codes broadens, making them more flexible and able to compromise. It appears to be more acceptable to the Dutch men that their Thai wives send a 'reasonable' amount of money for the education of their children or for the support of their parents. During their visits to Thailand, they are able to see how the remittances really have improved the living condition of their Thai parents-in-law. Similarly, the women gradually realise that their Dutch husbands will be irked if they give regular aid to their entire family. They compromise by sometimes refusing the frequent financial requests from their relatives in Thailand.

Occasionally, the couple will reflect on the positive and negative aspects of each other's family ideas. Some Dutch husbands appreciate the extended family networks of their Thai wives which provide welfare and care for their aged parents, while they are witness to the loneliness of the elderly in the Netherlands. Conversely, whereas the Thai women unquestionably do value the opportunity to express their gratitude to their parents, they sometimes do take note of the positive aspect of being an 'independent individual' in Dutch society, which protects an individual from importunate, exacting requests for economic support from family members.

Many cross-cultural marriage couples try to find their own ways of pursuing the welfare of their *gezin* as well as the well-being of the *khrop khrua* of the Thai wife. Nipha and Lucas, for example, agreed that Nipha's main income would be given to her parents to renovate their house in Thailand. When the construction was finished, she would reduce the remittances and help Lucas more financially by contributing to their living costs in the Netherlands. Nipha convinced Lucas that he would have a comfortable stay in Thailand, if her parents' house was properly renovated and that it could be a place for them to settle after their retirement. Likewise, Tong sends 200 Euro a month to her parents and daughter, and at the same time she gives 150 Euro of her income to Adriaan:

I gave Adriaan 150 Euro a month to contribute to our living expenses. I also advanced the energy costs and Adriaan reimbursed them later. Sometimes he forgot about it or did not return the full amount, but that was fine. To avoid any conflict, I didn't remind him to pay.

Had I kept asking, he might have become upset and reproach me for not helping him, but I always send money home.

Even though the couple adapts itself to the different family values, it remains difficult to overcome the cultural barriers. Some Thai cultural practices which are fairly similar to Dutch family ideas can be readily understood by Dutch husbands, whereas those which transcend their own cultural ideas appear to be difficult to accept. The cultural code, in which the *gezin* is prioritised, makes it easier for the Dutch men to support the children of their Thai wife financially. However, the Dutch husband will need some time to understand the Thai ideal of mutual obligations between siblings, which is irrelevant to the independent relations between siblings in Dutch society. Some still find it impossible to agree, as Ronald said:

I find it acceptable that Phloen gives money to her son and elderly parents. But it seems strange to me that her siblings often ask for money. I don't understand it. Dutch people are very concerned about asking for and borrowing money from others, even from our own parents and siblings. It is very impolite. Only if in real need, may parents or siblings eventually offer financial assistance. Here [in the Netherlands] people are proud that they can count on themselves.

No severe tension tends to occur if the unemployed women are not obliged to send regular remittances to their family in Thailand. One such example is Lan, who was a housewife for the first two years of her time in the Netherlands:

My family [in Thailand] does not need financial help. My sisters and brothers have a good career and earn sufficient income. They give my parents money. I do not have any children in Thailand, so I do not have that financial responsibility [as many Thai women here]. I give my parents some money and buy some gifts for my siblings only when I visit them in Thailand each year.

A quarrel may arise between the spouses when the women are completely financially dependent on their Dutch husbands, but are obliged to provide regular economic support to their families in Thailand. Protracted conflicts about this incessant demand of filial responsibility may eventually cause a strained marital relationship. Charunee, for instance, had worked as a cashier in a restaurant and had remitted around 600 Euro a month to cover the education of her three daughters and a living allowance for her mother in Thailand. She became stressed when she was laid off and no longer had an income to support them. Her Dutch husband was not prepared to contribute to the financial support she sent home, nor did he agree with it. She considered either working in a beauty parlour or in an erotic massage saloon, both run by Thai female owners. The latter opportunity would have given her a higher income than did her former job. She was, however, reluctant to take such a step because it could lead to severe tension if her husband learned about her job.

Responsibility of the women for their natal family

Earlier in this chapter I mentioned that the women and their natal family share the same interpretation of filial obligations. This leads to the question: How do kin responsibilities actually operate between Thai migrant women and their families at home? The women live at a considerable distance and are deprived of daily face-to-face contact with them. Why do they still comply with filial obligations by sending remittances? In what ways do they negotiate this?

The Thai migrant women recognise family obligations, but at times they and their Dutch husbands have the impression that the importunities of the women's families are an endless litany, as Nam experienced:

I give my parents 200 Euro a month. When my siblings find themselves in financial difficulties, they think of me. Once, one of my older sister's daughters married. She asked me to help her daughter's boyfriend, whose parents didn't have enough money to arrange the wedding. I gave her 30,000 Baht [around 600 Euro].

PS: Do they often request for financial assistance?

Yes, especially since I own a Thai restaurant. They assume that I am well off. I have already supported them with a large amount of money, but they have never become self-reliant. Instead, they keep asking for more and more. My husband can't understand this. He suspects that my brothers and sisters ask money not for their immediate needs, but to fuel their conspicuous consumption.

If the women have to contend with endless demands from their family members at home, why do they not simply terminate all material support? The hindrance to any such refusal is that their filial obligation to their families in Thailand has to be placed in the context of the way in which an individual thinks about the concept of being a person in Thai society. This is also inextricably connected to his/her gender position within the family. Instead of regarding themselves as an independent individual who gives priority to pursuing his/her own interests, the women's sense of person is constructed around kin-oriented relationships. They tend to identify themselves as an integral part of their families and define their social existence in terms of their fulfilment of their filial obligations. During my interviews, many women, regardless their education and social background, often stressed that they provided their elderly parents with financial support and that they were dutiful daughters who would never abandon their parents. The women from a rural background also exuded a sense of pride because their financial support has improved the well-being of their entire families.

The second consideration which has to be borne in mind is that the women's social position as an immigrant and their previous contribution to the family in Thailand actually strengthens their awareness of their filial responsibility. As immigrants, the women inevitably experience a certain degree of social discrimination in the host society. Their family members and other non-migrant neighbours in Thailand are a significant point of reference for them, helping them to surmount the difficulties encountered in their new roles (I shall discuss this in more detail in Chapter Five). By sending money regularly, the women are rewarded by the social acceptance of their families and home communities and this gradually helps them to develop their

self-esteem. Unquestionably, they are also expected to provide more material support to their parents than other relatives living in Thailand, since they married a *farang* man and reside in Europe, which is seen as a wealthy region by the Thais. Furthermore, many women, particularly those from a rural, lower-class background, had already been contributing economically to their natal families when they earned their livelihood in Thailand. Sending remittances after they have gone to live in the Netherlands is an extension of their earlier filial obligation. In their efforts to maintain their sense of self-esteem, the continuation of sending remittances is sustained and, over time, ineluctably their commitment towards their families is built up. Therefore, their social position as an immigrant reinforces the women's sense of filial obligation and legitimises the claim of the family for continuous personal economic support from the women and sometimes from the Dutch husband.

The third important point to remember is that the continuation of sending remittances is also based on interdependence of inter-generational relations. The women maintain their financial responsibility not simply because they feel morally obligated to their family members. On a practical level, this support is also an exchange for family care. As already mentioned in the Introduction, of the forty-five Thai women I interviewed, twenty have children from an earlier marriage. Many of them have left their children under the care and supervision of their parents or female kin in Thailand. Some women also have to rely on their female relatives to take care of their elderly parents. They reward these relatives with either regular or occasional material aid, which I shall describe in detail in Chapter Four. These transactions between the women and the family at home which consist in the exchange of finances for family care helps in obtaining an understanding of why the women honour their filial obligation despite the frequent financial demands from their families.

There can be absolutely no suggestion that the women are simply passively committed to their family responsibility. Nor do family norms exert any influential power in forcing the women's decision to provide actual support. Nevertheless, a withdrawal from family responsibility by directly refusing to send remittances is not a simple matter, since these cultural scripts are intrinsically linked to both moral and practical aspects. Any such violation often stigmatises the women, embroils them in family strife or lands them in a truly shattering situation

caused by the fracture of family ties. To avoid conflicts with their families and, simultaneously, take steps not to become overburdened by such responsibilities, the women resort to redefining the cultural rules and their own actual behaviour consciously and unconsciously.⁸³ For instance, some women compromised by gradually reducing the amount of the remittances after they had provided material assistance for several years and their families' well-being had improved to some degree.

As might have been deduced, the women's and their families' life-cycles ineluctably influence the quantity and frequency of the remittances. The women decrease the amount of remittances after their children have graduated and begun to earn their own living. Female kin who assist the women in daily child care can then no longer claim living expenses for the women's children, as in the situation of Ruang. She has lived in the Netherlands for sixteen years and had left her two daughters, who were born by a former Thai husband, in the care of her own mother. Initially she sent her mother around 200 Euro a month as well as another 100 Euro a month to her aunt who often assisted her mother in caring for her daughters. The amount of money was gradually increased because of the higher living costs incurred by her daughters as they grew older. When her daughters were studying for a Bachelor's Degree and lived on their own in Bangkok, Ruang gave them around 400 Euro a month directly and a reduced remittances of 100 Euro a month to her mother. She gave her aunt financial support only when in need. Recently, her two daughters—twenty-five and twenty-three years old respectively—have completed their studies and are earning their own incomes. Ruang has stopped sending them a regular allowance, but has offered them occasionally financial help. She still remitted her mother 150 Euro a month.

A change in the life-courses of the women and their families is also fielded as a legitimate excuse to employ a coping strategy to deal with the economic importunities of the relatives at

⁸³ Bourdieu (1977) criticises the limits of a dichotomous analysis of a structural versus an agent level, and proposes the mediating concept of 'habitus', referring to an area between that of 'willed intention' and a 'disposition' located inside and outside the agents themselves. He also stresses that agents are not fully aware of their own conduct and operate from what he terms 'learned ignorance': a mode of practical knowledge which does not include knowledge of its own principles. This concept is pertinent to my analysis, in which the Thai women might not often be aware of an underlying cultural idea of family and of the practices to which they resort in dealing with the incessant demands from their families. They might sometimes respond to such a situation unintentionally and/or spontaneously as well as applying various more conscious strategies to deal with it.

home. Some women, who have children with a Dutch husband, have used their wish to save their own money for their children's future as a reason to send less money. Others have offered a monthly allowance to their parents only, since the responsibility of adult children towards their elderly parents overrides all other relationships. They are able to refuse brothers or sisters economic assistance, especially if they have already done so many times, nevertheless their siblings still continue to request money endlessly. The passing away of the parents is one of the significant transitions in family life which can mark the termination of the provision of material aid to family members, particularly if the women have not had good relationship with their relatives, or do not rely on them for the care of their children.

Relationship with Dutch in-laws

In this chapter I have already delineated that the cross-cultural marriage couples refer to their own family norms in their efforts to make sense of the divergent familial responsibilities they encounter and that they require some time to adapt to these differences. This raises the question of the relationship between the Thai women and their Dutch in-laws. What are the underlying cultural ideas of in-laws relationship in Thai and Dutch societies? Do the Thai women expect and receive support from their Dutch in-laws?

Different cultural scripts of relations with in-laws

As cited in Chapter One, marriage in Thai society does not lead to a shift in the women's membership from their parents to the in-laws' family. Affinal kin are simply added to and included into the existing family members.⁸⁴ The relationship of the parents-in-law to the daughter-in-law is not characterised by an outspoken asymmetry of power, but it is still coloured by both reciprocity and hierarchy.⁸⁵ Such a family system has both advantages and draw-backs

⁸⁴ After marriage, women and men are counted as a member of both their parents' and in-laws' families. The parents-in-law hope that their children-in-law, particularly the daughter-in-law, will give them respect, care and sometimes material support. However, the cultural idea that the daughter is the main source of care influences the parents' expectation of relying on their own daughters for long-term care.

⁸⁵ In contrast, in patrilineal and patri-local societies such as those found in many parts of South and East Asia, the wife and the children are viewed as belonging to the husband's families. Ideally, the wife moves into her in-laws'

for the daughter-in-laws. Besides the importance of caring for the well-being of their own parents, the women are expected to take physical and emotional care of their parents-in-law, especially if they share the same dwelling. In return, the parents-in-law should be one of the sources of social support; particularly of child care, should the women live apart from their natal family. However, it is not uncommon for the mother-in-law to interfere practically in the marriage of her son by scrutinising how her daughter-in-law runs the household or how much financial assistance she offers to her parents—even though they have a separate residence. The extended family networks make it difficult to oppose such an intrusion by the in-laws explicitly, unless a person wants to run the risk of losing contact with them.

By contrast, the notion of the independent unit of the *gezin*, which consists of only the two spouses and young children, allows a mother-in-law less legitimacy (and less presence) to exert power over the *gezin* of her son. The *gezin* is defined as the central domain of the wife and she exerts the authority within the *gezin*. If the parents-in-law tend to be meddlesome in the domestic arena of the daughter-in-law, the latter is able to object directly or let her husband know she is displeased with the situation. In the latter event, he will assume the responsibility of informing his parents. The relationship between in-laws in Dutch society is less hierarchical and less binding than in Thai society. Rather than as a filial obligation, the daughter-in-law cares for her elderly parents-in-law on a voluntary basis. Their daily contact is infrequent, mainly at occasional family celebrations or special events. If both of their residences are located in the nearby vicinity and they establish a good relationship, they may have more intense social interaction. If not, they are able to keep a distance and avoid frequent contact.

Contradictory experiences with the in-laws

The paradox of the hierarchical and obligatory relation with in-laws in Thai society versus the voluntary ties with affinal relatives in Dutch society confronts the Thai migrant women with anomalous experiences in their interaction with their in-laws. Unquestionably, they appreciate the

family and is obliged to give her in-laws respect and care. The relationship of the mother-in-law to the daughter-in-law is dominant and hierarchical. As time passes, the daughter-in-law may be accorded greater acceptance and acquire a certain measure of power. This depends on her personality and contribution to the in-laws' family (Dube 2001; Fan and Huang 1998; Li and Lavelly 1995).

greater freedom and less control over their household by the Dutch in-laws. Many women indicated that their husband's mother does not interfere in the housekeeping or raising the children, which a Thai mother-in-law is more likely to do. Lalita described her experience as follows:

We [Lalita and Nikolaas] do not share the same house with my in-laws. My mother-in-law has nothing to do with our household and finances. She has never instructed me about decorating the house and taking care of Nikolaas. If I had married a Thai man, his mother could have been much more omnipresent and have even meddled in our life.

The fewer obligatory relations enabling an avoidance of frequent contacts with in-laws are perceived by the women as another advantage of Dutch conjugal relations. Generally, the women attempt to maintain a good relationship with their Dutch in-laws. However, if the relationships are strained, they face less pressure and have the options of minimising the contact, especially if their Dutch husband supports them, as was the experience of Suwipha. After she had been living in the Netherlands for two years, during a phone call her mother-in-law asked her why she did not start working. Suwipha felt uncomfortable and informed Jos about this. Later, Jos explained to his mother that Suwipha is his wife and that he is the person who earns the income to support his own family. It was none of her business whether Suwipha worked or not. This situation also reveals that the primacy of the *gezin* is not synonymous with non-intervention by the in-laws. In daily life, the mother-in-law may be concerned about the household of her adult son, certainly if he is married to a wife from a different country. Nevertheless, she has to tread carefully and express this subtly, since the Dutch family norm does not legitimise her overt intervention in the *gezin* of her adult child.

Relative independence also has a negative side. The private domain of the *gezin* with relatively few daily links to the *familie* helps to create a distant relationship with the in-laws. Many Thai migrant women appreciated the warm welcome they receive from their Dutch parents-in-law, but they do not develop a close relationship with each other. Some hardly spend any time alone with them without their Dutch spouse being present. Usually, they meet their

parents-in-law when they accompany their husband or when the parents visit their son. Their contacts with siblings-in-law are even less frequent.

The low level of sharing daily activities with the Dutch in-laws also causes the women to experience—what I shall call—‘a lack of everyday sociality’⁸⁶ and support from the Dutch in-laws. In Thai society, when the women have a conflict with their husbands, they can sometimes turn to their parents-in-law who will try to find a compromise by talking to their son or offer financial help to the grandchildren. The parents- or a sister-in-law are also one of the significant sources of child care. By contrast, the marital relationship of the spouses in Dutch society is considered a private matter and an individual couple’s own affair. They have to find their own solutions; if this should fail the *familie* might offer a helping hand. It is quite also unusual for the Dutch daughter-in-law to turn to the Dutch mother-in-law when she has a marriage problem. Instead, she rather expects more support from her own mother if they maintain a close relationship.

This does not mean that the Dutch parents-in-law are not willing to offer their Thai daughter-in-law social and emotional support. Notwithstanding, the absence of Dutch cultural scripts which consider the in-laws’ family (*familie*) as a part of the couple’s family (*gezin*) hinders them being more omnipresent in the day-to-day life of the couple. The Dutch in-laws are aware that regular visits, involvement in decisions and frequent daily assistance may be interpreted as interference in the *gezin* of their adult son. They care about their son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren and offer occasional help, but at the same time they have to stand on the sidelines until such time as their help is requested.

Violating the unwritten rules

Even though the women may have earned their living in the Netherlands for a few years, it is still difficult for them to recognise Dutch ‘sociality’, including the distinction between polite and impolite behaviour and the proper topics of conversation when interacting with their Dutch in-laws, fully. The transgression of these unsaid rules may cause misinterpretation and disappointment, which Phloen’s situation demonstrates. Once her Dutch spouse, Ronald, took her

⁸⁶ See the definition of this term in the Introduction. More details will also be discussed in Chapters Three and Four.

to his family for dinner. She noticed that her sister-in-law had gained weight and had a large belly. She assumed that her in-law was pregnant, but actually she was not:

I asked her whether she is pregnant. If so, I would have said ‘Congratulations’ to her. But she was evidently embarrassed. Then, I realised that I had made a mistake. When we went home, Ronald explained to me that if she had been pregnant, she would have let us know herself. It is quite impolite for others to mention this first. If she was not pregnant, my question implied that she was very fat.

Ronald added: Here it is also impolite to ask whether the couple plans to have children and how many children they want to have, if you are not close to them. You may think that people here are liberal and have more freedom. Actually, it is not true. There is a plethora of social rules which we have to learn.

The women also apply Thai ideas of hierarchy to the parents-in-law as a guideline for their interactions. In Thai society, when the daughter-in-law visits the mother-in-law, the former has to help in preparing food and/or take care of the latter physically. In diametric opposition to this, the ideology of personal independence—‘not being a burden to other people’—permeates the relationship between in-laws in Dutch society. The Dutch parents-in-law may appreciate occasional emotional support from the daughter-in-law, but they will avoid relying on her for physical care. Brought up with these distinctions, the Thai women assume that it is proper to care for the Dutch parents-in-law and that such behaviour will generate their in-laws’ affection for them. However, the Dutch in-laws may see such caring as a sign of their weakness and dependency. Lalita recalled her experiences when she offered her Dutch mother-in-law assistance:

I wanted to show my respect for her by caring for her. When Nikolaas and I visited her at home, I preferred that it was I who served the meal or washed the dishes. Anyway, she often objected. After I had kept offering assistance on many occasions, she later explained

to me that she could manage these things and that she was not so old she couldn't take care of it herself. I was very surprised that she did not appreciate what I thought I was expected to do.

When the Thai and Dutch in-laws have had more contact, they gradually become aware of the differences in cultural norms of in-law relationships. The women express their respect for their Dutch in-laws, but they are sensitised to not overwhelming them with assistance, as Lalita said:

After I had lived in the Netherlands for many years, I learned that I don't have to offer my parents-in-law [physical] care. When I visit them, I do show my concern by asking how they are. But I didn't need to assist them when they stood up or help them prepare drink and food.

Some Dutch in-laws recognise the hierarchy of relations from which the Thai daughter-in-law approaches them and they perceive this positively. They appreciate when she presents them with Thai food or handicrafts. They also realise that she welcomes them to visiting their grandchildren frequently and expects minor help in raising the children. Their close relationship can also be developed when a need for assistance occurs. Manee, for example, moved to live with Hendrik in a town in the South of the Netherlands for nearly a year. Their house is located nearby that of Hendrik's mother. Manee commenced informal work as a housekeeper soon after her arrival since she had to provide her parents and teenage daughter in Thailand with financial support. She also had to take a Dutch language course in the morning three days a week. As she was unfamiliar with the town and Hendrik had to work everyday, initially her mother-in-law helped by picking her up after she finished the course and her work. She could only speak a little bit of Dutch and English, but they attempted to communicate with each other. She sometimes spent an hour at her mother-in-law's house before she returned home. She often gave her in-laws Thai food. After several months of daily contact, they developed a closer relationship.

It is possible to draw the conclusion that the cross-cultural marriage couples have to deal with not only different ideas of family relations and responsibility towards their natal kin, but

also towards their in-laws. In Thailand, hierarchy and reciprocity characterise the relationship between in-laws and these in-laws are counted as a part of the extended family (*khrop khrua*), whereas affinal ties (*familie*) in Dutch society are relatively voluntary and are excluded from the couple's family (*gezin*). These different cultural presumptions influence the Thai women and the Dutch in-laws in shaping different expectations of each other and this process sometimes results in misunderstandings between them and the women's feelings of loneliness and lack of support.

Financial arrangements within the household

In Thailand, where bilateral kinship is prominent and the pattern of post-marital residence is flexible, there are no rigid norms for the management of the household economy. Various means are adopted, depending on the employment status of the woman, the couple's socio-economic background and the personal understanding they have reached. In a wealthy or middle-class family, if the husband is the breadwinner and the woman is a housewife, he may provide her with a monthly allowance to cover food and other household items. The wife can either use the rest of the money for her own purposes or keep it as her own savings. She also has the rights to offer a certain amount of money to her parents. If the women take up employment, they will become more economically independent. Both spouses may keep their income separate, but they help each other in paying for household expenses and the education of the children. They reserve part of their own income as financial support for their own parents. In a situation in which the husband earns a much higher income than his wife, he will probably assume a greater financial responsibility. Some couples may pool their income and the wife will distribute the money for household expenses, family leisure activities and savings.

Instead of a monthly salary, a household in rural Thailand obtains its income after the harvest. After the deduction of the agricultural costs, the net income belongs to the household. If the men share the same dwelling with the women's family, the women's father has the responsibility of the financial management. As mentioned before, the peasant women play an essential economic role in both agriculture and trade. It is possible that in some households the woman's mother arranges the household economy and holds the family's purse strings. When

young rural couples migrate to the city and earn a monthly wage, they may split their income and use one part to support their own parents and combine the other part for household expenses, usually controlled by the wife. It is not uncommon that the man neither assumes any financial responsibility for his parents nor for his conjugal family. His income is spent on alcohol, gambling or visiting prostitutes. When this happens, the wife is the main economic support of the family and controls the finances of the household.⁸⁷

In the Netherlands until the 1960s the traditional practice of a separate, but complimentary gender division of labour among middle-class families was prevalent; the highly valued breadwinning role was ascribed to the husband and the strong wife-mother role was attributed to the woman who was responsible for home-making and bringing up the children (Palriwala 2005). Traditionally, finances and profession were perceived to be the husband's private domain and he assigned some of his income to his wife to run the household.⁸⁸ During the past decades, Dutch women have increasingly participated in paid employment, though they do not seem to aspire to a career and prefer to work only part-time after the birth of their first child (De Valk 2006: 20). If the husband has full-time employment and the wife works part-time, the former assumes more responsibility for the family expenses, whereas the earnings from the latter are extra money for herself and for the children's needs. The young, educated spouses without a child tend to separate their income and savings as well as preferring to share household expenses. A few, who are married and have maintained a relationship for years, may combine their salaries in a joint bank account and spend part of it as housekeeping money.

Economic dependency in the initial period

The Thai women, regardless of their education and socio-economic status, expected to receive a monthly allowance from their Dutch husbands. This expectation is not greatly influenced by the practices of financial arrangement observed in households in Thai society. As already stated, when women from the rural, lower classes earned their own living in Thailand, many of them did not acquire a regular income from their former Thai husbands, who were economically

⁸⁷ The idea of manhood in Thai society is discussed in Chapter One.

⁸⁸ Exceptions can be found in farming and trading families, in which the women also play a part in managing the household earnings.

irresponsible. Instead, it is the global economic discrepancy between Thailand and the Netherlands and the imagination of an affluent Europe which combine to have an impact on the women's higher material expectations of their Dutch husbands, which I will discuss in Chapter Four.

Upon arrival, almost all the women interviewed were financially dependent on their Dutch husbands, although some women from middle-class families could initially count on their own savings collected from their well-paid work in Thailand. In rare circumstances, a few Dutch men with a high income offered a woman, who was a full-time housewife, some money to run the household and to send home (nine couples).⁸⁹ After Suwipha and her two daughters arrived in the Netherlands, for instance, Jos, who works as a manager in a company, allocated her 850 Euro a month for all the household expenses including food and energy costs. She could spend part of this amount for her own and her daughters' needs. Every month Jos allowed her send 100 Euro to her mother in Thailand.

The majority of the Dutch husbands paid for food, residence permits and health insurance. They did not allow their Thai wife to have a joint bank account from which she could pay the current household expenses and the remittances she sent home. Should she need to buy clothes or cosmetics, the husband may give her extra money. However, if he considers that this is an unnecessary extravagance, he may refuse to pay. When I described this situation to female Dutch respondents, almost all of them, particularly the younger ones, found this unacceptable. They said that this might be a traditional practice in their parents' generation, but in this day and age a husband should not treat his wife this way. They emphatically said that the housewife should have the right to spend her husband's income on running the household and occasionally on the fulfilment of her own needs, as she also contributes to the family by caring for the husband and children as well as tackling the household chores. Although the relationship between Dutch-Dutch spouses may not be ideally equal in practice and the housewives may feel financially dependent on their husbands, they do more or less have access to their husbands' incomes or can negotiate about this. For the Thai migrant women, it was difficult to accept this and they were

⁸⁹ Later, only four women still obtained a monthly allowance from their Dutch husbands and were full-time housewives, whereas the rest no longer received this and had commenced working to earn their own income.

disappointed that their Dutch spouses were not as generous as when they were in Thailand. Unfortunately, they had nothing with which to bargain. Their social position as an immigrant wife who was dependent on her Dutch husband for both income and legal residence limited their negotiating agency and generated an imbalance in the power relations (I shall return to this in Chapter Four).

The financial reliance of the women on their Dutch partner and the unbalanced power relations between the couples are not the only factors which constrain the women's access to their husbands' incomes. Their divergent ideals of filial responsibility are another determinant which arouses in the Dutch men, especially those with a minimal income, a feeling of unease about their Thai wives' transferring a part of the economic resources of the *gezin* (conjugal family) to her family in Thailand. From some Dutch men's perspective, their Thai wife is not properly equipped to manage the household finances because she often buys Thai food at expensive prices or superfluous household items. They give her a limited amount as a monthly allowance, but do not permit her to have a common account. Other husbands, who have later learned that their Thai wife gambles or often lends and/or borrows money to or from her female Thai friends, may be convinced that it is reasonable not to give her any allowances at all, nor to allow her access to their income. A few men in their fifties with a young Thai wife may not like the fact that their wife might have her own savings as they fear that she may find a new partner and run away.

Without a monthly allowance

The Thai women who were single or had experienced a previous childless marriage relationship and whose parents have enough savings to be self-reliant delay their participation in the labour market in the Netherlands. They depend completely on their Dutch partners and have no control over the management of family resources (three couples). The husband is a breadwinner and the woman is a housewife who stays home and takes care of the household chores. He plans the household budget and is responsible for the payment of the residence permit and the health insurance of his Thai wife. Every weekend the husband accompanies his wife when she buys food for the household and he pays for it. He does not give his wife an allowance, nor has she access to his income. It is also difficult for her to request money to send back home. Lan, for

instance, was single when she was in Thailand and her siblings regularly gave the parents money. During the first two years after her migration, she did not work at all. She received 10 Euro a day from her husband, Mark, for her daily expenses while she took a one-year Dutch language course. She kept this together with the tax deduction money⁹⁰ of around 160 Euro a month as her own savings. She gave some of it to her parents when she visited Thailand each year. Lan expressed her feelings about her financial reliance on Mark:

I had worked as a government official and earned my own salary when I was in Thailand. I could spend my money on what I wanted. Here I cannot do so freely because I have no income. I have had to adapt tremendously. At first, I did not feel comfortable because I totally depended on him. It was like begging him for money. But I didn't want to work here. As you know, it is difficult to find a good job. I had to resign from my career and to leave my family in Thailand to live with him. It is his responsibility to take care of me financially.

Economic dependency eventually drives these women to take up part-time employment. Unquestionably, their ability to earn an income increases their power position within the household. They experience a greater freedom in spending money for their own purposes and in remitting money home. Because the women now earn some income, the husband expects that they should begin to contribute to the maintenance of the *gezin*. The women themselves also realise that he may grow dissatisfied and that marital conflict may flare up if they keep saving all their part-time income for their family at home, while they provide nothing to the *gezin*. They assign part of their earnings to household expenses. After having been a full-time housewife for two years, Lan began to work as a housekeeper eight hours a week in two Dutch households. For this she received around 320 Euro a month. She used this income to buy her outfits, enjoy some

⁹⁰ This money which married and unmarried partners receive is based on the general tax deduction (*algemene heffingskorting*) for fiscal partners. All couples receive this, but should one partner have no or a very low income and he/she does not pay tax and therefore cannot receive this deduction. In this case the deduction is based on the income of (i.e. the tax paid by) the partner but given straight to the other partner. It is basically a redistribution of tax deduction among partner and not a subsidy.

social activities with her Thai female friends, and offer occasional assistance to her siblings. She also allocated 150 Euro a month to help Mark with the household finances.

Separating the income

Conscious of their former economic independence in Thailand and their responsibility for the families at home, the rural, less-educated women resolutely decided to seek employment soon after they found out that their Dutch husband would not provide them with any finances. When the woman begins to make her own money, the spouses separate their incomes. This was the case among twenty-eight couples, which is a majority among the respondents I interviewed. The husband is responsible for the main household expenses and the woman pays for food and miscellaneous household items. The woman counts on her own income when she remits money home. Since the woman makes some monetary contribution to the *gezin*, it is fairly acceptable for the Dutch spouse that she gives her natal family material assistance. This was the case in Nit's household. She earns 8 Euro per hour as an assistant-cook at a Thai restaurant. On Friday she has a day off, but she earns an extra income of nearly 50 to 100 Euro by selling the members of the Thai community Thai desserts and tickets in an informal lottery (*huai*). Her total income is around 900 to 1000 Euro a month without paying an income tax. The main part of her income, 500 to 600 Euro per month, is sent to her parents and her two sons in Thailand as a remittance. Occasionally she gives her relatives some extra financial assistance. In the Netherlands, she pays the food expenses, while Jaap is responsible for the house rent and energy costs. She can only spend a little bit of her income on herself. Most of it is distributed to her two children and her parents in Thailand.

Sharing the income together

After years of marriage, some Thai-Dutch couples do begin to share their income (eleven couples). This is particularly the case for women with a high education who have managed to be employed in a well-paid profession or for women who own a small enterprise such as a Thai restaurant, a grocery shop or a massage parlour with their husband. They put their earnings into a joint bank account which both of them can access. They define a certain amount as housekeeping

money, expenses for their leisure and remittances to be sent to the family in Thailand. They may have either a separate or a shared savings account. The woman can often negotiate with her Dutch husband on quite an equal power basis in managing the household economy because she earns a high income and the main part is distributed to their own *gezin* first. This type of financial arrangement is illustrated by Lalita and Nikolaas. Lalita had spent her first three years in the Netherlands taking Dutch language and occupational training courses. She relied totally on the economic support from Nikolaas, who worked as a computer programmer in a logistics department of a company. He transferred part of his income to a bank account which Lalita could use for household expenses and to settle her own requirements. Apart from sending 150 Euro a month to her parents, Lalita had to be thrifty since she personally earned no income. When she had finished all her training courses, she qualified for the profession of a nurse in a hospital. After years of work, she received a higher salary. She described how she and Nikolaas arranged their finances and her feeling of economic independence:

Compared with many couples, Nikolaas and I earn a quite good income. We combine our earnings and we have two ATM cards. We use part of the money to pay for all the household expenses or sometimes for a dinner at a restaurant. Since I have had my own income and share with that of Nikolaas, I feel freer to spend some more money for my own purposes. Usually, I spend more money than he. I pay for my clothes and cosmetics. I also send remittances to my family in Thailand.

PS: How much money do you send back home monthly?

When I began to earn my own income, I increased the amount of the allowance I sent to my parents. I currently give them around 15,000 Baht [300 Euro] a month. Should my brother or sister need money urgently, I also provide them an extra amount.

The economic household arrangements of the cross-cultural marriage couples change in relation to the women's life-cycle stage. Because of the dearth of informal care support from kin in the

Netherlands, the Thai women have to leave their employment when they are pregnant and become a full-time mother, taking care of their newly born baby. As they have no income, they again rely economically on their Dutch spouses. Consequently, they encounter the limits of their financial possibilities in spending money on their own needs and supporting the family at home. This is what happened to Siri. Upon arrival in the Netherlands, her husband, Marco, who is forty-three years old and works as a computer technician at a bank, provided Siri with 600 Euro a month for the household expenses. Every three months, he also reserved some extra money (around 200 Euro) as remittances for Siri's parents. Although the rest of the monthly allowance was sufficient for Siri, she needed to spend it carefully. Six months after her arrival, she obtained a job as a housekeeper at a social centre for the elderly. She began to work at 9 a.m. until noon and took a compulsory Dutch language course in the afternoon. After tax deduction, she received a payment of around 600 Euro a month. As she obtained her own earnings, Marco reduced the amount of housekeeping money to 300 Euro a month. She spent part of her income to support the finances of the *gezin* and she sent 200 Euro a month home. Currently, she has resigned from her work and has taken daily care of her one-year-old daughter. Marco refuses to send regular remittances to her parents and prefers to save money for their daughter. This situation sometimes causes quarrels and marital conflicts between them as Siri is obligated to remit money to her family in Thailand.

For the women who have brought their children from a previous relationship to the Netherlands, their long-term economic dependency on the Dutch spouse marks the inequality of the marital relationship. It also causes occasional conflicts, a situation which stimulates these women to search for an occupation. Initially, Suwipha was a full-time housewife and she and her two daughters from a former marriage were dependent on Jos financially. When they quarrelled, Jos sometimes referred pointedly to his economic contribution to the family. This made Suwipha uncomfortable. After three years of reliance, she has begun to work formally as a cleaner in a social centre for the elderly. Some of her income is spent as housekeeping money. She has grown more independent in using her earnings to fulfil the needs of herself, her daughters and her parents in Thailand.

Conclusion

Within one particular setting people seem to think of the ‘creation of a family’ as something ‘natural’ or taken-for-granted. They refer to their own conceptions of family to guide their behaviour, expectations and responsibility towards their family members. There is also a perceptible tendency indicating that they often do not recognise differences in other cultural family scripts. We are able to discern the arbitrary and socially constructed attributes of the family of the cross-cultural marriage spouses, since they are revealed in the confrontation between the two different sets of family norms. Between the Thai-Dutch couples, the financial commitment of the wife to her family in Thailand is interpreted differently and hence constitutes a major source of marital conflict. This practice is viewed as a significant filial obligation and is morally highly valued by the Thai wife, but it is not appreciated in the same way by her Dutch partner.

The Thai-Dutch spouses adhere to the different family structures and inter-generational relations, which are inherent in their different moral interpretations, perceptions and practices to do with familial responsibility. In Thai society, *khrop khrua* (family) includes both ties of procreation, affinal kin and distant relatives. Conjuality neither signifies a decline in consanguinity nor a termination of rights, obligation and sharing resources between the woman and her natal family. The parent-child relationship (*bun-khun*) is reciprocal and imposes a lifelong obligation on the latter by the former. The relationship of children to their parents is prioritised above other relationships. Brothers and sisters are also expected to assist each other economically. As a consequence of these normative ideals, Thai migrant women, who move to the Netherlands and build their own conjugal families, still define themselves as an integral part of their family members in Thailand and feel responsible for their well-being. In contrast, marriage in Dutch society represents a clear separation in residence and economic independence between *gezin* (the husband, wife and young offspring) and *familie* (the elderly parents, siblings and extended kin networks). The primacy of the *gezin* forms the basis of family life. The tie between parents and child flows downwards and is not bound to a life-long reciprocal care arrangement with parents. The relationship with siblings is voluntary and based on mutual

understanding, instead of financial aspects. The value attributed to an ‘independent individual’, making his/her own life and not being a burden to others, is also predominant. Moreover, the distinction between informal welfare in Thailand and the welfare provided by the state in the Netherlands is linked to ideas about family relations and responsibility. Therefore, the Dutch husband at first does not realise his Thai wife’s inherent economic responsibility to her natal family and finds this unacceptable.

Chapter One suggested that the dichotomous perception of family relations—either the nuclear family in the West or the extended kin ties in the East—obfuscates the role of family members in the marriage decisions of the Dutch (or European) men. In this chapter, I take this one step farther and argue that this demarcation also ignores relationships between in-laws in Northern European societies in general and in Asian and European cross-cultural marriages in particular. Although the Dutch men do not have much daily contact with their Thai in-laws, the in-laws are unavoidably involved in their marriage relationships, especially when these in-laws request their Thai wives for financial assistance. Apparently, the Thai women who relocate to the Netherlands have face-to-face interaction with their Dutch affinal kin. Both of them initially are less aware of the different unsaid rules of in-law relationship which they uphold (hierarchy and reciprocity in Thai society versus voluntary help and absence of contractual ties in Dutch society). They apply their own ideals to interact with each other and to make sense of each other. This situation sometimes leads to misapprehensions and a feeling of isolation and lack of daily assistance for the Thai daughter-in-law. My findings also highlight that to some degree the Dutch mother-in-law is involved in and concerned about the *gezin* of her son and Thai daughters-in-law, even though the ideal that the *gezin* is given priority over the *familie* does not allow her explicit intervention.

Family life is not an abstract system which entails a rigid set of family norms and obligations. It is instead a fairly dynamic domain in which family members acknowledge, but also redefine and negotiate these cultural prescriptions. The women feel obligated to pursue the welfare of their families, but they sometimes employ coping strategies to negotiate their families’ continuous material demands. Sometimes, after they have been exposed to different family ideas for years, the Thai women, their Dutch spouses and the Dutch in-laws intentionally or

unintentionally learn, compromise, and adapt to such distinctions. When a need for care arises, they sometimes initiate everyday contact and increase their mutual assistance. However, certain family responsibilities such as providing financial aid to siblings, which is incompatible with the Dutch family norms, may not easily be transcended.

The distinction in family relations (*khrop khrua* versus *gezin*) affects the management of household finances in the Thai-Dutch marriages. Many Dutch husbands do not allow their Thai wives to have access to their income since they are uncertain about whether they will distribute the main finances of the *gezin* to their *khrop khrua*. The control of the household economy also constitutes a dynamic feature and varies according to the women's situation of employment in the Netherlands, their status of an immigrant and changes in their life-courses.

Chapter Three

The Dynamics of Kinship and Friendship Networks

In Chapter One I discussed the economic, social and cultural determinants which influence the flow of marriage migration of Thai women to the Netherlands. I also emphasised that the women themselves are able to make the decision to marry a Dutch spouse and to migrate to the Netherlands, although to a certain degree their decision is dependent on their life-stage and the socio-economic background of their natal family. Neither structural nor individual factors, however, can provide a full understanding of how marriage migration operates within a web of interpersonal relations and how this flow of spatial mobility is sustained over time. Social network theory can give a better explanation not only of why people migrate, but also of why some people do not move, since their decision is heavily influenced by existing linkages both within the country of origin and within the country of destination. These social networks also have a selective influence on the destination of migration. Applying a social network analysis, I will look into the role of network connections in marriage migration of Thai migrant women in the Netherlands.

It is generally assumed that relatives are obliged to help each other, since kinship marks a special relationship which cannot be applied to other relations. Given this idea, pioneer migrants are supposed to provide endless assistance to their newly arrived relatives. I question such an assumption. Further most Thai women do not have family members living in the Netherlands. Friendship forms another crucial relationship in the women's daily life. During my fieldwork, however, many women expressed their hesitation to enter into instant friendship relations with their female expatriates. Why is that the case? In Chapter Two I made the point that the Thai-Dutch couples encounter two distinctive family sets. Will they adhere to different ideas and practices of friendship? And, apart from networks of kin and friends, do the women establish social connections with Dutch people or migrants from other ethnic groups?

The aim of this chapter is to shed light on these questions. I will start by examining how social networks facilitate the marriage migration of Thai women in the Netherlands and how

gender influences the establishment of these networks. The formation, continuation and fracture of these kinship and friendship relations among the migrant women are investigated in the second and third sections respectively. I will also discuss the different levels of Thai friendship, which are defined by the women themselves and expressed in different Thai idioms. As the women also develop social linkages outside the networks of kin and friends, I will emphasise the weak ties among the migrant women which serve as a source for informal economic strategies. Finally I will explore the acquaintanceship of the women with both the hosts and with immigrants from other countries.

The impact of social networks on marriage migration

In the Introduction I reviewed the different analytical levels of international migration. On the one hand, a micro-level perspective considers migration to be a rational decision made by an individual who evaluates costs and benefits of spatial movement. On the other hand, a macro analysis indicates the political and economic circumstances in both the sending and receiving country as a forceful condition which stimulates or obstructs migration (Boyd 1989; Massey 1990; Pedraza 1991). Any overemphasis on the rational individual or on the ultimate power of structural determinants is skewed. At a meso-level, the social network theory connects the gap between micro- and macro-perspectives and provides an insight into the dynamic nature of migration over time and space. Several studies stress that such pioneer migrants as relatives, friends or co-villagers who share the same community of origin offer reliable information and help those who have just arrived to deal with job opportunities, housing, finances, local social customs, and emotional problems (Choldin 1973; Faist 2000; Fawcett 1989). The network connections help to reduce the costs and risks of the process of geographical movement and resettlement. Over time, the flow of migration becomes self-sustaining and a chain of migration is maintained.

However, kinship and friendship networks among pioneer migrants, newcomers and prospective migrants are apparently seen as neutral relations. A gendered perspective is seldom taken into consideration. Gender differences may affect the formation of social networks and the

strategies of dealing with conflicts among both male and female migrants within the network. In this section, I apply both social network theory and a gendered approach to explore how kinship and friendship affect the flow of marriage migration of Thai women to the Netherlands. I pose the question how do the different qualities of social ties (kin, friends and co-villagers) shape the different degrees of support in the process of migration?

Prior to their marriage migration to the Netherlands, the majority of the Thai women (thirty-five persons) interviewed had initially taken part in internal migration in Thailand and some of them (sixteen persons) had subsequently undergone a shorter or longer stay abroad in such countries as the USA, Germany, Sweden, Hong Kong or Singapore. My findings show a similar trend revealed in several studies on Thai migrant women in Europe (Lisborg 2002; Pataya 1999; Ratana 2005). To a certain degree, these Thai women are independent and have acquired a range of life experiences before their migration to the Netherlands (or to Europe). For several women, marriage migration to the Netherlands has indeed been another sequence in their former experiences of geographical movement. The women's previous rural-urban migration in Thailand and their later movement abroad has been made possible through their social networks, as the life-history of Siri illustrates. In 1997 when Siri was seventeen years old and had finished secondary school, she migrated to Bangkok through the introduction of a female co-villager to work at a factory where this villager had worked before. She earned 100 Baht a day (around 2 Euro). During these three years, she changed her job several times, seeking employment in other factories which offered her a higher wage. One of Siri's aunts had married a man from Hong Kong and had lived there for many years. In 2000, she persuaded her to move to Hong Kong to assist her in undertaking household chores and taking care of her children, after her Filipino maid had resigned. She offered Siri a salary of around 20,000 Baht a month (400 Euro). Siri decided to move to Hong Kong and worked two years for her aunt. As they shared the same residence, Siri sometimes quarrelled with her aunt. Later, she changed her job and worked one year as a living-in maid in another house. She obtained the information about this job from a female Thai friend, who is also employed as a house maid in Hong Kong. In 2003 Siri returned to Thailand where she waited for a new work contract. During the six months of the bureaucratic proceeding for the contract, she met Marco (her Dutch husband), who happened to be on holiday in Phuket,

Southern Thailand. After a relationship lasting a month, Marco arranged a visit of three months to the Netherlands for her. After one year she migrated to live with him.

Apart from the increasing influence of globalisation dispersed through tourism and technological advancement in communications and transport, social networks between pioneer women and potential female migrants are another essential source which promotes the marriage migration of Thai women to the Netherlands in three different ways. The degree of assistance varies according to the characteristics of their social ties. One way in which these networks operate is that the pioneer women provide potential migrants with the information required for the migration process. They do not offer financial support nor do they assist in the application for a visa. This situation is found among acquaintances and co-villagers.

The second way occurs when pioneer women create a connection between a prospective migrant and a Dutch man who appears to be a friend of their husband. The Thai-Dutch couples visit Thailand for a holiday in the company of the male friend of the Dutch spouse. In her hometown, this male friend is introduced to a potential migrant, who is either a relative or a friend of the woman. This may eventually lead to a cross-cultural marriage.

The final way is used when the women request their Dutch husband to act as a guarantor in the application for a tourist visa for their close female relatives and friends. The pioneer women first advance the money for the travel costs and the visa application fee. They also arrange accommodation. During the three months of the potential migrant's stay in the Netherlands, she persuades a Dutch man to marry her or the pioneer migrants initiate a contact. If their introduction is successful, the women have to return to Thailand after the expiration of their visa. There they have to wait until their Dutch partner has processed an MVV (*Machtiging tot Voorlopig Verblijf*) visa to migrate to the Netherlands.⁹¹ These networks are formed through close kinship and friendship ties; they are trustworthy and reduce the economic and social risks of migration. After Yui, for instance, had completed six years primary school in 1987 when she was fourteen years old, she followed her older brother to Bangkok to seek employment. She worked as a sub-contract seamstress and earned approximately 1600 Baht a month (30 Euro).

⁹¹ See further details about immigration regulations in the Netherlands and the application for an MVV visa in Chapter Four.

When she was eighteen, she married a Thai man who was a colleague of her brother. After a relationship of six years, from which they had a three-year-old son, who is now in care of his father in Thailand, they separated. In 1999, Yui visited her younger sister, Mon, who was married to a Dutch man and had lived in the Netherlands for almost ten years. Mon paid Yui's ticket and visa. Mon's Dutch spouse introduced Yui to one of his male friends. But Yui could speak neither English nor Dutch and their relationship faltered. Mon made a new attempt by introducing Yui to a customer who often visited the take-away Thai restaurant where she worked. He had had a Thai girlfriend before, but had separated from her two years earlier. He was willing to pursue on acquaintanceship with Yui. After they had known each other for a month, Yui moved in to live with him. She returned to Thailand after the expiration of her tourist visa. After that, her Dutch boyfriend arranged the application for an MVV visa to bring her to the Netherlands.

The social networks which facilitated the intermarriage and migration of my respondents consisted mainly of informal interpersonal ties such as relatives or friends. None the less, some women mentioned that a few of their Thai female friends or acquaintances contact and later marry a Dutch man through the mediation of an agency. The fee for this arrangement ranges from 1000 to 2000 Euro. Some introduction agencies request an advance payment of 50 per cent of the service fee without any possibility of reimbursement. If her marriage succeeds, the husband is responsible for the remainder. Other agencies require the potential Dutch spouse pay the entire service fee.

The support for marriage migration to the Netherlands given to prospective migrants by pioneer migrants is apparently based on female-centered social networks.⁹² These specific network connections emerge neither automatically nor inadvertently. Instead, their formation is intrinsically linked to the historical, social and demographic characteristics of the Thai migrants in the Netherlands (and Europe). Given the fact that marriage is the most feasible way for Thai to migrate to Europe, the popularity of tourism to Thailand and the higher incidence of Europeans marrying a Thai woman than a Thai man, a gender selection of the Thai migration flow to Europe is generated. The women predominate in the community of Thai migrants in the Netherlands (and

⁹² Only two of the women I interviewed migrated to the Netherlands through the assistance of an uncle who owned a Thai restaurant.

Europe) (Lisborg 2002; Pataya 2002a; Ratana 2005). Consequently, the probability that female-based social networks will be established is high. These female ties facilitate a subsequent flow of marriage migration for the potential migrant women. Through these networks, the flow of Thai female migration to this region is sustained over time.⁹³ This reflects the reality that even though the immigration regulations in Europe have become more restrictive, social networks among Thai migrant women serve as another crucial source by which to establish contacts between a Thai woman and the European spouse-to-be, which eventually lead to marriage migration to this destination.

Fluidity of kinship networks among Thai migrant women

In migration literature, kin relations among pioneer migrants and newcomers tend to be considered unchanging and self-perpetuating. In other words, once these ties are established, they are presumed to be sustained automatically. There are few studies on how kinship networks of migrants are formed and continued. Moreover, these linkages are apparently characterised as reliable and cohesive; the assumption is that the pioneer migrants willingly and invariably offer all kinds of aid and that the newcomers can consistently draw upon these network connections as a vital source of assistance. Only a few studies (Menjivar 1995) describe under what conditions this support from kin ties cannot be claimed and why these connections are weakened and become conflictive—or even break down.

The recent anthropological view of kinship is very useful to a study of the kinship-based networks of migrants. As discussed in Chapter One, at the end of the twentieth century the anthropological perspective on kinship was criticised because of its static view, its lack of gender awareness, and its dichotomous division between modern Euro-American and traditional

⁹³ Social ties among Thai migrants may vary with the historical, political and economic conditions of the receiving country. For instance, during the oil boom in the 1980s there was a stream of male Thai migrants to the Middle East to take unskilled and semi-skilled employment (Supang 1999). It is possible that male migrants constituted the majority of the social networks and that these connections provided information about job recruitment in the Gulf region to potential male migrants. During the late 1990s, Thai migration moved to the new industrial countries in East and Southeast Asia in response to the increased demand for construction and domestic work. Both Thai men and women could be part of the social networks in Taiwan, Hong Kong or Singapore, where the demand for both male and female labour was high.

primitive society. Another fundamental critique of anthropological kinship studies is their assumption that kinship is universally rooted in biology and procreation. Schneider (1984) and other scholars (Galvin 2001; Stone 2006; Yanagisako and Collier 1987) argue that the socio-scientific notion that kin relations are based only on biological connections and reproduction is a Euro-American idea of kinship. It is just one of a number of possible ways to construct 'kin relations'.⁹⁴ People in other societies may define their connections in different ways, for instance through the sharing of blood, food, nurturing or residence. In addition, kinship is not considered immutable everywhere. Carsten (1995; 2000) suggested the term 'relatedness' to refer to a more flexible, open and neutral concept of kin relations and of other kinds of social relationships such as friends and neighbours. She also questions the dichotomous distinction of the conventional kinship theory which is based either on 'facts of biology' (as birth) or 'facts of sociality' (as commensality). In her work, she concludes that the experience of relatedness of the Malays on the island of Langkawi is in a constant state of fluidity and derived from sharing 'the hearth'—both acts of procreation and sharing over time the same blood, milk and food by people who share the same house (1995: 234-236).

In this section, I apply the fluid characteristics of 'relatedness' in an examination of the kinship networks of Thai migrant women and their relatives in the Netherlands. I go on to explore how these ties are constructed, continued and terminated.

Eighteen of the Thai women interviewed have one or more relatives, such as their mother, sister, aunt or niece living in the Netherlands. The pioneer women provide information about job opportunities, Dutch language courses and extension of the residence permit to a relative who just has arrived in the Netherlands. They are also expected to give material assistance, if the newcomer encounters a financial problem.

Although these female migrants do pool resources to help their newly arrived kin, in practice it does not mean that they will do so invariably. Given the scarcity of funds and the

⁹⁴ There is disagreement among scholars about the applicability of kinship to cross-cultural studies. Schneider (1984) concluded that kinship cannot be considered as a distinct domain cross-culturally since 'there is no such thing as kinship and kinship might only exist in Euro-American culture' (1984: vii). In contrast, other scholars (Carsten 1995; Galvin 2001; Stone 2001) are aware of the Euro-American biological bias of the kinship construction, but they argue that kinship might constitute a cross-culturally valid category (see for more details about this debate Carsten 2000, Galvin 2001, Schneider 1984, and Stone 2001).

difficulty in finding well-paid work encountered by immigrants, a long period of dependency of the newcomers on their relatives could drain already strained resources and generate conflicts among them. Among Thai women, such a complete reliance on their kin in the Netherlands is nevertheless rare for two reasons. First, the majority of the women entered the Netherlands through intermarriage. Their Dutch husband has been one of the crucial sources of support during the first period of settlement. He has arranged housing, food, residence permit and health insurance for his Thai wife. As a result, the women have rarely counted on their relatives for housing and making a living. They do tend to depend on kin for occasional financial help, especially when they cannot yet find a job and their husband refuses to provide them an allowance to send back home.

Second, the necessity of supporting their family in Thailand stimulates many women to accept employment soon after their arrival. With the increasing global demand for unskilled female labour aided and abetted by the assistance of social networks, sooner or later the women can find a job such as a waitress, assistant-cook or housekeeper. Once the women are able to earn their own income, they are not totally dependent on their kin financially, as in the case of Chit. She wished to have work soon after her arrival in the Netherlands in 1999. Her four children from her earlier marriage lived in care of her former Thai husband in Thailand,⁹⁵ but he earned insufficient income to support them. Chit had to send them a regular allowance. During the first few months of her stay, she was unemployed. Her mother, who was married to an Indonesian man and had lived in the Netherlands for fourteen years, sent some of her own money to Chit's children in Thailand. As her mother knew many Thai migrants in the Thai community in the Netherlands, she gathered information about job opportunities. Through her help, Chit became employed as a masseuse three months after her arrival. Once she had her own earnings, she no longer had to rely on her mother.

After they have been settled for years, the relationship of the women with their kin in the Netherlands is gradually strengthened through the sharing of material aid and regular contact. They share Thai food, music, films and occasionally economic assistance. It is quite difficult for

⁹⁵ Recently, her eldest son found a job and lives by himself. Her second daughter moved to the Netherlands and has lived with Chit for four years, while the rest have remained with their father in Thailand.

them to have frequent face-to-face contact, as they are fully occupied with their daily heavy work-load. However, when they have a day off, they gather and have Thai food together. If they reside in different cities, they maintain their daily contact through phone calls.

Sharing geographical proximity and having the common experience of a migrant are factors which generate a propensity among the women and their kin in the Netherlands to share emotional support. When the women have a marital conflict, a problem with their work or financial difficulties, they are likely to turn to those relatives in the Netherlands with whom they have built up a good relationship. They rarely consult their family in Thailand, as they believe that these kin lack an accurate understanding of the living and working conditions overseas. Because of the Thai idea of an affluent Europe, the women tend to prefer let their relatives at home believe that they have a better life in the Netherlands by sending them remittances, an issue to which I shall return in Chapter Five.

The kinship networks are continued on a reciprocal basis. This is grounded on the Thai cultural notions of *khrop khrua* (family) and *khvam pen phi nong* (being each other's siblings).⁹⁶ Gratitude is owed relatives (*yat*) and siblings (*phi nong*) who have given help. When these *yat* and *phi nong* are in trouble, the obligation is to return their assistance. According to these ideas, the migrant women are—particularly when they own a small business—supposed to render material aid and offer a job to relatives who have assisted them earlier. The status of a migrant is another factor which sustains mutual obligations within the migrants' kinship networks. As the women live far away from their family at home, their relatives in the Netherlands are a vital source of assistance. The women never know when they may find themselves in trouble; hence it is wise to maintain mutual support with these kin.

The relationship between Nit and her younger sister, Suda, is an example that illustrates how kinship networks among the Thai migrant women operate and are maintained. Suda moved to the Netherlands after her marriage in 1996 and Nit followed her three years later. In the first months after Nit's arrival, Suda frequently visited Nit and brought her Thai food. Nit could not yet find any occupation. She needed to send remittances to her two sons in Thailand, but Jaap, her Dutch husband, did not provide her with any money. Suda earned an income from her work

⁹⁶ For further explanation of these notions see Chapter Two.

as a maid in a hotel. She sometimes gave Nit some money to send to her sons. However, Suda also had the responsibility to provide a monthly allowance to the three children of her previous marriage in Thailand. She was unable to offer financial assistance to Nit all the time. Six months later, Nit found a job as a masseuse in a traditional massage parlour. She could be financially self-reliant. Nit and Suda did not meet each other frequently, but they called each other often. When Nit had a day off, she visited Suda and vice-versa. When Suda's eldest son married in 2001, Nit gave 30,000 Baht (around 600 Euro) to Suda to help with the expenses of his wedding. They sometimes had minor disputes, but they forgave each other.

The relationship of *khwam pen phi nong* (being each other's siblings) is recognised in Thai society, but this does not imply that, in practice, these ties always constitute closer relations than those between aunt and niece or between cousins. The quality of kinship networks among Thai migrant women in the Netherlands is also built on their previous and present relationships, as in the example of Wong and Suwan.⁹⁷ When Wong was fifteen years old in 1987, she followed her aunt, Suwan, to Bangkok to work with her on a construction site. After one year, Wong moved in to live with a male co-worker and they had a son together. Wong often quarrelled with him because he did not take any financial responsibility for her and her son. When she had marital problems, she often turned to Suwan, who often offered a shoulder to cry on. After they had been together for five years, Wong finally decided to separate from her husband. She left her son with her mother in her home town in the North-east of Thailand. Suwan suggested Wong work as a cook in a small food shop in Bangkok. Later Suwan married a Dutch man. In 1997 she and her Dutch husband made a trip to Thailand with a male Dutch friend. There she introduced this friend to Wong. Later, Wong married him and moved to the Netherlands. Wong found a job as a masseuse and earned quite a good income. When Suwan had financial problems, Wong gave her some help. Over the years, Suwan and Wong have developed a close relationship.

The mutual obligations between the Thai women and their relatives in the Netherlands have a contradictory feature. Although they form a safety-net which offers assistance in urgent situations, they can be a source of conflict among kin. As described earlier, the women are

⁹⁷ If the age of siblings or cousins does not differ and they have assisted each other continuously both in Thailand and the Netherlands, it is not uncommon for them to feel they are relatives and friends at the same time.

expected to give reciprocal assistance to relatives who have helped them previously. If they fail or refuse to reciprocate assistance, a family quarrel, or even a breakdown in the kinship network may occur. After having lived in the Netherlands five years, Mon, a younger sister of Yui, became the owner of a massage parlour. Through Mon's assistance, another younger sister, Phirom, married a Dutch man, who happened to be a male friend of Mon's Dutch spouse and moved to the Netherlands in 2002. Mon persuaded her to work in the parlour, because Phirom lived in the same city as Mon and she could not yet find any job. Mon trained Phirom in the art of massage. Nevertheless, Mon did not offer Phirom a high wage because she had often helped Phirom, particularly by establishing the contact for her marriage migration to the Netherlands. Phirom was expected to return this assistance by working for her. After one year of working together, Phirom asked Mon to raise her wages, but Mon refused. Phirom moved to work in another massage parlour, which paid better. They had a big dispute and severed all contact. Mon was upset about this and grumbled, 'I helped her with many things, but she returned me nothing. As soon as her wings grew strong enough, she flew away'.

Running a business together or borrowing/lending money is another source of tension within kinship networks. Conflicts can exceed a mere verbal dispute and end with the termination of kin ties. Nevertheless, after years, some migrant women and their relatives may become reconciled and re-initiate the contact between them again, while others may remain apart. Such situation is illustrated by Chup and her two sisters. After three years of marriage, Chup separated from her Thai husband in 1986 although they had a daughter. A friend of Chup's father had a niece who was married to a Dutch man and owned a Thai restaurant in the Netherlands. She needed a cook and a waitress for her restaurant. In 1989 she arranged a visa for Chup and Chup's younger sister, Wanna, to migrate to the Netherlands and to work at her restaurant.⁹⁸ A year later, their youngest sister, Khem, followed them to the Netherlands to work in this restaurant too. During her work, Chup met a Dutch man, Bert, who was a regular customer and they kept in contact. In 1991, Chup, Wanna and Khem had a problem with the owner because she required

⁹⁸ Compared with the present situation, the immigration regulations at that time were not as strict and it was relatively easy to migrate on the basis of a work contract, especially when it was a specialised, semi-skilled job such as a cook in a Thai restaurant. For more details about the immigration regulations and employment in the Netherlands see the Introduction.

them to work longer without raising their wages. They had to leave the room they had rented from the owner of the restaurant. Bert arranged a place for them to stay. Later Bert and Chup got married. Khem also married with a Dutch male friend of Bert. In 1993, they opened their own small Thai restaurant together. Chup's and Khem's husbands helped with the management. As the restaurant did well, Khem and her husband wanted to become the sole owners. Chup and Khem had a blazing quarrel about this. In the end, they discontinued all business together and they terminated all contact. Khem went to work in another Thai restaurant. They did not inform their mother in Thailand about their conflict. Two years after the termination of their contact, Chup became pregnant and she had a daughter. Chup's mother visited her in the Netherlands and had the chance to meet her daughters. She noticed the conflict and tried to compromise. She asked Khem to visit Chup and her niece in hospital. When Khem saw her niece and met her mother, her anger evaporated. She began to renew contact with Chup and Wanna again, although their relationship has never become as close as before.

To conclude, kinship networks are one crucial source of assistance to the newcomers in the process of marriage migration and settlement. These social ties have to be cultivated over time through mutual assistance and exchange of emotional support. A refusal to offer reciprocal help and a mutual financial business can cause conflict between the Thai women and their kin in the Netherlands. In addition, these network connections are not invariably reliable and harmonious. Given their limited resources, there is no guarantee that pioneer kin will always help the newcomers. It is also possible that pioneer relatives will take advantage of the newly arrived migrants as they are reliant on these kin, as the situation of Mon and Phirom illustrates. The spur for the migration (whether it be labour migration, migration as a refugee or marriage migration) shapes the extent of dependency on kin and the availability of other sources of support. The majority of Thai women have migrated to the Netherlands through their marriage, although they have later participated in employment. Kinship is not an absolute source of assistance. The women can also count on their Dutch husbands, especially for housing and the earning of a living.

Friendship of Thai migrant women in the Netherlands

When I asked to whom the women actually would turn if they needed help, most women replied that it depended on the circumstances and the people who were available and reliable. A majority, especially the women who are housewives and financially dependent or those who own a business, are inclined to request help from their Dutch spouses for such daily problems as translating formal letters into Dutch and making contact with Dutch officials. They also expected their husbands to be a source of financial and emotional support, as Lan described:

In general, I will think of Mark if I need assistance. If he has a day off and I want to go out, I sometimes ask him to take me by car. He also helps me to process the formalities for the extension of my residence permit. I earn only a minimal income, so he pays for my plane ticket to visit my parents in Thailand once a year. As he is my partner, I also expect him to give me emotional support.

As illustrated above, kin are a vital source at hand if the women have relatives living in the Netherlands and they developed a good relationship with these kin. The women rarely expect material assistance and advice from family in Thailand. They did emphasise, however, the crucial role of their relatives in Thailand in providing care of children and the elderly, a theme on which I will elaborate in Chapter Four.

Many women (thirty-seven persons) mentioned their Thai female friends in the Netherlands as a source of sharing a life-style and enjoying social activities. Of these thirty-seven women, only seventeen stressed that they have Thai friends to whom they can turn for social support and financial assistance. Eight women reported that they have no friends in the Netherlands, as Yui explained:

I am busy with my work, so I don't have enough free time to keep contact with anybody. My colleagues [in the Thai restaurant] are persons to whom I can chat and I have a good time with them. But I cannot talk to them when I have a problem. We work together. I am

afraid of gossip. After I had lived here a few years, I had many friends whose company I enjoyed. I thought that they were my good friends, but they turned their backs when I needed their help. Then, I dropped them.

Friendship seems to be one of the significant interpersonal relations for the Thai migrant women. According to Yui, one can question whether women wish to have Thai friends in the Netherlands? What does 'friend' mean to them? If a friendship is formed among the women, how is it maintained? What causes its discontinuation?

It should be noted that, although women are acquainted with other Thai male and transgendered migrants, friendship among Thai women in the Netherlands is predominantly established with their female expatriates. In general, having friends of the opposite sex is feasible in Thai society. Male friends can be a source of minor help if the women are single and live apart from their family. However, people tend to form close friendship ties with friends of the same gender. It is also considered inappropriate for a married woman to be frequently accompanied by a male friend. As mentioned in this chapter, the number of the women exceeds that of their male counterparts and there is much more opportunity to meet female friends. Therefore, the friendship relations I will describe in what follows refer to those among Thai female migrants.

'We are similar, but we are different'

The majority of the Thai women interviewed have a paradoxical feeling about friendship. On the one hand, they expressed their need to have *phuean* (friends),⁹⁹ who share country of origin and mother tongue. On the other hand, they hesitate to plunge into friendship with their female counterparts immediately. Many women recalled that after they had just arrived in the Netherlands and met other female counterparts, they would immediately talk with them. They asked to exchange telephone numbers since they wanted to keep contact and become friends. Nevertheless, some women were surprised that these female expatriates implacably refused further contact and kept themselves at arm's length. Later, when the women had made Thai friends, they discovered that some friends share only such joyful occasions as having Thai food

⁹⁹ *Phuean* is a neutral word that means friends.

or an outing together, but they cannot count on these friends in need. Gossip and jealousy sometimes occur among friends. After years of living in the Netherlands, the women had found out that sharing the same country of origin and language is not a guarantee that female expatriates will share the same interests and will become a good friend. Their female counterparts also differed from them as they came from varied socio-economic backgrounds and had had different life experiences. Instead of initiating new contacts as they had done before, they grew reluctant to develop friendship with other Thai female migrants, as Rani said:

I want to have Thai friends because it is nice to speak Thai when I am away from home. Yet, I will not initiate a friendship immediately after I have just met others for the first time. I have lived here [in the Netherlands] for ten years. I have met many kinds of Thai people. Although we [Thai migrant women in the Netherlands] are Thai, we are really different. We come from many different regions [in Thailand] and from different backgrounds. Before I become friends with them, I will first investigate that they are really *ching chai lae mai hen kae tua* (sincere and not selfish).

PS: What do you mean by *hen kae tua* (selfish)?

They contact me only because they are after some material advantage or other, like borrowing money and engaging in joyful activities together, but they have never reciprocated any help to me. When I had just met Lan [one of her friends], I needed a few weeks to find out whether I wanted to make any real contact with her. I also needed time to discover whether a person, with whom I have begun to have contact, will be a *phuean thi di* (good friend).

As the Thai migrant women originally come from different parts of Thailand and vary in socio-economic status, there appears to be a tendency for the women to seek the company of those who share a similar sub-culture and come from the same region in Thailand. Apparently, the women

from Isan (the North-east of Thailand), who form the majority of my respondents, often spend time together. When they get together, they speak their own dialect and prepare Isan food.

Class difference is also expressed in friendship. The majority of Thai women in the Netherlands have had little education and come from a rural background. It also appears that some women had worked in sex-related jobs.¹⁰⁰ The Thai migrant women notice these differences in the socio-economic background of their female counterparts. As a result, the educated, middle-class women are likely to select women from the same class and with the same preferences as close friends. The women from a rural, lower class background do the same. However, if the well-educated women obviously differentiate themselves from the rural, less educated women, they may be disliked and become the target of gossip. The influence of different social backgrounds on the selection of friends is reflected in Pla's experience. Pla had obtained a Master's Degree from the US. She has lived in the Netherlands for fourteen years. She always participates in the activities and festivals held by the Thai community in the Netherlands as a volunteer. She can mingle with other Thai migrant women easily, but she has only developed a close friendship with her educated female friends. Phai was one of her close friends with whom she has something in common:

I know several Thai women here and I am welcome to join their social gatherings. But what I also need is to have friends who are able to speak with me in the same 'language' and share the same interests. For example, once, I saw the movie 'Chocolate' and I wondered what the name of a main actress was. I asked Phai about this. She replied that this main actress is Juliette Binoche who had also played in the film 'The English Patient'. Then, I remembered it. This is what I also want from friends. We just had a brief conversation, but we understood each other. If I talked to a [Thai migrant] woman with a little education, she may not be interested in this.

¹⁰⁰ Some women who had worked in a sex-related job attempt sometimes to hide their life-history and claim that they are originally from the middle class. Other women can, however, figure it out by looking at the way they talk and the way they are dressed.

Nevertheless, there is no clear-cut, rigid rule that one can only make friends with persons from the same region of origin or class. If there were, social contacts among the women would be limited. At certain social events, such as Thai festivals or Buddhist ceremonies, the lower-class or less-educated and the middle-class or well-educated women mix.

The process of becoming friends

The making and maintaining of friendship among Thai migrant women is a time-consuming process. The women know many female counterparts as acquaintances (*khon ruchak*) and greet them at occasional meetings at a grocery shop or at Thai festivals. Their relationship with *khon ruchak* permits them to enjoy a social life with a person who shares the same country of origin and to exchange information about job opportunities. They do not keep in touch with these *khon ruchak*, nor do they establish immediate friendship with them hampered in taking such steps by distrust, fear of gossip, and being taken advantage, as in the above quoted interview of Rani.

After the women have occasionally talked with some *khon ruchak* and feel that they probably can get along together, telephone numbers are exchanged. They make phone calls and communicate with each other about their life in general, talking about how they gained contact with their husband, the duration of their stay and their occupation in the Netherlands. Some women begin to accompany each other to a market and have outings to attend Thai festivals or to visit a Thai temple. If, after a few months of keeping contact, the women find that this *khon ruchak* seems to be a good one, they will remain in touch and begin to be *phuean* (friends).

Sharing each other's life-history and at the same time keeping this confidential beyond the reach of other friends are other mile-stones in the direction of being *phuean sanit* (close friends). The private information the women share with their close friends concerns their past occupations in Thailand, their previous marital experiences, and the number of children they have (or do not have). Some women also exchange information about the career and income of their Dutch partner, even though these topics of conversation are somewhat sensitive. If women whose husbands earn a high income often tend to show off, it is possible that this will arouse jealousy and tension among their friends.

Mutual obligations mark the continuation of close friendship. The women often share Thai food, Thai magazines, music and films with their friends. They also help in delivering money or gifts from friends in the Netherlands to their family in Thailand. On the way back, they carry Thai dried food and give some to friends who do not visit Thailand every year. They expect their friends to do the same in return. In this way, inter-generational relations are established and friends become acquainted with each other's family in Thailand. When they bring money or presents, the parents and siblings will obtain information about their daughter or sister in the Netherlands. Usually, the women feel obligated to reply that their friends are doing well, even if this is not the case. When the parents realise that their daughter has good friends in the Netherlands, their concern about their daughter's life overseas is to a certain extent relieved.

Reciprocity among friends also takes place in the form of providing informal child care. If both friends have a young child, they assist each other without any payment. Some financial transaction may take place when a woman asks her friend to care for her children often. Although this care entails some financial payment, the women still perceive it as a form of assistance, particularly when they are the care-giver. Bun and Suwipha lived close to each other and have known each other for nearly three years. In 2005, Bun had to take a compulsory Dutch language course on three days a week. As she often left her one-year-old daughter with Suwipha from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., she paid Suwipha for the daily care. Suwipha explained how she perceived this payment:

Bun asked me to help to take care of her daughter. She gave me 6 Euro per hour. It was fine for me. I didn't do it as a business, but I wanted to help her. If she had sent her daughter to a formal day care centre, she would have had to pay a large amount of money and had to pick her daughter up on time. With me, she could pick up her daughter somewhere between 5 and 7 p.m. and I didn't charge anything extra.

When in need, close friends may be approached for a loan of money without interest. Nevertheless, the women do not request such financial support from their friends directly. They drop some judicious hints such as making that their need of money is modest and that they do not

know to whom they will turn, unless they allow themselves to be exploited by a Thai female private money-lender demanding high interest rates. For fear of a quarrel, many women avoid borrowing or lending a large sum of money from or to friends, whereas others who are addicted to gambling frequently borrow from friends. Not returning a loan to friends, intentionally or unintentionally, can build up tension in a relationship. When there is no sign that the lender will get her money back, she, her spouse or another close friend may drop some hints to the borrower, which may lead to the embarrassment of all concerned and may generate a dispute. It is also possible that the borrower will grow angry, return the money and dissociate herself from the lender or vice-versa. Rani had the following experience with lending money to one of her friends whom she had known for three years:

She had to send money to her mother in Thailand. Normally, her husband provided this amount every month, but her mother had requested it twice this month. She didn't dare to ask more money from him again. She told me that she wanted to borrow money from a [Thai female] private money-lender. She was my friend. I wanted to help her. She first mentioned 1000 Euro. I didn't have such a large amount of money, so I lent her 700 Euro. After a month, it seemed that she had forgotten it. I felt ashamed about talking to her about this. In the end, I informed Jan [Rani's husband]. He made a phone call to her spouse and told him about this debt. Her husband returned the money. After that, she kept her distance to me. Probably, she was angry that her husband found out about this.

Close friends are also able to share both happiness and grief without feeling ashamed. This is related to the ideal of Thai friendship, which is based on both material and emotional support. The different expectation and socialisation of gender roles form another factor which enables women more than men to share their emotions explicitly with friends without having to fear embarrassment. When Mark lost his job and had to sell his house. Lan was deeply worried about this. She cried and talked to Rani and Suwipha, who have been her friends for nearly four years. They gave Lan emotional support comforting that her husband would find a new job soon.

Generally, infrequent face-to-face contact may not necessarily terminate the relations between close friends in Thai society. When they meet again, their friendship can be renewed and they have no problem picking up the threads, although they have not been in contact for a long time. In contrast, the Thai women in the Netherlands live far away from their family and, as already said, their Thai friends are an important source in their everyday life. Without any severe dispute, lack of daily contact by telephone calls or social gatherings can weaken the friendship among them.¹⁰¹

Maintaining friendship also means having ways of handling conflicts. The ways in which the Thai migrant women deal with tensions with their friends are diverse and also depend on the cause of the friction. Mostly, problems are never spoken of directly. Instead of expressing disappointment to friends directly, women gradually begin to dissociate from friends without showing any sign of disappointment or disgruntlement. If it is unavoidable, they greet and talk as if nothing is the matter.¹⁰² None the less, the frequency of gathering together will gradually diminish. Interestingly, the function of gossip among Thai migrant women is ambivalent. Gossip can undoubtedly create conflicts between friends, but it can also prevent a severe dispute among them. The women are afraid that a serious quarrel with a friend may spread to members of the Thai community in the Netherlands through gossip. Moreover, the Thai mode of interaction which avoids 'losing face' (*sia na*)¹⁰³ as much as possible prompts the women to attempt to evade

¹⁰¹ I myself faced a similar situation. When I rarely participate in social gatherings and parties, the women gradually stopped calling me and lost contact with me.

¹⁰² It should be noted that generally the Dutch idea to dealing with a conflict is to discuss it openly and gradually (*'uitpraten'*). As the majority of the Thai women do not have close friends who are Dutch, they might have experience some difficulty in acknowledging these differences. However, they did look unfavourably on the Dutch way of dealing with marital tension and interpreted their Dutch husband's direct discussion of a conflict as quite 'impolite' and intolerably blunt.

¹⁰³ As described in Chapter Two, an individual's sense of being a person in Thai society is based on a socially oriented relationship, in which he/she perceives himself/herself as part of the group and thereby obviates social exclusion. This idea is linked to one of the crucial Thai ways of maintaining interaction, namely conflict avoidance. In other words, when people face a conflict, they tend to avoid a direct confrontation, which could result in fracture of the relationship and 'losing face' (*sai na*) on both sides. The Thai cultural idea of 'face' represents a person's social and professional position, reputation and self-image (Krisana 2005: 18). Therefore, losing face signifies more than mere embarrassment; it is also an admission of a person's inappropriateness in action, appearance and word, which entails a loss of respect and esteem of others towards him/her (Jackson 1995: 42). In the case of my study, the idea of 'losing face' is also connected to the Thai social value of overseas affluence. The migrant women's gaining 'face' surpasses simply their maintenance of their smooth relationships with their families and non-migrant neighbours; it also embraces the display of their overseas livelihood to their families and neighbours. Further details are presented in Chapter Five.

conflicts with others. If the conflict is not severe, the women will compromise. Nevertheless, in the case of a really harsh argument, particularly about borrowing or lending money, the women will explode with anger throwing worries about being the object of gossip to the winds. In such circumstances, social ties among friends are terminated.

'Eating friends' and 'friends to death': different shades of Thai friendship

There is not much research on friendship in Thai society. One exception is the investigation by Piker (1968) and Foster (1976) into friendship among male peasants in rural villages in Central Thailand during the 1960s and 1970s. This research points out the Thai distinction between 'eating friends' (*phuean kin*) and 'friends to death' (*phuean tai*). The former refers to a common relationship with people with whom one goes out for jollification, but who are never on hand when they are really needed. The latter implies an intense, almost total level of professed personal involvement and it involves the obligation to support one's friend in the most difficult of circumstances—even to death (Foster 1976: 251; Piker 1968: 201).

Piker (1968) illustrated the psychological quality of 'friendship to death' among male peasants. Almost all of them referred to special friends who tended to live at a considerable distance and with whom they became acquainted on an unusual occasion; when in the army, on a business trip or when seeking work in remote areas. Because of these geographical distances, face-to-face interaction with these friends is virtually non-existent and they rarely offer actual help in daily life. But the friends imagine that they can count on each other. Piker concludes therefore that 'friendship to death' is based on a fantasy, which reflects the peasants' desire to obtain emotional security from the imagination of having special friends to rely on.

Foster (1976) takes a previous study by Piker as his point of departure. He distinguishes between the ideals and the actual practices of friendship among the male peasants. For the male villagers, a friend is ideally a person whom they know intimately. In practice, companionship was barely mentioned by the male peasants as significant characteristics of close friendship. The men spoke of *phuean tai* (friends to death) as friends on whom they could rely, but they did not have to share pleasant daily activities. By contrast, the female villagers were much more restricted in their activities than men. Their friends were usually close neighbours and involved in

eating and gathering together as a pleasurable activity. Women's friends seemed to fit the ideal of 'eating friends' more than that of 'friends to death'.

It should be stressed that the data from the research by Piker and Foster were mainly collected among male peasants in Central Thailand in the 1960s and the 1970s. In the socio-economic context of rural villages at that time, the peasants tended to share a dwelling with or reside nearby their kin. Therefore, it was more practical for them to count primarily on kin who lived in the vicinity than on friends who resided at a remote location.

In contrast to their research, my study deals with friendship in the context of contemporary international migration. Having described friendship among these Thai migrant women in the previous section, I will now ask how far their friendship has features of 'eating friends' and in how far of 'friends to death'.

The distinction of Thai friendship into *phuean kin*, friends who are quite common, and *phuean tai*, friends who are highly valued, is constructed as a dichotomy. Contrary to Foster's explanation of friendship of female peasants as constituted only by the characteristic of 'eating friends', I suggest that for the Thai migrant women the boundary between *phuean kin* and *phuean tai* is rather blurred. Close friends share the characteristics of being both 'eating friends' and 'friends to death'. As the women live at a considerable distance from their kin in Thailand, they expect Thai female friends in the Netherlands to be a crucial source of day-to-day social contacts. The women cherish friends on whom they can depend in a situation of crisis as *phuean thi di* (good friends). None the less, it is inaccurate to call them *phuean sanit* (close friends) if they seldom participate in the same daily social activities. Friends who keep contact, share meals, enjoy pleasant moments together and help each other in practice are preferred and are ideally counted as *phuean sanit*. It should be remarked that practically the women do not expect that their close friends always fulfil these obligations. Rather, the relations between the women and their close friends (*phuean sanit*) are based on a balance of reciprocity. In other words, the women do not calculate the exact equivalent of what they give and what they gain. If the flow of reciprocity is approximately in balance, then they are satisfied.

In summary, although the Thai women in the Netherlands do express their need to have friends who come from the same country and speak the same language, they do not develop

friendships with other Thais immediately. Their social networks vary from *khon ruchak* (acquaintances) to *phuean* (friends), *phuean thi di* (good friends) and *phuean sanit* (close friends). The women tend to be friends with persons who have a compatible education, are from the same class and have a similar taste as well as come from the same sub-region in Thailand. Once they are established, this does not simply imply that friendly relations are sustained automatically and that friends are an invariable source of assistance. The women's relationship with friends is continued by sharing food, delivering gifts and/or money to each other's families in Thailand, giving financial help, offering child care and providing emotional support. Failure to maintain mutual assistance, losing daily interaction and arguments about money can terminate friendship networks.

Friendship in Thai and Dutch societies

Friendship is viewed as a relationship between people which can be found in every society. Paine (1974: 506) cautions that it is important to be aware about whether we talk about friendship as a set of universal needs or as a cultural artefact. According to his formulation, this implies that friendship is a universal interpersonal relationship, but the ideals and practices of friendship vary by society. Compared with the study of kinship, sociological and anthropological research has apparently little interest in the comparative analysis on the concept of friendship in different societies, cultures and historical periods (Risseuw 2005: 88). In this section, I will explore the underlying notions and practices of Thai and Dutch friendship and the couples' adaptation to these differences.

Friendship in Thai and Dutch society is based on different cultural ideas which signify different expectations and interactions between friends. The cultural notion of Thai friendship, as illustrated above, includes both material help and affection. Reciprocity and obligation mark the continuation of real friendship. In contrast, in Dutch friendship emotional and voluntary aspects are highly valued. People decide to be friends when they enjoy each others' company and trust each other. They can talk to their friends both when they are happy and when they are troubled.

Friends are considered a source of emotional support, rather than financial assistance.¹⁰⁴ Dutch people are highly conscious of not mixing money and friendship because this may lead to conflict and embarrassment between them. As friendship is based on volition, it is improper to impose an obligation on friends.

Given these differences, some Dutch husbands cannot comprehend why their Thai wives frequently provide food and occasionally lends money to their friends. In the men's opinion, they are not wealthy enough to give others material help. A few men even forbid their wives to offer food to their friends and invite them often for a meal. The women's sense of obligation about sharing material aid with their female Thai friends can cause tension between the Thai-Dutch couples. After having lived together for a couple of years, the Thai wives gradually become aware of the different attitude towards friendship of their Dutch spouse. They avoid conflicts by asking friends to pick up food when their husbands are not at home, or they give it when they have a joint outing. If their close friends are in dire need, the women lend them money without the knowledge of their husbands.

The Dutch partners also have great difficulty at first in understanding the reciprocity between their Thai wives and Thai female friends. They do not realise that giving friends gifts and support in Thai society will be returned in other forms. For instance, if the woman provides her Thai friends with food, these friends may help her in return by bringing gifts or money to her family in Thailand. Moreover, these friends feel obliged to return the gift, but it is not necessary to return it immediately.

After the Dutch husbands have witnessed the friendship between their Thai wives and their female Thai friends, they later realise that these friends will return their assistance to their wives, particularly when it is needed. Some men can accept their wives sharing food with friends as long as it does not happen too often. A few husbands begin to appreciate the mutual obligations of friendship between their wives and Thai friends, which is seen in the following example. Lan sometimes asked Suwipha to buy Thai ingredients and she would pay her later. When she took these ingredients without any payment, Jos assumed that Suwipha had given them

¹⁰⁴ According to interviews with a group of Dutch male and female undergraduate students, it is possible to borrow money from friends, but only a small amount such as 10 to 30 Euro when one are really needs this. Mostly, they mentioned their parents as the main source of financial assistance.

away. Afterwards, Suwipha told Lan that next time she should come when Jos was not at home. Lan felt uneasy about this and gradually stopped visiting Suwipha at home. She shared her concern with Rani, another close friend. Rani explained to Lan that Dutch people are direct. If they are curious, they just ask about something bluntly. Suwipha had proved to be a good friend for four years. Lan should forget such niggings and not let them harm their friendship. Lan agreed with Rani and kept contact with Suwipha. A year later, Suwipha and Jos moved to a new house. Lan often came to help with packing and moving. Other Thai female friends, to whom Suwipha had often given Thai food, brought their Dutch husbands too. Altogether around six couples pitched in to help, whereas Jos' friends were absent. Later, Suwipha invited two monks from the Thai temple in Waalwijk to participate in a Buddhist ceremony for the inauguration of the new house. Lan assisted her to prepare food for the monks and other guests. Other Thai friends also brought food. Jos really appreciated the assistance from Suwipha's friends and learned to acknowledge the obligations and reciprocity of Thai friendship.

According to the idea of privacy¹⁰⁵ in urban Dutch society, married life and the home of the couples' family (*gezin*) are secluded from the sphere of *familie* and friends. Ideally, spouses should not share their 'internal' problems with outsiders (Risseuw 2005: 101). On the other hand, the idea of *khrob khrua* (extended family) and the practice of sharing resources among relatives in Thai society permit the spouses to involve kin or sometimes even close friends in the affairs on their conjugal family. Without realising these different ideas, Dutch husbands often admonish their Thai wives remonstrating that it is inappropriate to share such private family issues as their husband's income and the situation of their marriage with friends. The Dutch men also find it difficult to accept that friends of their wives visit them after only one or two hours' notification. Conversely, the Thai wives are initially surprised to see that their Dutch spouses make an appointment with parents and friends a few weeks or even a month in advance. Later, the women more or less understand this privacy and have adjusted themselves to this custom. When their husbands are at home at the weekend, the women will refuse to receive Thai friends

¹⁰⁵ Privacy is, according to Paine (1974: 513), defined as a person's feeling that others may be excluded from something which is of his concern and it implies the recognition that they have a right to do this. It should be noted that the idea of privacy is defined in a different way in Thai society. See more details on this issue from perceptive studies of Niels Mulder (2000) and Krisana Kitiyadisai (2005).

who have not made an appointment a few weeks in advance. They will ask their friends to return on another day when their husbands are not at home.

Privacy within the home is also one of the dominant family values in Dutch urban society. Industrialisation, urbanisation, and an increase of wealth led to 'a rise of the bourgeois family' during the first half of the twentieth century. The home is conceived of as a private domain and one does not often drop into it casually. Architecturally the kitchen was apart from the living-room as the separate domain of the wife. Parents and children had their own bedrooms, which introduced 'privacy' within the home (Risseeuw 2005: 79). In contrast, the kitchen in Thai society is not perceived to be a private sphere. It is instead connected with food and nurturing. Sharing food is perceived to be creating ties with family and close friends. It is usual for relatives and close friends to help with cooking and share the cooked food. The Dutch partners I interviewed mentioned that at first they felt uneasy when their Thai wives' female friends went into the kitchen, helped to prepare food and took food themselves. They were also unfamiliar with a party in the Thai manner, which can continue from noon to late at night and where various kinds of Thai food are prepared. Although many Dutch men enjoy such an event, some of them raise the issue of losing their privacy and need some time to get used to it.

Overall, as friendship in Dutch society is based on voluntary and affective bonds, the Dutch husbands are not prepared for their Thai wives to give Thai food and material support to their Thai friends. It is also difficult for them to understand the maintenance of obligations and reciprocal relations between their wives and their Thai friends. The high value placed on privacy in urban Dutch society makes it unacceptable for the Dutch partners for their Thai wives to discuss marital affairs with friends. The practice of preparing and sharing food in the kitchen, which is a means of nurturing friendship for the women, is also considered as a violation of privacy at home by the Dutch men. The differences in friendship sometimes lead to misinterpretations which require the spouses to adjust.

Weak ties

Linkages between people within a social network can be distinguished as strong ties and weak ties according to the strength of their connection. Strong ties connect people who share a strong emotional involvement, reciprocal obligations, and frequent interaction. These linkages refer to relationships between kin and close friends. Weak ties, on the other hand, consist of less all-embracing linkages, are based more on specialised contacts, and lack of emotional strength. They are similar to specialised contacts within formal organisations, between clients and service providers, neighbours or acquaintances, who interact with each other occasionally (Faist 2000: 51-52; Granovetter 1973: 1361). The significant role of kinship and friendship networks in providing assistance to the migrants has already been emphasised. This does not mean that migrants' social connections entail only their relatives and friends and that all their social ties are strong. The role of weak ties among migrants should not be overlooked. Weak ties function as a bridge which connects diverse groups bonded by strong ties and facilitate access to resources and information between groups (Boyd 1989; Faist 2000: 101; Granovetter 1973). In the case of migration, weak ties with other expatriates also serve as a source for meeting the migrants' social needs, since they share the same language, interests and life-style, about which they cannot communicate with the Dutch people or migrants from other countries (an issue I will examine in Chapter Five).

Given the idea of the strength of social ties, I found that weak ties among Thai migrant women in the Netherlands are superficially constructed and linked within three kinds of informal economic activities: *kan len chae* (playing shares), *huai* (lottery), and *ngoen khu* (loans).

Kan len chae (playing shares)

A number of Thai migrant women form a share collective (*wong chae*), which can have ten to fifteen members (*luk chae*). One person volunteers to be the manager (*thao chae*) of the group. Each month she collects the money from all the members, receives the bids, and hands out the money to the winner. This manager has to be someone whom the other members in the group can trust. They have to be sure that she will not run away with the money. The amount of money the

Thai migrant women give to the manager can range from 50 to 500 Euro a month, depending on what they have previously agreed. If there are, for instance, ten persons, the share group will run for ten months. If all participants agree to give 300 Euro a month to the manager, there will be a base kitty of 3000 Euro a month. Each month, the manager will collect bids from each of the members. The member who proposes the highest amount of interest (*dok bia*) will take the kitty for that month, but she has to pay 300 Euro plus the amount of interest she has specified from then up to the last month. The kitty is made up of the 'base' share amount which each member has to pay each month plus the interest each person owes for that month. The person who takes the money in the last month will collect the most interest.

To reduce the risk of being cheated, the group is not a random construction. Since there is no official contract, it is wiser to form a group only with persons familiar with each other who are felt to be trustworthy. The members can ask their kin or friends to join the group and later kin and friends may persuade their friends or acquaintances to do likewise. In this manner weak ties are extended. Each person may not know all the members very well, especially if the number of members is large. None the less, everybody is convinced that all members will only encourage others whom they trust to join the group. If cheating does occur, it means that relatives or friends will lose their money as well. This is why the members are more or less assured of each other's credibility.

However, this construction is no guarantee that no deceptions occur. It occasionally happens that the manager or other members of the group embezzle the money. Gossip and rumour spread around the Thai community saying that certain persons were cheated and lost a large sum of money, earned by their industriousness and frugality. Some people were even nearly bankrupted. There was nobody from whom they could claim their money, not even from the manager of the group, since the cheater had absconded. It is also possible that this person simply did not return the money. The others could not sue her because no formal contract had been made between the members. The one social inhibition is that the gossip circuit will ensure that a swindler will lose face (*sia na*). She may also have to face sanctions and be saddled with a bad

reputation as a dishonest person within the Thai community in the Netherlands.¹⁰⁶ As a consequence, she may lose access to informal economic resources since nobody will allow her to participate in a share group (*wong chae*) or lend her any money. The loss of a large amount of money can cause the breakdown of relations between the kin or friends who have formed the group.

If there is a risk of being deceived, the question arises: Why do the women still join the group? Many of the Thai women I interviewed work in an informal job and do not enjoy the security of a work contract. To their detriment, they are unable to access a formal bank loan in the Netherlands. *Kan len chae* (playing shares) with other Thai migrants is an important—and often their only—resource for obtaining a loan. This activity also allows the women to attain the highest benefit (the base kitty plus the interest other members pay) within a short time. As explained above, the strict selection of the members, the Thai notion of saving face (*raksa na*), and the fear of gossip in the Thai community in the Netherlands check the chances of deception to a certain degree. Hence to take the risk of participating in this share syndicate is a ‘rational’ option for the migrant women.

Huai (lottery)

Many members of the Thai community are involved in a *huai* (lottery). The women who arrange such an informal lottery write numbers ranging from 1 to 99 on a piece of paper and sell these numbers to their fellow expatriates. They apply the last two digits of the Dutch state lottery to signify the winner of the lottery. When I conducted my fieldwork in 2005, the price of this informal lottery varied from 10 to 30 Euro per ticket, depending on the value of the prize. The prize the winner would receive could be a brand-name product such as a purse or a watch. The best prize of all was gold jewellery.¹⁰⁷ If the women who operate the informal lottery do not have enough savings to invest in purchasing the prize, they collaborate with a Thai female

¹⁰⁶ If many women from the same community in Thailand live together in the same city in the Netherlands, gossip can become even more influential. This can generate a bad reputation and cause losing face not only to the migrant women who cheated, but also to their family members in Thailand. My study, however, did not uncover any such a case.

¹⁰⁷ It is a fashion and indicates social value among Thai people, especially among the older generation, to wear or collect golden jewellery such as a necklace, bangle, and ring. This golden jewellery symbolises and displays the owner’s wealth.

entrepreneur. Nit, for instance, who works as a cook-assistant in a Thai restaurant, often ran an informal lottery to earn extra income. She is well known in the Thai community, so it was easy for her to sell the informal lottery tickets. Once, during a visit to Thailand she planned to buy two gold necklaces as prizes in the lottery so that she could organise it twice. She had to spend around 26,000 Baht (550 Euro) on this jewellery. She had to send the bulk of her salary to her mother and two sons in Thailand. The rest of her income was for her day-to-day living expenses. She was therefore very reluctant to spend her meagre savings on this investment. Nam, the owner of the Thai restaurant where Nit works, suggested advancing her the money to purchase the gold jewellery on condition they shared the profit between them. They set the price of one lottery ticket at 20 Euro. The winner would receive a gold necklace with a value of 13,000 Baht (270 Euro). After the deduction of the costs, Nit had to give half of the profit to Nam, depending on the number of lottery tickets she could sell.

Ngoen khu (loans)

Some women need money urgently, but they have no savings and cannot turn to friends. They choose to borrow *ngoen khu* (loan) from a Thai female private money-lender. The women are introduced to this private money-lender via their Thai friends or acquaintances. The lender issued a formal contract and charged a high interest rate ranging from 10 to 20 per cent a month in 2005. Another resource for urgent money is *kan cham nam* (borrowing from a pawnbroker). To get hold of an amount of money, the women give their jewellery such as a watch or gold necklace as collateral to a private pawnbroker, who is usually a Thai woman. How much money they can raise depends on the value of the objects. They have to pay interest every month. Their possessions can be sold, unless they pay the money back within an agreed period of time. My respondents mentioned that some of their friends gambled at the casino and had lost large amounts, ranging from 200 to 1000 Euro. They did not want their Dutch husband to know this. They decided to borrow money or pawn their assets to the pawnbroker and so ran into debt.

To sum up, the Thai migrant women in the Netherlands are engaged in three main economic activities: *kan len chae* (playing shares), *huai* (lottery), and *ngoen khu* (loans). In contrast to friendship, the women do not develop any emotional attachment to the female

counterparts who operate these activities. The women define them instead as *khon ruchak* (acquaintances). Their interaction with *khon ruchak* in these economic activities is one of their economic strategies to cope with financial constraints in the host country.

Acquaintances from other countries

Not all Thai women had kin living in the Netherlands. Fellow migrants from other countries are an initial source of their daily contacts, particularly when no strong ties with Thai friends have been established. Only a few Thai women have acquaintances from such other Asian countries as Indonesia, China, Vietnam or the Philippines. They felt that they could get along well with these Asian acquaintances. Although their cultures and languages vary, they share a sense of geographical origin and way of life, compared with people who are from Morocco, Turkey, Africa and Europe. During the first five months of her stay in the Netherlands, for example, Tum did not yet know any Thai female counterpart. She met a female Philippine migrant who was her neighbour. They sometimes talked together. Once, Tum told her that she was bored with staying home and would like to work. This Philippine neighbour told Tum about an occupation as a cleaner at a hotel in Amsterdam. Tum applied for this job and was employed.

A majority of Thai women have no friends or acquaintances from other countries. A few months after their arrival, many women had a chance to make contact with other migrant ethnic groups such as from Morocco, Turkey, Africa and China when they took the one-year compulsory Dutch language course. However, these classmates were most likely to gather with their own expatriates during coffee breaks and had conversations in their own local language. Instead of developing a friendship with them, the women tended to socialise with other Thai migrants who happened to share the same classroom.

Some women who were later employed in a bank, a factory or a hotel had Dutch, Surinamese, Indonesian or Eastern European colleagues. Mostly, the women chatted with these colleagues during their work. Only a few women had an occasional outing with them. Ruang worked in a photo-frame factory. She was acquainted with many co-workers of Dutch origin and from other countries, but she had a rather good relationship with one of her female Dutch

colleagues. Ruang occasionally talked with her when she had marriage problems with her former Dutch husband. She received support from this colleague and sometimes invited her for dinner.

It should be noted that the weak ties of the Dutch husbands are expanded intentionally or unintentionally through their Thai wives' friendship networks. Many Dutch people are inclined to socialise within their own age-cohort; there are few opportunities for people of different generations to mix with each other (Risseuw 2005: 107). Their ties decreased gradually as they became older. A few Dutch men in their late thirties and forties mentioned that their social connections had been broadened when they started the relationship with their Thai wives. They met more Dutch men because of accompanying their wives to Thai parties where many Thai-Dutch couples gather, as Lucas explained:

Dutch people do not have much chance to meet new people. We go to work and we meet our colleagues. When we are at home, we are alone. We don't visit friends often, particularly if they already have their own families. Since I have lived with Nipha, her [Thai female] friends frequently invite us for dinner. There I meet other Dutch men. I also feel more relaxed about meeting her Thai friends. They eat, talk and laugh. But when I gather with Dutch people, I have to prepare myself to be ready to talk to them. They sometimes talk about politics or global news. I have to be on the ball about this. Otherwise, people will think that I am not smart.

Does the Dutch husband, on the other hand, introduce his Thai wife to his friends and colleagues? It is quite rare for the women to meet friends or colleagues of their Dutch partner personally. Usually, they merely hear stories about his friends from him. Ten women reported that they had met the friends of their husbands and had on some occasions accompanied them to a party organised by the company where they were employed.

The women sometimes felt uncomfortable when they had a gathering with the friends or colleagues of their Dutch spouse, especially when their Dutch language skills were not proficient. The situation tended to become worse if the husband was insensitive to his wife's discomfort, did not translate any of their conversations, or did not pay more attention to her. Bun expressed her

feelings about her difficulty when she accompanied her husband, Daan, to a party with his Dutch friends as follows:

To be honest, I didn't want to accompany Daan to a party with his friends. I am surrounded by only Dutch people. My Dutch language was not fluent enough to fully understand their conversations. Can you imagine how boring it was when you have to sit and listen for hours to conversations you largely don't understand? You just smile and say nothing. Daan sometimes complained that when I meet his friends, I am not as happy and lively as when I gathered with my Thai female friends.

The women who speak Dutch fluently also experience uneasiness arising from the different etiquette in conversation. As elaborated in Chapter Two, it requires enormous effort for a migrant to learn the unsaid rules when socialising with Dutch people. The women felt that Dutch people do not start the conversation at the first or second meeting. They have neither an idea of how to introduce themselves nor on what topic they should begin their conversation with the Dutch people. Many educated women, who are unable to gain a skilled occupation, lose their sense of self-esteem when they gather with friends of their husband and his friends questioned them about their jobs.

In short, when the women married and migrated to the Netherlands, it was no longer possible to have face-to-face interaction with their family and friends in Thailand. They needed to create new social contacts. Because of the inadequacy of their Dutch and English, the different ways of creating 'sociality', and the tendency of migrants to socialise with their counterparts, the women rarely established close friendship relations with the Dutch or with migrants from other countries. The relationship with them was one of acquaintances and colleagues. The daily social life of the majority of the Thai migrant women, especially of those who work in a Thai restaurant or a Thai massage parlour, was limited mainly to their Dutch spouse, Thai female friends and occasionally their Dutch in-laws.

Conclusion

A social network analysis and a gendered approach reveal that female-based social connections through kin, friends, and co-villagers play a significant role in facilitating the Thai women's rural-urban movement in Thailand, their previous migration abroad and subsequently their marriage migration to the Netherlands. The women are quite independent and have had some experience of geographical movement prior to their migration to the Netherlands. These findings contradict the common generalisation that the women are left behind or are a dependent follower who completely relies on the male migrants.

Although ties of kinship and friendship serve as a crucial source in realising marriage migration and the adjustment to the new environment of the newcomers, these linkages should not be perceived as self-perpetuating and cohesive. The concept of 'relatedness' as proposed by Carsten (1995; 2000) gives room to analyse the flexible, subtle and at times conflictive characteristics of daily kinship and friendship networks of Thai women in the Netherlands. The blood relations of *khwam pen yat lae phi nong* (being relatives and siblings) are insufficient to sustain a continued relationship and assistance between the Thai women and their relatives in the Netherlands. Instead the social aspect of kinship based on sharing food, physical proximity and affection over time is another medium for maintaining their kin ties. The women's relations to their relatives in the Netherlands are not always supportive and/or harmonious. It is possible for kin linkages to be terminated, especially when the women and their relatives refuse to provide mutual assistance.

The Thai migrant women live thousands of miles away from their family in Thailand. Several women have no acquaintances or friends who are Dutch and/or come from other countries. Their female expatriates in the Netherlands are a vital source of their daily social life. If the women are unable to form a close friendship with other Thai migrants and receive little support from their Dutch in-laws, their social connections will be limited and they may have to battle with loneliness.

The term 'relatedness' is also a useful tool with which to create a conceptual space in which it is possible to abstract and analyse the fluid attributes of Thai migrant women's

friendship. Instead of perceiving their friendship as a rigid, dichotomous Thai idea of ‘eating friends’ (*phuean kin*), who share only joyful activities, and ‘friends to death’ (*phuean tai*), who can be on hand in times of crisis, my findings reveal that becoming a friend among the Thai migrant women is a time-consuming process. Their friendship also constitutes different qualities which are expressed by a whole gamut of Thai words, ranging from *khon ruchak* (acquaintances), *phuean* (friends) and *phuean thidi* (good friends) to *phuean sanit* (close/intimate friends). These different levels of friendship vary according to the frequency of contact, their mutual assistance and degree of affection. Other female expatriates who the women only greet and make polite conversation with when they meet are called *khon ruchak* (acquaintances). *Phuean* (friends) are a person with whom the women sometimes have outings and share such minor help as exchanging Thai food, music and films. *Phuean thidi* (good friends), who do not turn away in calamity, are highly valued. Nevertheless, as the women live far away from their natal kin, the psychological dimension of friendship is essential to them. *Phuean sanit* (close friends), who share daily social activities, material help, and emotional support are the most preferred. Close friendship is sustained by balanced reciprocity. Failure to fulfil these obligations can cause the fracture of a friendship.

The social connections of the Thai migrant women are concentrated not only on kinship and friendship relations, they are also extended through so-called ‘weak ties’, particularly acquaintanceship with other Thai female migrants. Weak ties among the women apparently entail such informal economic activities as *kan len chae* (playing shares), *huai* (lottery) and *ngoen khu* (loan). These linkages require less emotional commitment and obligation but this does not mean that they are less important. These ties enable the women to access alternative and informal financial resources which migrants cannot acquire from the formal economic institutions in the Netherlands.

The Thai-Dutch spouses encounter different ideas and practices of friendship. The women initially do not realise that their obligations towards their Thai friends will generate difficulties for their Dutch partner, as a friendship relation in Dutch society values emotional involvement and is based on a voluntary basis. After years of living together, the couples more or less recognise these distinctions and adjust to them. Apart from different ideas of friendship, an

inadequate mastery of Dutch language and etiquette, which is a requirement for sociability, constrains the extent of the Thai women's social networks with Dutch people. Therefore, the women have to cross cultural borders not only in the realm of family relations, as discussed in Chapter Two, but also when making friends and acquaintances. In Chapters Four and Five I will examine the influence of migration and transnationalism on the life-course of the women and their family care as well as the socio-economic changes in the local community in Thailand.

Chapter Four

Reshaping the Life-Course and Family Care

The process of international migration does not end once the migrant women arrive in the receiving country; it is a continuing process. This chapter begins by addressing the initial stage of the Thai women's adaptation to Dutch society and the implication of the Thai idea of affluence abroad for their experiences and perception of living conditions in the Netherlands. Marriage migration also reshapes the life-cycle stages of the migrant women, especially affecting their legal residence, career and prospects for receiving care. In Chapter One, the term 'gendered geographies of power' explained that an individual occupies a social position within power hierarchies created through historical, political, economic, geographical, and kinship-based conditions (Pessar and Mahler 2001: 6). In this chapter, the influence of the women's social position on their employment and perception of social mobility through marriage migration is analysed. Moreover, the concept of 'gendered geographies of power' underlines the importance of the degree of agency migrants exert within the constraints of their social position; in this context the women's adjustment to and negotiations regarding their career trajectories in the Netherlands are studied. So far, the change in the women's life-path as a consequence of geographical mobility tends to be portrayed in the stages just prior to and just after migration. I shall extend my analysis to their later life-phases and expectations of receiving care when they grow older.

Marriage migration is more than a transition in an individual's life-course; it also affects an arrangement of family care. Rather than discussing a breakdown in the family, many studies highlight the reality that to maintain the welfare of their families the migrants foster familial linkages across national borders (Basch et al. 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Parrenas 2001). At first glance, geographical proximity, which is regarded as a significant element in family care, would seem to be irreconcilable with the experiences of migrants who live far away from their family members. This is certainly not true of Thai migration to the Netherlands. The women do not surrender their responsibilities to their natal families. This is most evident in their

determination to shoulder the care of their children and parents. Many women have left their children from a previous marriage in Thailand. How do they bring up their children from such a great distance? By following a critique of the tendency to homogenise the category of ‘transnational families’ (Baldassar 2007: 280),¹⁰⁸ I shall show that long-distance mothering is not the only form of child care recognised by the migrants. Some Thai women have later reunited with their children from a previous marriage in the Netherlands and others have *luk-khrueng* children with their Dutch husband. How do the cross-cultural marriage couples manage these disparate forms of child care?

Care of the elderly tends to be thought of as being determined by a moral contract between generations. This explanation relegates the migrants and their family members to the role of passive social actors who unthinkingly follow their cultural prescriptions. I shall illustrate a different reality, in which the migrant daughters re-arrange the care of their elderly parents and inter-generational relations and family care appears to be interdependent on each other. In Chapter Two, I discussed the fact that the Thai-Dutch couples adhere to distinctive cultural family ideas, which stipulate their different obligations towards their natal and in-law families. In this chapter, I look at the way the women manage to assume family responsibilities within transnational spheres.

The role of kinship and friendship networks in facilitating the migrant’s adaptation to the host country and caring for the children and elderly in transnational families has been extensively studied (Baldassar and Baldock 2000; Choldin 1973; Spitzer 2003). Finally, since the majority of Thai women move to the Netherlands as a consequence of intermarriage, the role of the Dutch spouse in the adjustment of his Thai wife and in providing child care will be explored.

Initial settlement

After arrival in the Netherlands, Thai women have to adapt to a different environment and life-style. Almost all respondents stressed that the Dutch climate in winter made them depressed and

¹⁰⁸ Transnational families are defined as families which live separated from each other, yet hold together and create a feeling of collective welfare and unity across national borders (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002: 6).

homesick, especially during the first period of their settlement. Familiar food is one of the things which loom extremely large when they are disoriented and far from home. Language was another barrier in their communication. Of the forty-five women, twenty could speak neither Dutch nor English upon arrival, whereas some could only manage a little bit of English. Only a few women with a good education could speak English fluently. To communicate with their Dutch husbands, many women applied a mixture of Thai, (broken) English and gestures. Hampered by this limitation in communication, most women had difficulties in expressing their feelings of loneliness or their need for their husbands' attention, as is shown by the example of Yui:

After I had just moved to the Netherlands, I spoke neither English nor Dutch. It was very tough for me to tell Richard what I wanted and how I felt. I even spoke Thai and gesticulated when I communicated with him. If Mon [Yui's sister who lived in the Netherlands] visited me, she helped me to translate. Richard had to be patient and tried to understand what I wanted to say.

For the past few decades, Dutch immigration policy has placed a heavy emphasis on the integration of immigrants. Learning the Dutch language is seen as a pertinent means to integrate immigrants into Dutch culture and to help them feel part of Dutch society. During my fieldwork in 2005, all newcomers who had followed a Dutch partner to the Netherlands were required to take at least a one-year compulsory Dutch language course.¹⁰⁹ This is useful for Thai women who cannot speak English because they more or less learn to communicate with their husbands, even though their Dutch language is not yet fluent.

¹⁰⁹ This requirement to follow an integration course is not enforced on citizens from the EU member countries and the 'First' World such as USA, Canada, Australia and Japan. During the past few years, the immigration regulations have undergone many changes. Since 2007, the immigrants are free to decide where they will take the Dutch language course and they are initially required to pay personally for the course. If they complete the course within three years, a proportion of the costs will be refunded. If they have not completed it within five years of arriving in the Netherlands, they will be fined by the municipality (Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst 2008).

'He is rich in Thailand, but he lives a simple life in the Netherlands'

Several women, particularly from rural, lower-class backgrounds, were disappointed when they were confronted with the real living-conditions and economic status of their Dutch husbands in the Netherlands. Given the Thai cultural construction of overseas affluence, as discussed in Chapter One, the women fostered some illusions about the Dutch men's wealth and modern life-style. Their imagination of a wealthy Europe was also reinforced by the big spending pattern displayed by their Dutch potential partners during their holidays in Thailand. The women failed to recognise that the uneven economic development between Thailand and the Netherlands allowed him to enjoy a luxurious life in Thailand. During the initial period of their relationship, they also believed that their prospective Dutch spouse was financially generous because he often sent them an allowance. Nevertheless, when they arrived in the Netherlands, they found out that their Dutch husbands lived in a fairly cramped apartment, led a simple life and had to spend money carefully. After having lived together for a few months, some Dutch men refused to give their wives money to send home. Tong at first had yearned to attain a better life in the Netherlands. Later, she recalled her feelings when she discovered the economic reality of her husband in the Netherlands:

I thought that Adriaan was rich and would own a big house. He had paid for all the food and accommodation when I had accompanied him for a week during his holiday in Thailand [in 2002]. When he returned to the Netherlands, he regularly gave me 8000 Baht (160 Euro) a month. After I moved to the Netherlands [in 2003], I learned that he rented a small flat and that he had to worry about money since his job [a security guard] did not earn him a large income. Both of us had had a bad marital experience. I was separated from my previous Thai husband. Adriaan's former Thai wife [in the Netherlands] had also left him two years earlier. I felt sympathy for him and finally decided to remain with him.

The evidence detailing the women's disappointment on their arrival is consistent with my findings in Chapter One that their economic motivation for marriage migration is fuelled by the

Thai fantasy about a wealthy, modern Europe and the economic disparity between the developing and developed country, in this case Thailand and the Netherlands.

The educated, middle-class women could more or less overcome the language obstacle as they could make contact with other Dutch people using English. However, they too had experienced difficulty in adapting to a different life-style. Prior to their migration to the Netherlands, many of them had had a well-paid profession, were financially independent and owned their own car.¹¹⁰ Some who were single lived with their parents in a spacious residence. A few had been married to a well-off Thai husband and led a luxurious life in Thailand. By contrast, in the Netherlands they had to use public transport and needed to take care of all the house chores by themselves. They also had to economise, especially before they had found employment for themselves. When Amphai was twenty-four years old, for example, she married her former Thai husband, whose father was prosperous. She had a car with a driver and maids who did the housekeeping. Her husband supplied her with a monthly allowance, which permitted her to lead a luxurious life. Nevertheless, he kept a mistress. After six years and having had two sons, they divorced. Two years later, Amphai made contact with Henk through an introduction by her Thai female friend in the Netherlands. After a relationship of one year, she and her two sons moved to the Netherlands. During the first months, she had to alter her life-style. She transported the fresh food and household items by bike, after she had done her shopping. Only when she accompanied Henk did she go in his car. She dressed casually in daily life, except on the few occasions she accompanied Henk to a party.

At this juncture it should be emphasised that the technological improvements in transport and the relatively cheap flight tickets enable the women to visit the Netherlands first before they commit themselves to permanent migration. Their travelling costs and the fee for a tourist visa application are provided by their potential Dutch partners. During their stay of three months, the couples have an opportunity to get to know each other and some women meet their Dutch in-laws. Such a short visit at least allows them to ascertain the reality of living in the Netherlands to some extent.

¹¹⁰ Since the public transport in Bangkok is unreliable and the possession of a new car symbolises the wealth of the owner, many upper- and middle-class people have their own car and hardly ever use public transport.

Feelings of loneliness

In the first months after their arrival, the social networks of the women were limited, particularly those who did not have any relatives in the Netherlands. They clutched onto their Dutch husband as their only crucial source of emotional security. Lan's experience gives an example of the difficulties in adaptation she experienced in the first six months after her arrival in the Netherlands:

I didn't know any Thai people and I had no relatives here. I didn't dare to go out alone because I couldn't remember the name of the street. I might easily have got lost. I was lonely and homesick. When Mark wasn't at work, I always accompanied him whenever he went out. After I had been here for a year, I became familiar with life [in the Netherlands]. Then, I felt it was okay if I had to stay at home alone.

Some Dutch men did notice what it meant for their Thai wife to live far away from home and to adjust to a different environment and customs. They provided her with the necessary information about living in Dutch society by showing her around the city in which they lived, visiting Asian grocery shops and making phone calls to Thailand. Others assisted their wives in establishing social networks with other Thais by searching for information about the activities which are arranged by the Thai community. When Tiwa had been in the Netherlands for just five months in 2005, Frans discovered from an Internet website that the Stichting Sajaam (Siam Foundation) had invited a monk from the Thai temple in Waalwijk to teach the dharma, the merit principals of the Buddha, to Thai migrants in Amsterdam.¹¹¹ Frans took Tiwa to this event. There Tiwa got in

¹¹¹ The Stichting Sajaam is a Thai voluntary foundation in the Netherlands which was established in 1995. Its major aim is to provide essential information about living in the Netherlands to Thais and to offer Dutch and Thai language courses. For instance, this foundation organised an event in Geleen, the South of the Netherlands, in October 2005. The Thai consul, a lawyer and an officer of the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Department were invited to give the Thai migrants legal information as about such matters as the extension of their residence permit, application for Dutch citizenship and property rights in Thailand of Thai who had changed their citizenship. The Stichting Sajaam has also linkages with Thai women's associations in such other European countries as Norway, Germany, France, Switzerland and Italy. They have established the Association of the Thai Women's Network in Europe and organise an annual meeting in one of the member countries.

touch with such other Thai women as Pla, Lan, and Suwipha. Later she participated as a volunteer in the activities of the Stichting Sajaam.

Although many husbands were accommodating and supportive, a few men were not very sensitive to their Thai wife's feelings of isolation and loneliness. They expected her to adjust to Dutch society since she was the person who had migrated. They did not realise that when marrying a woman from a different country, they themselves had to pay her a great deal of attention and also to adapt to the other culture of which their wife is a part. Ruang's life-history is a good example of this sort of situation. She married a Thai man who was a co-villager in 1981 and had two children by him. They separated after seven years of marriage. Ruang had to shoulder the economic responsibility for her children, but without any income. She followed her female villagers to find work as a bar girl in Phuket, the South of Thailand, as she wished to earn a high income as they did. As her English was not fluent, she was unable to attract many foreign male clients. After three months, the owner of the bar fired her. She moved to work in another bar, where she met her former Dutch husband who was on holiday in Thailand. They commenced a relationship. During the three years in which they had contact, he often visited her in Thailand. In 1992, she finally asked him to take her to live with him in the Netherlands and he agreed. However, there they began to have conflicts after eight months, as Ruang explained:

He didn't give me any money to send home. I was disappointed. Our relationship was tense. I was a housewife and prepared dinner for him every day. He returned home only to have a meal and he often went out with his Dutch female friend, whom he had met through a dancing club. He didn't care about my feelings. It was difficult for me to explain my feelings to him as my English and Dutch were poor. We lived in the same house without talking to each other for months.

Their husbands' lack of attention—in combination with their refusal to provide remittances, their poor communication and the women's disappointment in their living conditions in the Netherlands—can cause marital conflict or even a separation as in the case of Ruang, who finally left her former husband after three years in their relationship.

The impact of immigration regulations on a marriage migration

Even though some of the women suffered and would have preferred to end the relationship with their Dutch partner, their options were limited by their legal inability to fulfil the requirements for a residence permit. Under the stipulations of the immigration policy of the Netherlands, a Dutch citizen who earns a sufficient and steady income is able to guarantee the status of a non-Dutch partner in the Netherlands.¹¹² When the application for an MVV visa is approved by the Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst (IND), the women are allowed to move.¹¹³ Under the terms of this kind of visa, the woman, accompanied by her Dutch spouse, has to report her arrival at the town hall of the city in which she and her husband reside. After a few weeks, her partner has to apply for her legal residence. After IND approval, she will receive a one-year residence permit. Her husband needs to set the procedures for the extension in motion. This time she will receive a residence permit to remain in the Netherlands for five years or less, depending on the validity of her national passport. The women can guarantee their legal residence themselves after they have lived in the Netherlands legally for three years. During this initial period, they are totally dependent on their Dutch spouses.¹¹⁴

The women who wished to terminate their relationship sought other options and assistance by consulting their Thai female friends, Dutch officials or a lawyer. However, their

¹¹² From 1 July 2008, under the Dutch Minimum Wages and Minimum Holiday Allowance Act (*Wet minimumloon en minimum vakantiebijslag—WML*), a Dutch citizen can bring a non-Dutch partner to live in the Netherlands if she/he earns 1512 euro a month or 1441 euro a month excluding holiday allowance. If a non-Dutch person, who was already employed in the Netherlands and has later married a Dutch partner, wants to apply for a residence permit on the basis of family formation (marriage), he/she cannot use his/her own income to guarantee his/her status. Instead, the IND will consider the income of the Dutch partner. Furthermore, a non-Dutch person who marries a Dutch citizen and wants to stay in the Netherlands for longer than three months should fulfil the following conditions: she/he is 21 or older; she/he (and the Dutch partner) are unmarried and are able to prove this with official legalised documents; she/he will run a joint household with the Dutch partner and will register herself/himself at the same address as the Dutch partner; and she/he is required to take the civic integration examination abroad before coming to the Netherlands (Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst 2008).

¹¹³ The maximum length of stay in the Netherlands with a tourist visa is three months. After expiration, people have to return to their country of origin. If the Dutch man wishes the woman to live with him, he has to go through the procedure of an MVV (*Machtiging tot Voorlopig Verblijf*) visa application. An MVV visa, which is valid for six months, is an entry visa for a person who will remain in the Netherlands longer than three months (Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst 2008).

¹¹⁴ Once an immigrant has had a residence permit for three years on the basis of a relationship with or a marriage to a Dutch citizen, and if they have complied with the conditions applicable to requesting a residence permit for a period of three years and no general grounds for rejection exists, they are eligible for a residence permit for continued residence. A residence permit will be granted regardless of whether or not their relationship or marriage has ended, and regardless of whether or not they have sufficient means of existence (Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst 2008).

only choice was either to endure their unpleasant marital relationship for three years or return to Thailand. After Ruang found out that she could not rely financially and emotionally on her former Dutch partner, she found work in a factory to earn her own income. She also wished to terminate her marriage:

We had terrible disputes and [after a year] I wanted to separate from him. But I couldn't. I didn't know anybody here [the Netherlands]. Had I separated from him, who would have guaranteed my residence permit? Nor could I return to Thailand. I had to earn money to live on and for the education of my daughters. I was depressed and lost weight. I told the whole story to my teacher [at the Dutch language school] and she introduced me to the lawyer. He explained to me that I had no choice, except to remain with him.

After enduring her marriage for three years, Ruang separated from him. Four months later, she met Bastiaan and they began a relationship. They have now been together for ten years.

The women who have been in the Netherlands less than three years might possibly continue their residence permit on conditions of a 'humanitarian nature',¹¹⁵ but not many of them are well-informed about this rule. Plenty of interpretation of the question of which constitutes of a 'humanitarian nature' is required. In the situation in which Ruang, who did not face any physical violence from her former husband, but was unhappy with her marriage and felt depressed, found herself, it is unclear whether or not this reason is included in the conditions of a 'humanitarian nature' and how the women prove this. One of the purposes of the immigration regulations in the Netherlands, because of which the non-Dutch partner has to rely on their Dutch spouse for legal residence for three years, is to protect Dutch citizens from a sham marriage. Nevertheless, they simultaneously intrude on the marital relations of cross-cultural marriage couples and limit the negotiating power of the migrants with their Dutch spouses.

¹¹⁵ If the marriage relationship ends before the immigrants have been granted a residence permit for three years, they may be eligible for a residence permit for continued residence if there is a combination of compelling reasons of a 'humanitarian nature' which include: the position of unmarried women in the country of origin; the social position of women in the country of origin; the possibility of support in the country of origin; the support provided by a parent for children born in the Netherlands or receiving education in the Netherlands; evidence of subjection to (sexual) violence within the family (Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst 2008).

Because of their position as an immigrant, the women regard obtaining an unlimited residence permit or Dutch citizenship as one of the most successful goals they can achieve, ranking beside the economic improvement of their family in Thailand. It allows them the independence to live in the Netherlands, some eligibility for welfare provisions, and freedom of geographical mobility to many European countries.

Career trajectory

Prior to their marriage migration to the Netherlands, the majority of the women (twenty-six persons) had worked in unskilled jobs, serving at a food stall or working in a factory, a beauty salon or on a construction site. Of these twenty-six women, seven later entered such sex-related jobs as prostitute, erotic masseuse and bar girl. Sixteen women had held skilled occupations as teachers, government officials, nurses or administrative staff in a private company. The remainder (three persons) had never worked because they moved to the Netherlands soon after their graduation.

Searching for employment in the Netherlands

Fifteen women—of different educational levels—attended short training courses in Thailand, which they expected would equip them for the labour market in the Netherlands. These courses ranged from a few weeks to a month and included English language, computer skills, Thai cooking and traditional massage. This evidence of the initiatives taken by Thai women in making plans for their future careers in the Netherlands roundly contradicts the assertion that the female migrants experienced international migration passively and in desperation.

Through networks of kinship and friendship, as described in Chapter Three, the women, particularly those from a rural background with little education, were able to find employment within a few months of their arrival. The majority concentrated on such unskilled jobs which do not require knowledge of the Dutch language or indeed much education as cleaning, factory work or work on a farm. Thai restaurants and (traditional or erotic) massage parlours were other main

sources which absorbed Thai female labour in the Netherlands.¹¹⁶ A few women initially were a housewife.

Compared with their less well-educated expatriates, the women with a higher education encountered much greater difficulties in obtaining an occupation. They had had a prestigious career in Thailand; consequently they were reluctant to undertake low-skilled jobs in the Netherlands. None the less, their options were limited. Their degree of education and work experiences in Thailand were not highly valued and formally recognised in the Netherlands. Their limited proficiency in the Dutch language was another hindrance, even for some women who had obtained a Master's Degree from overseas and could speak English fluently. Faced with these hurdles, they are less able to compete on the Dutch labour market. Five months after her arrival, Tum had not been able to find a profession:

As you know, if you obtain a degree in business management and have worked in this field for some years, it is not difficult to find a job in Thailand. Initially, I convinced myself that, armed with this qualification, I could find employment here [the Netherlands]. I tried applying to a few companies, but I was refused time and again. Then I learnt that my degree and work experiences in Thailand did not really count here.

The women cope with the difficulty in finding a skilled occupation by various means. The most obvious step is to delay finding employment and spend time on learning the Dutch language. They recognise that their proficiency in Dutch is one of the major keys which will increase their opportunities to find a well-paid job. Some women also register for a short occupational training course, varying from six months to a year depending on the profession for which they are preparing themselves. Lalita had worked as a nurse in a government hospital in Thailand for five years. She assumed that with her work experience and fluency in English, she would be a good candidate when she applied to be a nurse in the Netherlands. However, the opposite was the case.

¹¹⁶ In the past few years, it has become more likely that the Thai women will work as a masseuse in an erotic massage parlour, since it is less visible than window prostitution. Working in such a parlour is also more flexible. The women can decide to work whenever they want and have the freedom to move to another parlour.

She devoted her time to taking Dutch language courses for two years and a nursing course for one year:

After the completion of my Dutch language course, I visited a Dutch official to discuss my interest in this job. She suggested I take a nursing course. I had to spend six months acquiring the knowledge of medical care. Another six months were spent for an internship in a home for the elderly and later in a hospital. I also took a two-week course about how to write a *curriculum vitae* and how applicants should present themselves in an interview. Finally, I was accepted for work as a nurse in a hospital.

A few women continue with a further degree course at a university in the Netherlands in order to improve their position on the labour market. It should be emphasised that the financial support of the Dutch husband and his encouragement are two crucial factors in his wife's further education. In contrast to the women from a rural, lower-class backgrounds, the women from the middle class, who do not have a regular financial obligation towards their families in Thailand, are able to devote their time to the improvement of their occupational skills. After her migration to the Netherlands, Phai registered for a one-year Master MBA programme at the Erasmus University Rotterdam:

I didn't want to be a housewife and stay at home. Frank suggested that it would be wiser to take a course in the business field. I must thank him for his devotion. During the time I was studying, I didn't work at all and I spent part of our savings on pursuing my studies. He has never complained about this. After graduation, I applied for a job and finally I was employed as a financial consultant at ABN AMRO in Amsterdam.

Other women justified their failure in finding a skilled job by accepting any kind of employment, as they wanted to be financially independent. Nonglak had obtained a four-year university degree in hotel management in Thailand. After graduation, she was employed as a receptionist at a hotel

in Phuket, Southern Thailand. Upon arrival, she applied for similar positions in the Netherlands, but she was rejected many times:

I was upset when they [employers] told me that my Dutch was inadequate. Of course, how could my Dutch language be at the same level as that of the other Dutch applicants? What I needed was an opportunity to prove that I could work and that I could develop my language skills, but they didn't give me any chance.

After Nonglak had had to swallow many refusals, in the end she had to accept to work as a housekeeper in a hotel in the morning and work as a waitress in a Thai restaurant in the evening.

Wages and working conditions

According to my field research in 2005, various women (twenty-two persons) engage in informal work without paying income tax, *ngan dam* (black work). Seven persons combine both a formal and an informal part-time occupation, while twelve women only work with a formal contract and pay income tax, *ngan khao* (white work).¹¹⁷ Many women prefer to work in an informal job because they want to receive the full amount of their income. Others have little knowledge of the taxation system in the Netherlands and are uninformed about their entitlement to a pension based on their employment, as Lan explained:

I clean the houses of two Dutch couples two days a week. Or, when a Thai woman arranges the catering for a party and needs somebody to prepare the food, I accept the job. I don't want to work formally and pay tax. I don't understand how it works. If I were to work for only a few years, how much pension would I get? I do not plan to live here forever. Shall I receive the pension if I return to Thailand permanently?

¹¹⁷ As cited in Chapter Two, four women were a full-time housewife and received a regular allowance from their Dutch spouse.

It is difficult to estimate the average income the Thai women earn each month because of the variety and flexibility in their employment as described above. Without paying income tax and including all income from many jobs, I assess that the women receive a payment of roughly around 400 to 1800 Euro a month. Those who run a Thai restaurant or have a professional occupation may earn a salary before tax payment over 2000 Euro a month. In the following, I shall briefly elucidate the wages and working conditions in the three main sources of employment—Thai restaurants, housekeeping and Thai massage parlours—which accommodate the majority of the Thai female migrants in the Netherlands. These data on wage were collected in 2008.

The women who worked as a waitress or an assistant-cook generally received a wage of between 8 and 10 Euro per hour. A cook earns a little more than the others. They start their work at 4 p.m. and end at 11.30 p.m., but the waitresses may begin and finish their work a little bit later than the cook. Their full-time working schedule is five or six days a week. Although they do have a day off, they will sometimes have to stand in for other employees who are on holiday. They will be compensated by being paid extra income.

In domestic work, the women are paid 10 to 11 Euro an hour if they are formally employed as a hotel maid. Their working schedule starts at 10 a.m. and ends at 1 p.m. and they work four or five days a week. They have to finish cleaning ten to twelve rooms within a limited period of time. If the women do housekeeping at a private house, the wages vary from 9 to 11 Euro per hour, depending on the agreement. In general, they spend three or four hours on the cleaning of one house on one day per week and they may work at two to three houses a week altogether.

Compared with those who are employed in a Thai restaurant and in housekeeping, the women who work in massage parlours, particularly the erotic establishments, earn a slightly higher income. The price of erotic massage is around 80 to 90 Euro per hour.¹¹⁸ Forty or fifty per cent of this amount is given to the masseuses and the rest belongs to the owner. For traditional massage, the price is 50 to 60 Euro per hour and half of the amount is the share of the masseuses.

¹¹⁸ If the customer requests a sexual relationship after the woman has finished the erotic massage, she can either accept or refuse. If she agrees, she will earn an additional income, which varies from 70 to 90 Euro and depends on her agreement with the customer. In some parlours, she may have to give part of it to the owner.

The total income per month is uncertain, depending on the number of clients and the amount of tips the women receive. The basic income of women working in erotic massage parlours is not much higher than those working in the traditional ones. The former group, nevertheless, receives more clients per day than the latter, as a consequence of the popularity of erotic massage. Regardless of the type of parlour, the masseuses mostly work six days a week, from 11 a.m. to midnight. If the women take a holiday or a day off, they earn nothing (Panitee 2004: 49-50).

The women's perception of social mobility

Rather than seeking career prospects in the Netherlands, the majority of the uneducated, rural women (twenty-three persons) remain in unskilled employment, but their wages and working conditions were relatively better. Only five women, who had worked as waitress, cook or prostitute, had accomplished upward occupational mobility by owning a small business such as a Thai restaurant, a grocery shop, or a Thai massage parlour.

I discussed earlier in this chapter how many women were dissatisfied with the reality of the living conditions they encountered upon their arrival in the Netherlands. However, after a few years, the lower-class, rural women do define their marriage migration as upward mobility. In Thailand, they were employed in unskilled jobs and had to work long hours for a minimal wage, which was insufficient to ensure their families' well-being. They experienced downward mobility, both occupationally and economically. In the Netherlands, they worked in similar occupations to those in which they had earned their livelihood in Thailand. These low-skilled jobs do in fact offer them lower payment, compared with other skilled professions in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the uneven economic development between Thailand and the Netherlands and, as a consequence of this, the huge discrepancy in the rate of exchange transform their earnings in Euro into quite a substantial amount when they are exchanged for Thai Bath.¹¹⁹ Their income in the Netherlands obviously contributes to economic improvement of their families in Thailand.

¹¹⁹ In July 2008 the minimum wage in Thailand was 203 Baht (around 4 Euro) per day in Bangkok and slightly less in the provinces (Thailand Board of Investment 2008). In the Netherlands, the minimum gross wage for an employee who is 23 years or older and has a full-time job in July 2008 was 1356 Euro per month or 62 Euro per day (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid 2008). This means it is fifteen times higher than in Thailand.

These rural women with little education, who gain financial benefit from their participation in the 'unequal' global labour market, interpret the transnational spaces they inhabit as a site of 'equal' opportunity. As analysed above, they had fewer opportunities to access well-paid employment in Thailand, compared with the educated and middle-class women. There seems to be a wide gap in socio-economic disparity between them. By contrast, in the Netherlands both groups are perceived by the Dutch as immigrants and they both encounter great difficulty in seeking a skilled job. Almost all of them, regardless their education and social status, have to build up their career from 'scratch', as illustrated by Nang:

In Holland we [Thai migrant women] are quite equal [in terms of finding an occupation]. Thai women with a higher education might have worked as a manager or a government official in Thailand, but it is difficult for them to find employment in these jobs in the Netherlands. No matter what our work experiences and education in Thailand have been, we have to put up with all kinds of jobs here [the Netherlands]. After we have lived here for many years and have improved our working skills, it is possible for us to obtain a well-paid occupation.

Of the thirteen women with a Bachelor's or Master's Degree, only four could ultimately find employment in a skilled profession, namely nurse, accountant, financial consultant and freelance language teacher. The majority of them have encountered downward occupational mobility, which engenders emotional turmoil and a loss of self-esteem. Tum had worked in the administrative section in a private company in Bangkok for several years. She recounted the bitterness she felt when she began working as a hotel maid in the Netherlands:

On the first day I felt very depressed and asked myself why my life had been turned upside down like this. When I was in Thailand, I wore a jacket and a skirt. I worked with a computer. But here, I was a hotel maid. I felt that I was at the bottom of the heap of working positions in the hotel. After two months, I could no longer endure it. I resigned, even though I didn't yet have any new job.

A year later, Tum was still unable to find a career which matched her level of education. She decided to work as a traditional masseuse. After one year, she was promoted by the owner to be the receptionist and cashier of the parlour. Only when many clients throng the parlour and all the masseuses are occupied does Tum now have to give a massage.

The educated women alleviate their painful feelings engendered by their perceived decline in their professional lives by heavily emphasising the financial rewards from low-skilled employment in the Netherlands which provide them with an income many times higher than did their prestigious job in Thailand. Mali has worked as a waitress in a Thai restaurant and receives a wage of 55 Euro a day (3 p.m. till midnight). Her income including tips is approximately 1500 Euro per month, which is much higher than the salary she was paid as a teacher in a private school in Thailand:

At first, I was upset about being a waitress. But, when I calculated my earnings in Thai Baht; it was a large sum of money which I would never have earned from my teaching job. You see, in Thailand my salary was only 13,000 Baht [270 Euro] a month. If I work hard and save money here [the Netherlands], I can enjoy my life when I return to Thailand.

Participation in low-skilled jobs for several years can, nevertheless, lead to a de-skilling process. The women have little opportunity to use the skills learned from their higher education when they are working as a maid, waitress or masseuse. Their chances of being employed in a professional job and advancing their careers in the Netherlands ebb.

A few women hide their real job and tell their family in Thailand that they are employed in a respectable occupation similar to that which they held in Thailand, as in the story told by Nonglak:

I regretted that I had to accept being a maid and a waitress. I did not let my parents know my real occupations and simply told them that I worked in a hotel. Can you imagine how deep their grief would be were they to learn what I really did?

On account of the high value of living overseas among Thai, some women choose to deal with the decline in their career mobility by accentuating their experience of international migration to the Netherlands. They also stressed their chances to travel within Europe as a privilege, since such an opportunity can only be dreamt of by many Thais as a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Arrangements for child care

International migration inevitably causes a geographical separation of migrants and their family members, which to some extent affects their family care. Nurturing and care-giving tend to be ascribed mainly to the women; it is unavoidable that the migrant women are expected to maintain their care responsibility, even after marriage migration.¹²⁰ In relation to child upbringing, many studies point out that the migrant women manage various forms of mothering and negotiate the meaning of 'transnational motherhood' to deal with their spatial separation from their children who remain home (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Parrenas 2003; Raijman et al. 2003). On the basis of the data collected in my field research, three different arrangements of child care made by Thai migrant women in the Netherlands are discussed: separation of mother and child; reunion of mother and child; and having children with their Dutch spouse.

Separation of mother and child

In the first arrangement, the women (thirteen persons) reside in the Netherlands, whereas their children born to a former Thai husband remain in Thailand. These women rely either on their own mother or other female kin as the first alternative to child-rearing. Only two women had left their children with their previous Thai husband with assistance from their mothers-in-law or sisters-in-law. The young remain with their grandmothers or other female relatives who take

¹²⁰ The universality of the dichotomous conception of the gender division of labour, which assigns the role of reproduction, care and nurture to the woman, is questioned by feminist anthropologists (Collier and Yanagisaka 1987; Moore 1988; Stone 2006). This idea is not natural; it is socially constructed and varies by society. See also the explanation in Chapter Two.

responsibility for their day-to-day care. Some grown-up children, particularly those who are already married, earn their own livings.

Regardless of their socio-economic background, these migrant mothers emphasised their trust and relief in leaving child care to their mothers and female kin. This reflects the taken-for-granted, normative gender role which considers women the most 'natural' and suitable care-providers of the family. When the mother is unable to assume daily child care, other female relatives, instead of the husband or other male kin, are expected to assist. Before Amphai brought her two sons to the Netherlands, she preferred to have her children under supervision of her mother and sisters:

Actually, my ex-husband would have liked the children to remain with him, but I refused. I preferred my sons to live with my mother and sisters. I believed that they could take care of the daily needs of my sons and give them affection and moral guidance. I didn't think that my husband was suitable to parenting, since a man tends to lack sensitivity and is often careless in small matters.

Being separated from their children and sharing mothering with other female relatives is not a novel, uncommon situation for many Thai migrant women. As demonstrated in Chapter Three, the rural, less-educated women had already experienced internal migration in Thailand prior to their migration to the Netherlands. There their time had been swallowed up by their lengthy working hours and they had left their young children under the supervision of their female kin in the rural village. They provided an allowance for their children and travelled back and forth to visit them. A few had taken their children with them and trained their older daughter to help with child care. The women from the higher or middle classes lived in a relatively stable economic situation and had access to more options. Some had given up their career and become a housewife and cared for the children with the assistance of either a live-in maid or day-care service, if their husbands could afford this financially.¹²¹ The parents or in-laws were another

¹²¹ Being a housewife in Thai society does not necessarily signify that the woman will be the only person who takes care of the children and carries out the household chores. In some wealthy or middle-class families, the wife can

crucial source of child care when a couple shared a residence with them and the wife had a full-time occupation. The child-rearing was also re-arranged to adjust to the circumstances of the women's marriage. When they were separated from their previous Thai husband, those who relied on him economically might start working again and leave their children with their mother.

When the women migrated to the Netherlands, they had to face the fact they were at a considerable distance from their children and the emotional consequences of this were unavoidable. Ruang described how she felt during the initial period of her life in the Netherlands when she was apart from her two daughters:

When I worked in Phuket [Southern Thailand] and my daughters lived with my mother [in Chiang Rai, Northern Thailand], I could visit them often. But, here [in the Netherlands], I lived so terribly far away from them. I missed them very much. My oldest daughter [who was at that time ten years old] told me that, when she really missed me, she would look up at the sky and feel that I was there. When I heard her words, I sobbed my heart out.

Despite the emotional consequences it presented, the women did not perceive long-distance mothering and the sharing of child care with relatives as problematic, nor did they think that such circumstances would necessarily be a traumatic experience for the children. The principal reason for this assumption is palpably linked to the cultural idea and practice of motherhood and mothering in Thai society. Motherhood is considered extremely important and giving birth to her first child, rather than marriage itself, ideally marks a woman's entry into adulthood (Darunee 1997; De Young 1966). Nevertheless, motherhood is not synonymous with mothering. In other words, the biological mother is ideally expected to take care of her own child, but mothering has not necessarily to be exclusively performed by the biological mother. It is usually shared by other female kin, as a natural extension of the cultural concept of *khrop khrua*¹²² (the extended family)

sometimes have outings and nurture her beauty, while she receives help in child care and housekeeping from a live-in servant. This diverges starkly from the ideal of a Dutch housewife in the middle-class family. The duties of caring for the offspring and managing household chores are seen as her main responsibility.

¹²² See the elaboration of the idea of *khrop khrua* in Chapter Two.

and the possibility of sharing a residence with three generations. Mothering also varies by class, as already discussed previously. In the world of the migrant women from rural, lower-class backgrounds, providing daily physical care is not the only way of mothering. They defined sending remittances and their ability to support the children's education as another form of expressing their affection and fulfilling their responsibility of being a mother. During my fieldwork, many women often proudly mentioned their children's educational and professional successes, which in their eyes justify their hard work and the burden of separation from their children.¹²³

Second, the duration of living apart from the offspring can go some way towards lessening the emotional cost. During the initial period of their lives in the Netherlands, the women had probably been more anxious about the well-being of the children. However, after the separation has lasted several years and the women gradually realise that their children can lead their own lives without them, they feel more at ease. It also stands to reason that the age of the children is also relevant. The women are more concerned about their children when they are still minors or very young than when they have become adults, graduated and found an occupation, as Thian said:

I miss my children very much and would love to live close to them. Somehow, though I am not very worried about them. When I moved to the Netherlands, they were mature and could take care of themselves. My oldest daughter lives with her husband and children in the US. The younger one worked as a flight attendant for a few years. I am admittedly a little bit concerned about my youngest son. He has just completed his studies and begun working.

Finally, as a matter of course a network of extended kin is regarded as a source of child upbringing in Thai society. Hence the role of the female relatives in giving daily care and alleviating the emotional consequences of the mother-child separation is remarkable. The women

¹²³ Some women mentioned that their children sometimes misbehaved spending money profligately and paying little attention to their school work. However, they believed that their migration overseas and their living separately from their children was a better option than remaining together in Thailand without any prospects.

may feel less pain and anxiety, if they have trustworthy female kin who can provide their children with appropriate daily care, moral guidance and affection. This is a major reason that by choice the women choose their own mother or close female kin to assist them in child-rearing. The children may not suffer too much from the absence of their mother if their grandmothers or aunts give them care and affection for a number of years. They rather develop a bond of trust and emotional warmth with these kin. Some children at first even refused to leave these care-givers and to follow their mother to the Netherlands. This was the situation Suwipha faced:

I was busy with my work [in Thailand], I left the older daughter with my mother in Chonburi [Central Thailand] and the younger one with my aunt in Nakhon Ratchasima [the North-east]. After I had been in the Netherlands for six months, I brought them over to live with me. Initially, the younger one didn't want to come here. She wanted to stay with my aunt who had taken care of her since she was born. During the first few months here, she often cried and wanted to return to Thailand. She needed several months to become used to living without my aunt.

These female relatives also have a substantial influence in mediating the mother-child relationship. They can explain to the children how greatly their mother loves and cares about them and that she is sacrificing herself for the family's well-being and the future of her children. Such explanations help to make the children feel that they are not growing up without their mother's affection and care, even though they lived separated from each other.

Reunion of mother and child

Of the twenty women who have children from a previous marriage, eight have brought their children to the Netherlands.¹²⁴ They initially left their children with other female kin and later their Dutch husbands arranged the migration of the children to the Netherlands.¹²⁵ As a

¹²⁴ Of those seven women, Kung and Chit brought one child to the Netherlands and left one or more children in Thailand.

¹²⁵ The circumstances of migration from the sending country and the migration regulations in the receiving country determine the form of the migrant's family reunion. The immigration and employment regulations in Italy and Spain

consequence of the restricted immigration policy in the Netherlands, the application for child reunion has to be set in motion immediately after the women's arrival.¹²⁶ This process entails restrictive regulations, an income requirement and a pile of Dutch documents; the Dutch husband has a final say in deciding whether he will sponsor and arrange the child reunion.¹²⁷ Some Dutch men believed that the young children should grow up with their mother and agreed to set the process for the reunion in motion, but a few men objected to taking any such action. This refusal sometimes caused conflict between the couples, perhaps even later their separation. After Wong had spent a year in the Netherlands, Dirk, her former Dutch husband, refused to bring her four-year-old son to the Netherlands as he felt uncomfortable about living with a young child. They frequently quarrelled about this. Wong finally had to leave her son in the care of her mother in Thailand. After she had been in the Netherlands for two years, her son contracted a serious illness. He had already passed away, before she could arrive in Thailand. Her relationship with Dirk worsened as she blamed him for this tragedy. At that time, she was working in an erotic massage parlour and insisted on doing this work although he objected to it. After she had qualified to

allow a number of female migrants to work in domestic service under the terms of a formal contract. Some Filipina female migrants continue the relationship with their Filipino husband and later reunite with him and the children in these countries of destination (Parrenas 2001; Pe-Pau 2003). By contrast, the majority of Thai women enter the Netherlands through marriage with a Dutch spouse. Family reunion of Thai women in my research refers to the reunion of the women with their children born to a former Thai husband.

¹²⁶According to the immigration rules, a minor child can move to the Netherlands if he/she meets the following conditions: he/she is younger than 18; he/she is not married and has never been married; he/she is a member of the family (which means, among other things, that he/she has not lived apart from his/her mother/father for more than five years); he/she is related to the person with whom he/she wants to stay in the Netherlands; he/she will live with his father/mother as soon as he/she arrives in the Netherlands and will register at the same address as his/her father/mother; and if he/she is 16 years or older, then he/she is required to take the civic integration examination abroad. An adult child (18 years or older) who wants to live with his father or mother in the Netherlands, has to comply with the same conditions as a minor child mentioned above, but with some differences: he/she is a member of the family (which means, among other things, that he/she has not lived apart from his/her mother/father for more than one year); he/she is required to take the civic integration examination abroad. An adult child will not be admitted to the Netherlands unless it is unreasonably harsh to let him stay behind in the country of origin (Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst 2008).

¹²⁷The family member in the Netherlands who will guarantee a child's migration to the Netherlands must have Dutch nationality, a permanent residence permit (asylum or regular), or a temporary residence permit (asylum) and must have sufficient income in the Netherlands. For family reunion the net income, including a holiday allowance, must be equal to or higher than the subsistence level (1273 Euro a month for married couples/unmarried couples living together and 891 Euro a month for single parents), as provided in the Dutch Work and Benefit Act—Wet werk en bijstand or WWB (Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst, 2008).

apply for her own residence permit, she separated from him. Later she began a relationship with another Dutch man, who is now her husband.

Apart from the women's reliance on their Dutch spouses to guarantee their legal residence for three years, as stressed earlier in this chapter, the fact that the ultimate decision in child reunion is made by the Dutch man is another indication of the unbalanced power relations in the cross-cultural marriage.

Upon arrival in the Netherlands, the children invariably encounter difficulties in adapting to Dutch society. Almost all children have the problem of communication with their Dutch stepfather at home and with their classmates at school. None the less, the Dutch husbands had the impression that, if the children migrated to the Netherlands when they were young, they could learn the Dutch language and adapt to the new environment and social norms easily. Some of them assist their stepchildren with their homework and help them to learn Dutch. After Suwipha's daughters moved to the Netherlands, Jos talked about how quickly they had learned Dutch as follows:

Initially, the youngest daughter [who was five years old when she arrived] didn't want to go to school. She couldn't talk with classmates and teachers in Dutch. After six months, she had been able to adapt very well. She could understand and speak Dutch quickly. Now, she has been here for nearly four years. She can speak Dutch with a perfect accent.

Compared with the younger children, the teenagers encounter greater hardship, since they have been socialised for years according to Thai social norms, which are quite different from those in the Netherlands. At first, they become confused when they have to adopt Dutch social values; especially when at the same time their mother expects them to adhere to the Thai norms. For example, it is relatively acceptable in Dutch society that a young couple engages in sexual relations before marriage, but the Thai mothers find it difficult to accept and express their concern about this. They are afraid that their teenage daughter will accidentally fall pregnant,

which may cause them to lose face (*sia na*) in the Thai community in the Netherlands and among their relatives in Thailand.¹²⁸

The reunion of mother and child may not necessarily have an entirely positive outcome. The migrant mothers are delighted when they are reunited with their offspring, but they are also anxious about their routine employment. They do not have as much leisure time to spend with their children and cannot give them much guidance. By contrast, if the children remain with a grandmother or other female relatives in Thailand, these kin and sometimes neighbours can help to supervise them.

Having children with the Dutch spouse

Seven women I interviewed have children by a Dutch husband. Of these seven women, two had also brought their offspring from a previous relationship to the Netherlands. The women stressed their experience of isolation and lack of support from their natal kin and Dutch in-laws during their pregnancy and when raising the children. If they were in Thailand, relatives would have visited often or stayed with them to provide care and emotional support both before and after the delivery of the baby. They would have been trained in caring for the newly born baby by their own mother or mother-in-law. In stark contrast, in the Netherlands they are often alone when their husband goes to his work. After the birth, they mainly take care of their infant on their own with the assistance of their Dutch spouse and occasional visits of their in-laws.

The experience of the Thai daughter-in-law of a lack of child-care support from the Dutch in-laws has to be analysed within the cultural differences in family structure and mothering in Thailand and the Netherlands. In Thai society, as a matter of course members of a *khrop khrua* (extended family) pool and share economic resources as well as support and care. As noted earlier, child-rearing can be performed by the mother, the kin network and sometimes even neighbours, particularly in the rural areas. This cultural idea stipulates that the parents and parents-in-law are morally obliged to supervise the couple in the upbringing of the child. The

¹²⁸ Even though there has been a transformation of gender and sexuality in Thai society, being involved in a sexual relationship before marriage is, to a certain degree, not accepted. Some teenagers have to keep it secret. Their engagement in premarital sexual relations is portrayed by the Thai media as a dysfunction of the family institution, moral degeneration and social disorder in Thai society.

couples sometimes feel they have to put up with interference from the parents and in-laws in the socialisation of the children, but they can rely heavily on them for child care.

In a diametrical opposition, the wider circle of relatives, the *familie*, is excluded from the sphere of the two spouses and young children (*gezin*) in Dutch society. The normative ideal of exclusive motherhood is historically embedded in urban Holland and remains resilient. In other words, the biological mother is viewed as the primary and exclusive source of mothering with assistance from her husband (Palriwala 2005). This ideology restricts the opportunity for in-laws to be a main source of support in daily child care. They may occasionally help to look after the grandchildren, but the women cannot depend on them as a regular source of advice and help in child-rearing. The idea that the Dutch mother-in-law might lodge temporarily in the couple's residence in order to instruct her Thai daughter-in-law about how to take care of an infant also seems to be beyond the stretch of Dutch imagination.

In Chapter Two, I mentioned that the welfare state in the Netherlands is linked to the idea of the conjugal, nuclear family, which consists of a breadwinning husband, a full-time housewife and young children. The state welfare policy is also based on the cultural code of exclusive motherhood and mothering, which limits the women's other options for child care.¹²⁹ The Thai women have to re-arrange their daily schedules in accordance with their child's upbringing and their own employment. If the Dutch husband cannot afford a formal day care service, the couples decide that the Thai wife should be a full-time mother taking care of her young children. Financial strain may occur, especially if the women are obligated to send regular remittances to their family in Thailand. Some husbands compromise by providing their wife with a monthly allowance and remittances to send home, whereas others who earn a minimal income may refuse, which can lead to marital conflict. Some women found a solution by sharing child care with their female Thai friends and/or a day care centre, so that they could still keep their part-time job. The inadequacy of child-care support in the Netherlands and the economic obligation to the family in Thailand prevent the women having more children, as described by Phimon:

¹²⁹ This ideology was reflected in the government family policy in a specific taxation system and a state provision for child care which can be said to have been the cause of the low numbers of officially working women in the Netherlands, compared to such neighbouring countries as England and France before the Second World War. This trend continued beyond the 1950s. Although recently figures on part-time working housewives have been rising, they remain lower than in neighbouring countries (Risseuw 2005: 79).

I had worked full-time and sometimes I attended Thai festivals with my Thai friends. But after I had given birth to a baby, I rarely had outings with them. I worked part-time three days a week. I left my son one day with my Thai friend, who lived nearby and two days at a day care centre. The other days, I took care of him myself. I was sometimes exhausted and depressed. If I had been in Thailand, my mother would have helped me to care for him. She recommended that I should have another baby, but I refused. She didn't realise how difficult it is to raise a baby without assistance from relatives.

The dichotomous and universal ideal of the gender division of labour between husband and wife downplays the role of the father in parenting and ignores the cultural variability of child care. The data from my fieldwork indicate that the Dutch husband does engage in the upbringing of his offspring and that the Thai-Dutch couples run into problems because of their different methods of socialising their children. Thai mothers such as Bun and Pimon, for example, prefer to let a baby sleep in the same bed as the parents at night. They always pick him/her up whenever he/she cries, and feed him/her on demand many times a day. On the other hand, a Dutch husband prefers to let a baby sleep alone in his/her own room and wants his Thai wife to feed the baby at regular times. A few of them forbid their wife to speak her regional Thai dialect to their young child. These differences in child-rearing and socialisation frequently cause tension between the spouses.

Giving care of the elderly from a distance

The state's provision of care of the elderly is less developed and institutional care is less widely available in Thai society. It is also perceived as a slur on their morality if the adult children entrust their parents to the formal care of a home for the elderly. Caring for the aged parents is therefore a task principally assumed by family members and determined by the norm of *bun-khun* relations between the parents and child. In other words, to repay the debt to their parents who made a great sacrifice to bring them up, the adult children are obligated to provide life-long care for their elderly parents. As explained in Chapter Two, ideally the son can return the debt to his parents through an ordination and occasional support, whereas the daughter is identified as the

prime care-giver responsible for the physical and emotional well-being of her parents. As a consequence of her socialisation, the daughter feels more responsible than the son towards her natal family and is more likely to provide regular financial assistance and care to her parents.¹³⁰ Care of the elderly within the networks of kin is also facilitated by inter-generational living arrangements. Although family structure and relations in Thai society have gradually been changing, it is still common for three generations to share the same dwelling and for the woman to provide her parents or in-laws with daily care.¹³¹

Unquestionably, great distance may place constraints on family care, but it is unthinkable for geographical separation to be used as an excuse by the Thai migrant daughters to avoid caring for their parents. Caring can be provided in the realms of physical, financial, emotional and moral support (Baldassar 2007; Finch and Mason 1993; Hashimoto 1996). Despite the thousands of miles which separate them, almost all the women interviewed make caring from a distance feasible by sending their elderly parents remittances for three reasons. Most obvious among these is that it is relatively difficult to maintain physical care over a considerable distance. Remittances are fairly tangible and can easily be transferred across borders. Second, the women also gain because, for their point of view, financial support conveys not only material help. It is also certainly deeply imbued with emotional and moral values, offering them a vehicle to express their affection and *bun-khun* obligation to their parents. Finally, in contrast to the industrialised countries with developed welfare systems, material aid from the adult offspring is one of the crucial sources of care of the elderly in Thailand and can to a certain degree compensate for their physical absence from daily care-providing. Apart from the concrete allowance, the migrant daughters provide emotional and practical support through regular telephone calls. Physical care occasionally occurs when the women visit their parents in Thailand.

The flows of care of the elderly are apparently assumed to be unilateral: either from adult child to ageing parents and/or from the state to the elderly (Baldassar 2007: 278; Baldassar and

¹³⁰ A study on rural-urban migration of the Thai women from a village in North-east Thailand executed by Mills (1999: 87) reveals a similar trend. Migrant daughters were usually considered a reliable source of financial assistance and care to parents and kin in the village. The parents might receive some financial contributions from their son if he should happen to visit, but they fostered fewer illusions that they would gain regular benefits from his urban employment.

¹³¹ Practices of care-giving of the elderly in Thai society vary according to class, economic status, availability of kin, and pattern of residence.

Baldock 2000). This idea implies that ageing is a dependent life-cycle stage which relies absolutely on care from the adult offspring, other family members and/or the state. At first glance, the inter-generational relations between the Thai migrant daughters and their parents in Thailand seem to confirm such an assumption, given the aged parents' reliance on financial and occasional physical support from their migrant daughters. Such an impression is false and a more detailed examination shows that the relationship between them does contain some elements of interdependency. Rather than being exclusively dependent, the elderly parents are quite obviously significant providers of daily care to the grandchildren in Thailand, as elucidated earlier in this chapter. Such an assumption of the dependent elderly underestimates the active role of aged parents as a vital source of care-giving in transnational families and fails to recognise the heterogeneity of the ageing population, which consists of the young elderly in their sixties and the old elderly in their eighties.

When there are ailing parents who require round-the-clock care, geographical propinquity becomes one of the most important issues in maintaining care-giving and care-receiving. For the provision of physical care in such instances, the Thai migrant women depend primarily on their sisters or other female kin who reside in close proximity or live in the same compound as their parents. This support in providing care involves reciprocity between the migrant women and their family members in Thailand. In exchange for the assistance in daily care-giving and to ensure that the female relatives will look after their parents in an appropriate fashion, the women reciprocate by giving these kin some cash. Lalita, for instance, remits around 300 Euro a month to her sister who takes care of her elderly parents in Thailand. This amount is used by her sister as an allowance for the parents. She can also spend part of it on her own needs. As her sister has taken care of the parents for years, Lalita sometimes gives her extra money if she is faced with an urgent financial problem.

Transnational families tend to be viewed as a collective unit, in which all members sacrifice their own interests to fulfil their filial responsibilities and to improve the family's well-being. I argue that this idealisation overlooks the indubitable conflicts present and the power dynamics at work in the transnational families. The migrant women and other family members in Thailand do pool and share support for care of the elderly, but this is not to say that troubles

caused by tension and asymmetrical reciprocity among them do not frequently occur. Apparently, as the women provide hardly any physical care, they are expected to be a main financial provider, shouldering all the expenses incurred in the care of their parents. They must also endeavour to maintain a smooth relationship with their female kin, as they are entirely dependent on them for care of the elderly. Sometimes, their relatives demand higher remittances simply by claiming the medical costs of the ailing parents. Their refusal can generate family strife and their family may condemn them as persons who are ungrateful to their parents and family. Kung, for example, comes originally from a quite poor family. When she moved to the Netherlands, she worked informally as a waitress in a Thai restaurant three days a week earning 50 Euro a day. She gave 200 Euro every month to her sister who took care of their ailing mother in Thailand. She expressed her uneasiness about the frequent financial requests importuned by her sister and other siblings:

Sometimes, my sister asked me extra money. She told that the remittances I sent home were not enough to meet the costs of caring for our mother. If she personally had an urgent financial problem, she also requested my assistance. If I refused, she reminded me of how much she sacrificed to take care of the mother every day. Other siblings also thought that as I worked in the Netherlands thus I must earn a high income. They expected from me to pay more for our mother's medical expenses.

The requirement of having to perform multiple gender roles simultaneously across borders sometimes causes a conflict between the women's obligations towards their parents and their own conjugal families. In a critical situation when an elderly parent faces severe sickness, other female kin have full-time employment and there is no money on hand to hire a maid, the woman has to visit Thailand and assumes this care responsibility, especially when she has no formal job in the Netherlands. The Dutch man is happy to agree that his Thai wife remain in Thailand for a few weeks, but he finds it difficult to accept the situation if she prolongs her stay for months to care for her ill parents, as Lan experienced. Her mother suffered a severe illness and was admitted to the hospital for a fortnight in 2006. Her three sisters had to ask for days off and took

turns arranging the care. Her only brother visited their mother frequently, but rarely stayed overnight to provide care. When the mother returned home, she needed full-time care and preferred her children to care for her, rather than a live-in maid. Lan was expected to assume this responsibility as she worked informally as a housekeeper two days a week, even though this was in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, it was easier for her to stop with her work, than this was for all her siblings who all had a full-time occupation in Thailand. She was willing to express her gratitude by taking care of her mother, but she was also reluctant because her husband, Mark, might be upset about her long absence in Thailand:

My paltry income didn't allow me to travel back and forth [between the Netherlands and Thailand] to visit my mother frequently. As my siblings didn't want to bother Mark, they collected their own money to pay for my ticket on condition that I cared for my mother for three months. Of course, it is the duty of the children to look after the elderly parents and I really felt obligated. Somehow, I was also worried about Mark. He was disappointed about the length of time I was planning to stay in Thailand. When I explained this to my siblings, one of my sisters complained that I loved Mark more than my mother. Her words hurt me deeply. As she lives in Thailand, she could stay with her spouse and still visit our mother often. She might not have realised how anxious I was to combine the duty of being a wife in the Netherlands with being a daughter in Thailand.

Tension between the Thai-Dutch spouses and between the women and their natal families generated by trying to come to an agreement about care of the elderly is one of the outcomes of the couple's adherence to the different family codes—*khrop khrua* (extended family) in Thai society versus *gezin* (conjugal, nuclear family) in Dutch society. As described in Chapter Two, the Thai idea of family specifies that a daughter is still counted as part of her parent's family after marriage and that the relationship of the children to their parents is prioritised above all other relationships. The migrant women and their relatives in Thailand accepted it as a matter of course that the women would take care of their frail parents for a month, while they let their husband and children fend for themselves during their absence. In contrast, there is a clear-cut separation of

economy and residence of *gezin* from *familie* in Dutch society. The relationship with the spouse and the young children (*gezin*) overrides those with elderly parents and extended relatives (*familie*). Furthermore, the Dutch cultural idea of a marital relationship values affection between spouses as well as sharing daily life and residence. As a consequence, the Dutch husband expected that his Thai wife should dedicate her efforts primarily to performing her duties as a wife and mother to the *gezin* and that she should spend her time daily with him and children. Then, it is acceptable for her to visit and care her parents and in-laws occasionally. The women's dilemma presented by these divergent concepts of family duty, being a dutiful daughter of the *khrop khrua* by providing care to her elderly parents, can be interpreted by the Dutch husband as being an irresponsible wife and mother in the *gezin*.

The women's prospects of receiving care

In studies of transnational families, the role of the migrant women in providing family care and in receiving support for child and elderly care from other female relatives in their country of origin has largely been recognised. None the less, receiving care when the migrant women themselves grow old is also a significant and challenging issue. As the women are likely to have a longer life expectancy and to marry at a younger age than the men, generally more ageing women than men live alone (Hashimoto 1996: 54). When the migrant women are living far away from their families in Thailand, how do they expect to overcome such a great distance when they will need care in their old age? Some women have children by their Dutch husbands. Do they plan to rely on them for care? What are their other options?

Many women I interviewed were middle aged; receiving elderly care was not yet a matter of urgent concern for them. When I asked them the question 'Who do you expect to provide care when you grow older?', many of them initially showed some hesitation and uncertainty. Others in their late thirties or early forties confessed that this issue had hardly ever occurred to them because they are not yet old enough to be worried about it. During our conversations, some women later did reveal their prospects of care-receiving; a vision which was shaped by their family trajectory, the cultural idea of family and practical aspects. The majority of the women

interviewed (twenty persons) have children from their previous marriages in Thailand. They planned that, if their Dutch spouse passed away, they would return to live permanently in Thailand and their children would be a major source of care-giving. Their preference to rely primarily on their offspring is governed by the *bun-khun* relation between parent and child.¹³² In Chapter Three, I stressed the dynamic characteristic of ‘relatedness’ between the migrant women and their relatives in the Netherlands. Practically, the *khvam pen phi nong* (being each other’s brothers and sisters) does not always guarantee that the women will maintain more intense mutual assistance with siblings than with other extended relatives. This is certainly true if they and their siblings have built up scarcely any reciprocal relations. This is also the case with the parent-child relations. The quality and quantity of the debt the children will repay to their parents in the form of care of the elderly is influenced by the (financial, physical and/or practical) care which the parents have given to them and the mutual affection they have cultivated over time. The women have provided their children with economic welfare and education. Consequently, they believed that their children should recompense them with care in their old age. Furthermore, as they see it, the support offered by family care is a continuous chain of obligations extending over generations. Many women feel that they deserve to receive care in their old age from their children because they have steadfastly provided their elderly parents with remittances and emotional support.

The women who have *luk-khrueng* children by their Dutch spouses expected to remain in the Netherlands and to receive daily care from them. This form of care arrangement may not be as simple as it sounds. The Thai mothers still adhere to the Thai family values, while their children have been born into Dutch society and are more or less socialised by Dutch family norms. Both of them may be confronted with a different family morality regarding care of the elderly. Accustomed to the family value of the independent unit of the *gezin* (conjugal, nuclear family), the adult children and their future (Dutch) partners may feel uncomfortable if the Thai mother shares the same dwelling with them and expects them to give her daily physical care. Caring for the elderly in Dutch society, as described in Chapter Two, tends to be based primarily on the children’s volunteering to do this and emotional involvement. This is endorsed by the

¹³² About the *bun-khun* relation see Chapter Two.

perception that such care is also a part of the responsibility of the state, specifically in terms of financial care. The children may provide their mother with no more than affection and occasional physical care, but they may take it for granted that she can rely economically on the state. In fact, many Thai migrant women can count neither on an employment-related pension nor the universal old age pension if they have worked at an informal job without paying income tax, have not obtained Dutch citizenship and have not been resident in the Netherlands for the required number of years.¹³³ When they grow older, a group of these women may face loneliness and financial difficulties, especially if they have not saved enough.

To avoid being dependent on their Thai or *luk-khrueng* children only, some women invest savings from theirs and/or their Dutch spouse in the renovation of the house of their parents and/or purchase a piece of land, usually close to their relatives in Thailand. When they and their Dutch spouses are retired, they can spend some of the time in the Netherlands and some in Thailand (I shall discuss this in more details in Chapter Five). The women can look to their relatives for care. Phloi, for instance, does not wish to rely ultimately on her *luk-khrueng* son. She owns three Thai restaurants in the Netherlands and has adequate savings. She bought a new residence, located close to her parents and some of her siblings, in her home town in the North. She has also purchased another house, nearby the residences of her other siblings who have moved to Bangkok. She provided one of her nieces with money to pay her tuition fees for a four-year undergraduate degree. They have developed a good relationship over the years. She expected to be reliant on her relatives and this niece in particular for physical and emotional care. Apart from their children and relatives as potential care-givers, the women with a large amount of savings can also afford to employ a live-in nurse should the need arise. This suggests that the inequality of receiving care for the elderly is also present among the immigrants themselves. When the need for care arises, the women with better financial means will have various options, whereas those with meagre savings will tend to depend totally on their children and kin.

The women without children face a more vulnerable and uncertain future, particularly when they are a housewife without any income. They expected to be able to count on their Dutch partner as a source of care and economic support. Some of them have lived with their Dutch

¹³³ See more details on the pension systems in Dutch society in Chapter Two.

husbands without a marriage contract or certificate. If these husbands have not made a will and the women are not eligible for a proportion of his pension after his death, they plan to return to Thailand permanently and be dependent on their relatives for physical care and sometimes financial help. Other women without children have earned some income in the Netherlands and have often maintained a reciprocal relation with their kin in Thailand by giving them material assistance. They hoped that these relatives will reciprocate by providing them care of the elderly.

Conclusion

Marriage migration is a never-ending process, which encompasses far more than just the women's experience of geographical mobility. It inevitably causes a shift in their livelihood and family care and shapes their prospects for care-receiving in old age. To readjust to these changes and to upkeep transnational family relations, the Thai migrant women undertake multiple gender roles across borders; they are income-earner, wife, mother, daughter and sister.

Apart from facing the two different conceptions of marriage and family in Thai and Dutch society as analysed in Chapters One and Two, the women also encounter a great difficulty in adjusting to the different living conditions and cultural environment, among them climate, food, and language on their arrival in the Netherlands. In the time in which they have been unable to find any occupation and their relations with other Thai counterparts have not yet been established, they initially rely mainly on their Dutch spouses both financially and emotionally. The immigration regulations in the Netherlands make them even more vulnerable and dependent on their Dutch partner as these rules limit their capacity to endorse their own legal residence during the first three years of their residence.

Geographical mobility also has an impact on the migrant women's career trajectory. As discussed in Chapter One, the women's social position influences more than just their decision to marry and to move. In this chapter, I have argued that their social position including education, work experience and socio-economic background also ineluctably determines the women's experiences and perceptions of occupational and social mobility gained by marriage migration. The majority of uneducated, rural women faced horizontal mobility in career in the Netherlands

because they were mostly concentrated in unskilled jobs with little chance of a promotion. Nevertheless, they still do interpret their family's economic betterment from their earnings in Euro as a rise in social status. By contrast, the middle-class women with a higher education encountered a decline in their occupation, as a consequence of the low evaluation of their Thai educational standard in the Netherlands and their lack of fluency in the Dutch language. A few women have improved their qualifications by pursuing a Dutch language course, an occupational training programme and/or a higher degree at a university in the Netherlands; steps which finally equipped them to acquire a prestigious job. Others justify their acceptance of a low-skilled occupation by focusing on the financial gain, while anxiously keeping it secret from their kin in Thailand or choosing to highlight their upward mobility achieved through their migration to the Netherlands. This also suggests that, in the beginning, the rural, less-educated women have less capacity to communicate, suffering as a result of the inadequacy of their language skills. Despite this limitation, they adapt better in terms of occupation than their educated, middle-class female expatriates in a sense that they have no objections to accepting every kind of employment which might be offered.

In responding to the changing family care caused by marriage migration, the women rearrange child-rearing in various forms, which are shaped by their past marital experience, the family's life-cycle and the cultural codes of mothering. Many women have left their children in the care of their female kin in Thailand. This form of care arrangement is not uncommon, since the Thai cultural idea defines both the mother and extended relatives as a major source of child care. Mother-child separation might not necessarily lead to problems between the migrant mothers and their children, even if they have lived apart for years, the offspring have grown up, and the women have a trustworthy relative on whom they can rely. Those women who were reunited with their children in the Netherlands and others who have children with a Dutch partner have faced other kinds of difficulties. Struggling with the geographical distance from their natal family and the Dutch cultural idea which ascribes an exclusive parenting role to the biological parents, the women have experienced a lack of support of child care from their relatives and in-laws. They have also had to adapt to the different ideas and practices of child-rearing in Thai and Dutch societies. Previously, the role of the Dutch husbands in facilitating their Thai wives'

adjustment to Dutch society and supporting their legal residence has been underlined. At this juncture it should be stressed that they also play a vital part in processing the mother-child reunion and helping in child care.

The women deal with caring for the elderly parents from a great distance by providing them with financial support and relying on their relatives in Thailand for daily physical care. Support for care of the elderly is determined by both the strength of the feeling of filial obligation and the actual reciprocity developed between the women and their family members over time. Considering their prospects of receiving care as they grow older, the women expected that their sacrifice for the families' well-being will be rewarded by the children and kin who will look after them in the future. This evidence confirms my argument in Chapter Two that sending remittances cannot be interpreted purely in terms of morality, in which the women acquiesce in family norms—in the Thai case the *bun-khun* relationship (the children's gratitude to the parents) and the *khvam pen phi nong* (being each other's brother and sister)—by offering their natal family a continual economic contribution. A practical dimension is significant because it shows that remittances are exchanged between the women and their families not just for child and elderly care, but also for a promise of the care the women will receive in their old age. Finally, transnational families are not purely a locus of co-operation, in which all family-members pool and share resources to maintain family welfare. Family strife sometimes erupts, especially when the women face endless financial importunities from relatives at home and have to fulfil filial responsibility simultaneously in both the Netherlands and Thailand.

Chapter Five

Living in Transnational Communities

Various scholars and policy makers still choose to pay considerable attention to the livelihood of immigrants during their process of adaptation, in particular their social mobility and their integration into the country of destination (Menjiva 1995; Raijman and Tienda 2000; Van Niekerk 2000). Nevertheless, the tide is changing and a growing number of studies now opts to underscore the transnationalism of contemporary migration. Globalisation, capital flows, the advent of information technology and the expansion of transport in recent decades have generated an increased time/space compression. This allows migrants to maintain their memberships of their community and to create economic, political, cultural and familial activities across borders (Basch et al. 1994; Bryceson and Vuorela 2002; Salih 2002). In Chapter Four, I focused on how marriage migration and transnationalism affect the women's life-course and their arrangement of family care. In this chapter, the impact of transnationalism on the women's perception of community and 'home' and on the life of non-migrants in the local community in Thailand is emphasised.¹³⁴ I will begin with an analysis of the women's experiences of being both 'here' and 'there' in relation to the reconstruction of their community membership. As transnational ties are supposedly always considered to create the migrants' connectedness to both places simultaneously (Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Armbruster 2002), I will move on to explore in how far in daily practice the women's sense of belonging to community and 'home' is characterised by complexity.

Migration and transnationalism have an impact not only on the migrants; they also affect the people who do not move (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Levitt 2001; Parrenas 2001). One of the prominent transnational linkages takes place in the form of the sending remittances. A continuous flow of finances from the Thai women in the Netherlands (and throughout Europe) to their

¹³⁴ As explained in the Introduction, I followed only the visits of women from lower classes and with a rural background to their hometown in Thailand. Throughout this chapter, I refer to the effect of remittances and 'social remittances' on the migrants and non-migrants from lower classes in rural communities.

families in a local village in Thailand has been observed (Lisborg 2002; Prapairat 2005; Ratana 2005). This foreign income is primarily spent on the renovation of the house and the purchasing of consumer goods. Do such activities simply imply an ‘unproductive’ form of use? In studies, the economic outcome of the remittances tends to be overwhelmingly accentuated, whereas their social and cultural effect is downplayed. The purpose of the second part is to study the deployment of remittances and its socio-economic consequences in the migrant women’s household and local community.

There is not only a financial flow from the receiving to the sending country; it also encompasses a transmission of information, symbols, social values and life-styles which is called ‘social remittances’ (Levit 2001: 54). In the third part, I will elucidate to what extent these ‘social remittances’ generate or challenge the cultural ideas and practices of non-migrants in the origin community, and why some elements from global cultures are modified by local ideas, whereas others are ignored.

The relationship between the sending community and various places overseas is neither one of simple economic dependency nor a one-way traffic. Goods, people and cultures move back and forth between locations (Gardner and Osella 2004: xxii). In the fourth section, I suggest the term ‘reversal of social remittances’ to examine how contacts with the immigrants to a certain degree influence the opinion and life-styles of the hosts in the receiving area. Apart from the flow of Thai women to the Netherlands, there has been a reverse geographical movement of a group of retired Dutch men married to a Thai wife to Thailand. Do they create their own transnational relations? If so, how do they benefit from their seasonal migration and transnational life-style? The answers to these questions will be unfolded in the final part.

The women’s perception of community and home

The conventional sociological notion of community stresses that sharing physical proximity and a homogenous culture within a bounded location is a central feature of community and the continuation of communal relations between its members. The term *Gemeinschaft* (Tönnies 1955), for instance, refers to close-knit, face-to-face contact, intimate relationships and social

cohesion. In the community, roles are specific and consonant with one another and members are relatively immobile, physically as well as socially. The moral custodians of the community are strong, its code clear and firmly internalised.¹³⁵ Community sentiments involve close and enduring loyalties to place and people (Baldassar and Baldock 2000; Bell and Newby 1971: 23-24; Bernard 1973). Viewed from this classical perspective, there would seem to be a good chance that geographical movement may generate disruptions of the community and diminish the members' sense of belonging to their community.

There are evidences that migrants today in many parts of the world simultaneously experience multiple localities, engage in activities both in their host and their original societies and reconstruct their sense of community and home (Armbruster 2002; Gardner and Osella 2004; Salih 2002). This leads to a reconsideration of the concept of 'community' and 'home', particularly the components of geographical proximity and face-to-face interaction between its members. Anderson (1983: 6-7), for instance, suggests that 'all communities larger than primordial villages with face-to-face contact are imagined. The members of a modern nation will never know most of their fellow-members..., yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'. He takes points to stress the power of mass literacy and its attendant large-scale production of projects of ethnic affinity which enable people or groups to communicate without direct or face-to-face relations. In this view, members of a community internalise an image of the community not as a group of anomic individuals, but as interconnected members who share their fundamental membership of the community (Anderson 1983; Appadurai 1996). Community today is therefore constructed, reinvented and contested (Chavez 1994; Gupta and Ferguson 1992). It is also necessary to distinguish between the sociological significance of locality (in the sense of 'place' or physical proximity) and of territory (in the sense of 'homeland' or 'soil').¹³⁶ For the de-localisation of many communities does not imply a loss of significance of the territory

¹³⁵ Tönnies (1955) distinguishes between *Gemeinschaft* (translated as 'community') and *Gesellschaft* (translated as 'society or 'association'). The former is characterised by personal intimacy, emotional depth and solidarity within a bounded locale. These interpersonal relations can be found in a traditional society. The latter has the characteristics of a modern society, which is defined by the feature of large-scale, impersonal and contractual ties.

¹³⁶ This does not mean that the geographical location loses its significance. Because of the need for a place to live daily life, to have a dwelling and to pursue interests, everyone continues to inhabit one or more locations at any one point in time (Kennedy and Roudometof 2001: 20). Yet, a sense of community membership is not fixed to a specific physical location.

(Kennedy and Roudometof 2001: 20). Migrants still keep up their ethnic affiliation and redefine the meanings of 'home' and to where they belong.

The data from my fieldwork indicate that geographical separation does not terminate social linkages and membership between the Thai women and their families and communities in Thailand. They live physically in Dutch society, but they simultaneously imagine through daily consumption a sentiment which connects them to their home community. They can enjoy a variety of regional Thai foods because the improvement in transport facilitates a quick distribution of products and fresh ingredients from Thailand to the Netherlands within a couple of days. This differs from the situation encountered by the pioneer migrants who migrated to the Netherlands nearly twenty years ago, as is recalled by Bao:

When I had just moved to Holland [in 1980], it was very difficult to find Thai food. There were only a few Thai restaurants, but no Thai grocery shop in Amsterdam. I had to buy Thai ingredients at shops run by Chinese or Indonesians and the price was exorbitant. But now I have no difficulties in finding various kinds of products from Thailand in many Asian grocery shops.

Goods which flow within the transnational fields become significant not in themselves, but in the social and cultural meanings with which they are inferred by those who consume them (Salih 2002: 56). As discussed in Chapter Three, food in Thai society does not simply nourish the members of the group, but the act of consuming food together also strengthens social bonds and a sense of belonging among its members. The convenience of finding Thai food in the Netherlands and the frequency of having Thai food in daily life generate a feeling of 'being home away from home' in the Thai women, as Suwipha expressed:

In Holland I am able to find many kinds of Thai food stuffs. Whatever fresh Thai ingredient I want, I can mostly find it in the Thai or Chinese grocery shops. This allows me to make various kinds of Thai dishes. I feel as if I were in Thailand.

The technological advancement in communication is another factor that forges linkages between the women and their relatives in Thailand and that permits them to share their daily lives, even though they cannot share geographical propinquity. Using global television channels and Internet websites, the women can immediately keep track of events which happen in Thai society. When a *coup d' état* took place in Thailand on 19 September 2006, for instance, the Thai migrants in the Netherlands were soon informed about it through the CNN and BBC television channels. Since broadcasting about this political event was banned in Thailand, the Thai community in the Netherlands, and elsewhere, were able to see the pictures of the event before the people in Thailand. Some women immediately made a phone call to exchange the details with family and friends in Thailand. Furthermore, Thai films, magazines and music can be bought in Thai grocery shops in the Netherlands or can be easily ordered through Internet websites. Many houses of Thai-Dutch couples are equipped to receive Thai television channels broadcast via satellite. The women can watch the Thai music videos and soap operas at virtually the same time as people in Thailand; they have more topics of conversation to share with their relatives.

Apart from daily consumption and communication, the women's sense of belonging to the 'homeland' and to an imagined community can also be renewed by sharing symbolic signs and ceremonies with their fellow expatriates in the Netherlands and non-migrants in Thailand. For example, there were official celebrations of the sixtieth anniversary of King Bhumiphol's accession to the throne from 9 to 13 June 2006 in Thailand. These events included the royal barge procession on the Chao Phraya River in Bangkok, the granting of amnesty to 25,000 prisoners, fireworks displays and concerts. People elsewhere in Thailand wore a yellow t-shirt to show their respect and loyalty to the King, as yellow symbolises Monday, the day on which His Majesty was born. In the Netherlands, the Royal Thai Embassy and the Thai community organised this ceremony in Amsterdam from 9 to 10 September 2006. There was an exhibition recording His Majesty's contribution to Thailand and traditional Thai dances were performed on the stage. Many Thai women, accompanied by their Dutch husbands and children, participated in the candle-light ceremony in the early evening. As did Thai people in Thailand, these women wore a yellow t-shirt to express explicitly their loyalty to their beloved King and their motherland. Through sharing this celebration, their sense of connection to their homeland was reaffirmed.

As illustrated in Chapter Four, many women suffered from the different physical and social environments in the Netherlands and faced a certain degree of exclusion, especially regarding legal residence and occupation. To overcome these differences and resist discrimination, they tend to practically and symbolically display their affiliation to their 'Thainess' even more strongly than when they resided in Thailand. When the women participated in Thai festivals which were organised by the Thai temple in the Netherlands, they preferred to don traditional Thai outfits: clothes they barely contemplate wearing when they were in Thailand. They also show a great concern about the events in Thailand. When the tsunami hit the Andaman coast in the South of Thailand on 26 December 2004, for example, considerable numbers of victims died. Many female Thai entrepreneurs in the Netherlands co-operated with other members of the Thai community to collect financial aid for government social organisations which assisted the victims.

The women not only reconstruct their attachment to the home community, they also form a sense of community among the Thai in the Netherlands. They re-create 'Thai' culture and attend Thai and Buddhist rituals, which are modified to fit into the Dutch climate and laws. Since the ceremonies are generally announced as official holidays in Thailand, a solution is found by organising them on a Saturday or occasionally on a Sunday, when Thai women and their Dutch husbands have a day off and are usually able to attend. Or at Loi Krathong (which is arranged on the night of the full moon in November), people in Thailand usually go to a canal to launch their *krathong*, which is made of banana trunk and decorated with banana leaves, flowers, a candle and three incense sticks.¹³⁷ In the Netherlands, the Thai migrants would be fined for floating too many *krathong* on the canals. It would be also inconvenient for them when the temperature plummets in bleak November. Instead, a small artificial pond is put in the hall in which this festival is organised. Because of the cost and the rarity of banana leaves in the Netherlands, the Thai use polystyrene and colourful papers to decorate the *krathong*.

On no account should the women's participation in Thai or Buddhist ceremonies be interpreted as nothing more than a form of solidarity. Their sense of community towards the other

¹³⁷ In the past the purpose of this ceremony was to pay respect to the goddess of the water, to beseech her help for a successful harvest, and to apologise to her for making the water dirty through daily consumption. Nowadays, this festival has become more a social event for both Thai and foreign tourists.

Thai in the Netherlands is solidly based on a shared ethnic origin, common life-style and interests. In other words, they originally come from the same country, speak the same language and share the similar experience of being a migrant wife of a Dutch spouse. In Chapter Three I underlined the role of weak ties in the form of acquaintanceship among the Thai in the Netherlands in providing economic survival strategies. In this chapter, I suggest that their daily contact with their fellow expatriates also serves as a vital source of help to meet practical and social needs. They can exchange information about where to find cheap Thai ingredients, when the Thai festivals are held, and what is happening in Thailand, which would be less possible to share it with their Dutch spouses and migrants from other ethnic groups.

Even though the members of the Thai community in the Netherlands share their ethnic origin, they are not a homogeneous group. Consequently, the women establish sub-groups and sub-cultures within an ethnic community. The women from Isan (the North-east of Thailand), who make up the majority of the Thai in the Netherlands, often gather together, make Isan food, speak Isan dialect, and play *mo lam* music (folk songs in Isan dialect). This is irrefutable evidence that the migrants can develop multi-dimensional affiliations to both the ‘Thai’ culture and their regional cultures.

The women’s perception and experiences of ‘home’ are not also uniform. Home is instead multi-locational and moveable, varying according to the circumstances of daily life. When I asked which place the women perceived as ‘home’, almost all of them—regardless of the duration of their stay in the Netherlands—initially presented a nostalgic ideal of Thailand as their ‘real’ homeland, a place to which sooner or later they would return. In daily life, ‘here’ and ‘there’ are sometimes both regarded as home because the women establish their own family with their Dutch spouses in the Netherlands and simultaneously keep up social ties with their family in Thailand. Or, when they are concurrently bombarded with both discrimination from their hosts and incessant financial demands from relatives in Thailand, home is neither ‘here’ nor ‘there’. Nit expressed her mixed attitude about ‘home’ in the following words:

Of course, Thailand is my home. I was born and grew up there. I occasionally miss the peasant life of my home village. The neighbours were generous and we often shared food.

But I have doubts about whether home there [in Thailand] is always really peaceful. When my relatives kept importuning me for more money, I feel disappointed. I sometimes think that here [the Netherlands] is also my home. I have lived with Jaap for many years and I am getting used to the life here. When I have visited Thailand and the plane has departed from Bangkok, I feel that I left home. But when the plane has landed at the airport in Amsterdam, I feel that I arrived home as well.

The women sometimes express their ambiguous feelings about a temporary reunion with their families, aroused by the high expectations of financial success their families place upon them. They certainly look forward to visiting home once or twice a year, entertaining in the Thai lifestyle and enjoying Thai food, but they are anxious about visiting their families if they do not have enough savings to take back home (I will provide more illustrations in the next section).

Remittances: deployment, impact and meanings

This part begins with reviewing perspectives and literatures regarding remittances use and its effect on the sending area. Both the economic and gendered approaches discussed in the following are applied in an attempt to analyse my own data. An emphasis will be laid on the impact of remittances on the rural village and how remittances are spent and managed from the view of the Thai-Dutch couples, the families and the neighbours in Thailand.

Perspectives and research on remittances

The economic perspective on the use of remittances and their effect on the sending communities is to be distinguished into two approaches: the migration pessimist and the developmentalist. The first approach contends that overseas income is likely to be spent 'wastefully' on conspicuous consumption, extravagant life-passage rituals in the family and unproductive investment. Such squandering neither improves the household's long-term financial security nor does it promote an investment in such income-generating activities as running small-scale enterprises. There is an undeniable risk that increased dependency on overseas earnings by the household and the nation

can instigate economic instability since remittances are unpredictable and reliant on the global market demand for labour by migrants (Lipton 1980; Keely and Tran 1989). Conversely, the second approach argues that the money migrants remit home is used 'productively' to secure household needs and to develop the welfare of the sending areas. At the macro-level, it raises investment in the trade and service sectors and alleviates an ailing economy in the country of origin (Lianos 1997; Orozco 2002; Taylor 1999). The limitations of both perspectives lie in their overemphasis on their uncompromisingly clear-cut positive or negative dimension of remittances and in their overriding concern with economic effects.

Several authors have argued that the new economics of labour migration has been developed simply to cope with the complex interaction of migration, remittances and development. Their arguments are three fold. In the first instance, remittances can be considered as returning household expenditure in the migration process and as a source of investment capital which can be used to support the education of children and/or to facilitate the migration of other household members (Lianos 1997; Stark and Lucas 1988). Secondly, remittances generate direct and indirect effects in migrant-sending economies. Non-migrants who do not receive any remittances may nevertheless benefit from the economic growth and increased investment of other households or companies as a consequence of the magnitude of consumer spending by the households which do receive remittances (Djajic 1986; Taylor 1999). Thirdly, the deployment of remittances is shaped by the political and economic conditions of the country of origin. Political instability, economic recession, lack of business training services, and an underdeveloped infrastructure may all impede migrants in their efforts to invest productively (Nair 1999; Van Hear 2002). This approach criticises the rigid and simplistic views of both the migration pessimist and the developmentalist. However, it still does not challenge the overstatement of the economic outcome and the impact of the remittances is assumed to be unproblematic and gender neutral.

A gendered perspective argues that the perception which sees spending money on housing, consumption and ritual ceremonies as 'wasteful' activities reflects a narrow, 'masculinist' interpretation of the economic development. This economic explanation ignores the broader social aspects of development and the complexity of the migration experience on the basis of

gender, age and other variables (Piper 2005 cited by King et al. 2006: 411). Instead, the gendered approach sheds light on the inter-relationship between migration, remittances and gender relations. It is an irrefutable fact that gender specificity may influence access to remittances and control of the use of remittances within the household. The overseas income may also affect a rearrangement of migrant family care and a reconfiguration of gender and inter-generational relations among family members (De Haas 2007; King and Vullnetari 2006). Critically, migrants and non-migrants tend to be perceived as passive actors, whose behaviour is constrained by structural, political and economic determinants. A gendered view provides an insight into a certain degree of social agency exerted by migrants and non-migrants in defining remittances.

Deployment and consequences of remittances

Remittances are primarily deployed in meeting substantial family needs, paying off debts, renovating a house and pursuing luxurious consumption. Extra money is sometimes remitted for urgent family medical care and such life-passage events as a wedding or an ordination. The Thai women also contribute financially to the development work in their local communities, which might include renovating a district temple, school and hospital. Wong, for instance, raised money from her expatriates in the Thai community in the Netherlands to organise a *pha pa*¹³⁸ ceremony for the primary school in her home village in the North-east of Thailand on 24 December 2005. Proceedings began with a Buddhist ritual at the school in the morning and around sixty villagers participated in this event. Wong later handed over the donation of around 50,000 Baht (1064 Euro) to the school principal. In the evening, an outdoor celebration banquet was arranged. Several students performed both traditional Thai, Isan (North-eastern), and modern dances on a stage. Later, the school principal publicly addressed Wong and her Dutch spouse in his speech to express his thank and to honour them for their contribution to the community.

This overseas income obviously augments the economic well-being of the women's natal family in Thailand. Most women with rural and lower class backgrounds had no prospect of helping to provide a better life for their families before their migration to the Netherlands. The

¹³⁸ *Pha pa* literally means 'forest robes'. It is a Buddhist ritual, in which the robes and such miscellaneous items as soap, tooth-paste and tea are offered to the monks. In addition, people who organise a *pha pa* ceremony will raise funds from others and donate these to the temple, school or hospital.

money they send home generates the improvement of their families' living condition and permits them and their families to move up the social ladder of the sending community. Importantly, remittances support a better education for their offspring from a previous relationship, which includes the possibility of upward social mobility. This would be impossible if the women had remained in Thailand. At the community level, to some extent the remittances promote the social development of the women's villages, such as the reconstruction of the temple or the school. Indirectly, the women's support of community projects symbolically reaffirms the continuation of their community membership, enhances their self-esteem, and brings their families public recognition, as illustrated above by Wong's experience.

Of course, it is not all plain sailing. Such remittances widen the socio-economic disparity within the local community. The contrast between the modern, concrete residences of the families receiving overseas income and the wooden, rustic-style houses of those denied remittances is patently obvious. Since the migrant women refer to the existence of their class mobility in their community in Thailand, their economic progress and better life-styles makes them and their family feel financially and socially superior to other non-migrant villagers. Some families with a migrant become an informal financial resource assuming the role of a private lender or pawnbroker for villagers. For example, some farmers who faced financial troubles turned to Wong's elder sister or other families with a migrant to sell or mortgage their farmland. During my visit to her home town in Khon Kaen province, the North-east in 2005, Wong proudly showed me the pieces of land she had purchased from other villagers since her migration to the Netherlands.¹³⁹ Furthermore, higher social privilege is extended to the women's children and relatives. Due to their donation, their families received quick service when they visited a doctor at the local hospital or their children attracted more attention from teachers at the school. Such circumstances therefore result in a socio-economic inequality between the emigrants' and non-migrants' families.

The increased opportunities for conspicuous consumption opened up by remittances awaken a feeling of competition among the migrant families. Their relatives often tell the women

¹³⁹ This is not vacant land. In most cases it has belonged to villagers who were forced to sell it in the wake of economic hardship. The friction which can arise from such transfers of ownership needs further research.

about the economic contributions of other migrant neighbours. This competition in the display of material success or sometimes even just the boasting about it works as an extra justification for the incessant importuning of parents for financial support.¹⁴⁰ Phloen learned from her mother that a female villager, who was married to a German, had sent a large sum as a remittance to her parents to reconstruct their house, to instal modern appliances and to buy a new car:

One of the villagers told my mother that her daughter [who married a German] sent her around 50,000 Baht [around 1000 Euro] a month. This prompts my mother to keep asking for more money. I wondered what kind of occupation that woman had. How could she remit such large sums of money? I live in Europe, so I know how hard we have to work to earn our income and that the cost of living here [Europe] is expensive.

Some women reflected that the remittances they send back home become an important matter to their families, overshadowing their living conditions in the Netherlands. They wondered whether, if they were unable to provide their families and communities with remittances, they would still be the recipients of such honour and social recognition.

The financial progress and the improved social status the women and their families acquire through their overseas earnings generate a specific preference among the villagers in having children and a transformation of the power relations within the migrants' families. Some young villagers are now tending to prefer to have a daughter rather than a son, because they hope that sooner or later their daughter will marry a foreign man and will send them remittances as the pioneer migrants have done (Prapairat 2005; Ratana 2005). As mentioned in Chapter Two, several rural women had already supported their family financially when they were in Thailand. However, the considerable amount making up remittances means that their families become economically more reliant on the women, which gives them a certain degree of power in the household decision making. It should be underlined that the consequences of the migration and the remittances create a dilemma. Certainly, the women obtain more power to make such

¹⁴⁰ A study of Prapairat (2005) of Thai migrant women in Germany illustrates a similar trend to my findings in the situation of Thai women in the Netherlands. The migrant women felt that their families did not appreciate how hard they had to work in Germany and that, as a consequence, their families made endless demands on them.

decisions within the family pertaining to such issues as the reconstruction of their parents' houses, giving advice about the care of elderly or an investment by the family. None the less, becoming the main economic supporter does not mean that the women are emancipated from the gender role of family care. Instead, they are still expected to shoulder both financial and care responsibilities on which I have already elaborated in Chapters Two and Four.

Defining and negotiating remittances

As cited earlier, the migration pessimists deem a deployment of remittances on basic family needs, conspicuous consumption and family ritual as economically 'irrational' and 'unproductive'. Whatever they may think, from the point of view of the Thai migrant women and indeed non-migrants in Thailand, spending an overseas income on these activities is considered socially and culturally something that is 'reasonable'. As described earlier, the majority of the women interviewed originally came from a family with a lower economic, rural background and their families had lived in relatively poor conditions. Unquestionably, in their vision their income in the Netherlands should in the first instance improve the family's standard of living, pursuit of daily consumption and guarantee the education of the children. Later, the women may consider an investment. Wong, for example, is the daughter of a farmer and came from a relatively poor family. She and her siblings had to migrate to Bangkok to seek employment. Their meagre income from unskilled jobs was barely enough to cover the household expenses of their own family and the amount they had to remit to their parents. When Wong moved to the Netherlands, during the first two years she spent the main part of her income on the reconstruction of her parents' house. She also purchased a new car for her older sister who lived close to her elderly parents. This made it easy for her sister to take the parents to the district market around 20 kilometres from their village. After Wong had lived in the Netherlands for four years, she purchased a piece of land and helped her sister to open a small grocery shop in the village.

In any consideration of the use of remittances it must be borne in mind that this is significantly influenced by the Thai cultural ideal of living abroad. In Chapter One I showed that the Thai envisage Western countries as modern and wealthy and that consequently the migrants are subjected to pressing expectations of economic success. As a result of this cultural ideas, the

women and their families spent a large part of the remittances on such status-enhancing activities as the purchase of modern household appliances and extension of the residence; a signifier to display their material achievement which they have obtained from marriage migration to other villagers. These consumptions by the migrant families also convey visions of imagined foreign places and the type of modernity about which the non-migrants tend to fantasise in accordance with their local perception of living overseas. During my visit to Wong's home village in the North-east of Thailand in 2005, I noticed that the houses of Wong and of other migrant women had a dining-table and a modern kitchen. However, the women's family members were accustomed to the Isan (North-eastern) style and preferred to have their meal sitting in a circle on a large mat on the floor. The dining-table was used by the Western son-in-law during his visits to Thailand. Their main function is to embellish the house and to exhibit the migrant families' acquisition of a modern Western life-style regarding the local idea of overseas life.

Admittedly, remitting money for the purpose of organising a life-passage ritual in the family may not increase the household's economic security, but it is imbued with significant social and symbolic values. As in the case of community as presented earlier in this chapter, the transnational family relations of migrants can also be imagined and renewed through various forms of exchange and interaction (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002: 10). The women live at an enormous distance from their families in Thailand and seldom have face-to-face contact. Sending remittances for a family ritual is one of the essential means by which to strengthen the ties with them. The women may not be able to attend the family ceremonies personally, but their financial support signifies their presence and involvement symbolically. In this case, a cash payment expresses social and emotional bonds.

Lastly, the use of remittances is intricately linked to a plan for the future contrived by the women and their Dutch spouses. Some Dutch men are convinced by their Thai wife to invest their savings in modernising the house of their Thai parents-in-law by the addition of an air-conditioner and a Western-style toilet.¹⁴¹ They can then enjoy a comfortable life during their yearly visit to Thailand. As elucidated in Chapter Four, many women and their Dutch spouses

¹⁴¹ I also noticed that some of the houses of the women's parents in Thailand had both a Thai- and a Western-style toilet. The former was for the women's families who were unfamiliar with the Western-style toilet, while the latter one was used by the women and their Dutch husbands during the time they spent in Thailand.

expected to live either permanently or temporarily in Thailand after retirement. These couples are likely to invest their savings in the purchase of a plot of land in the women's home town and plan to construct their own residence after their retirement.¹⁴² During my visit to Amphai in her home town in the South of Thailand in 2005, her husband, Henk, expressed his feelings about the possibility of owning some pieces of land near the house of Amphai's parents:

Whenever I visit her home, I like to walk and look around the land I own. I feel as if I were a king [smiling] because I own a big piece of land which I would never be able to afford in the Netherlands. A few years before my retirement, I will build a house on this land. Then, I can live some months in the Netherlands and some months in Thailand.

Because the material contribution to the family and the community are compounded of both economic and cultural meanings, many women have to curtail their expenditure and must experience hard work in the Netherlands to save sufficient money to send home. Those who are unable to follow the successful pioneer models apply a certain degree of 'impression management'¹⁴³ to cope with the high expectations and pressure exerted by their families and non-migrants in the sending community. During their visits home, the women stage-manage the presentation of their financial achievements by arriving in a fashionable outfit, wearing gold jewellery and presenting gifts from the Netherlands to their family and neighbours. An example of this is given by Nit. She spent nearly 300,000 Baht (6000 Euro) when she visited her family in the North-east with Jaap, her husband, in December 2005. She took her parents and sons out to many restaurants. She arranged a trip to Pattaya, in Chonburi province, near the Gulf of Thailand, for her parents, sons, a sister and a brother-in-law. She defrayed all the costs incurred such as food, accommodation and the hire of a van with a driver. As she did not have enough savings to

¹⁴² Non-Thai citizens cannot legally own real estate in Thailand. Many Dutch men can only possess a house or a piece of land on the name of their Thai wife.

¹⁴³ Goffman's theoretical thinking is influenced by symbolic interactionism. He stresses how an individual's self or identity is maintained and functions in the daily interactions of modern society and he uses the theatre as a metaphor of social interaction. He also suggests the concept 'impression management' which refers to managing the impression people hope others will form of them (Goffman 1956; Harste and Mortensen 2000). In other words, when an individual appears in the presence of others, he/she will try to present and to control his/her self-image so that this will convey an impression to others which is in his/her interest to convey (Goffman 1956: 3).

cover all these expenses during her visit to Thailand, she had to borrow 3000 Euro from the Thai female owner of the Thai restaurant in which she worked in the Netherlands. On her return, she had to pay this debt back.

The women themselves are not alone in this. Their Dutch spouses are also intentionally or unintentionally involved in this presentation of affluence. The women's parents perceive their Dutch sons-in-law as members of the *khrob khrua* (extended family); hence they are expected to fulfil some financial obligations to them. Conversely, the Dutch sons-in-law adhere to different cultural family norms and sometimes reject this responsibility. To conform to the family expectations and to avoid conflicts, some women remit money to their parents from their own income, but tell them that the remittances were given by their Dutch partner. Unaware of the truth, the parents praise their Dutch son-in-law for his generosity and share their appreciation with other relatives and neighbours.

Through their Thai wives' material support to their families and local communities in Thailand, the Dutch men acquire social recognition from their Thai in-laws, other villagers and government district officials. They appreciate this warm welcome and the feeling of being special as such recognition would rarely be their lot in the Netherlands. None the less, they sometimes find it difficult to collaborate with their Thai wives and to acquiesce in the conspicuous display of economic success by supporting their in-laws and the local community. They can accept the custom which requires that their wives present gifts to their parents and children, but they do not comprehend why they spend a large amount of money on buying a multitude of presents for their relatives, or even close neighbours. Inspired by the imagination of a wealthy Europe, the women's parents fantasise that their Dutch sons-in-law must be well off and assume that the man is obliged to pay for all the expenses when the in-laws accompany him and his Thai wife on a trip in Thailand. Some Dutch men like Victor found that these situations were unsettling:

After I have lived with Kung for a few years, I can understand that she has a financial responsibility to her family in Thailand. I agreed to give her some money to send home. I also found it acceptable to pay for dinner for her family a few times when we visited a restaurant during my holiday in Thailand. Somehow, I felt it was unreasonable if I had to

pay every time. Dutch people are thrifty. This quality demonstrates one's maturity and pride. It is embarrassing [for Dutch people] to spend money prodigally to impress other people, and later face financial trouble.

Marital tension between the Thai-Dutch couples may arise because a husband's refusal to pay causes the women a loss of face (*sia na*) and suggests that they have financial problems. Some women find a solution by letting their spouse pay first and then reimbursing it to him later, while others simply have to explain this situation to their partner, as Phai described:

When Frank started to complain, I explained to him that I visit my parents only once a year. I would like to treat them to a fantastic trip. I live far away from them and I am unable to take care of them. This is the only thing I can do. The money we pay for a trip of my family in Thailand is a small amount when we convert it in Euro. We cannot do many things in Europe for this amount of money. But it is an expression of our *khwamkatanyu* (gratitude) to my parents.

To conclude, remittances are likely to be spent on household maintenance, the education of the women's children, family rituals, reconstruction of a house and conspicuous consumption. Admittedly, using overseas income on these activities may not generate direct economic sustainability in the migrants' households and the local village, but socially it displays a higher socio-economic status of the women and their family and sustains the continuation of their ties with the families and communities. Remittances are imbued with both positive and negative socio-economic implications. They enhance the living conditions of the families of the migrants and support local development projects. Negatively, they also generate inequality within the community, material competition among migrants and preference for a daughter to a son. Remittances and their deployment on the improvement of the socio-economic standing of the families are a significant manifestation of migrant women's achievement from marriage migration. The inevitable outcome is the women are unavoidably confronted with high expectations from their families. Some of them have applied 'impression management' to deal

with such pressure, sometimes with the involvement intentional or unintentional of their Dutch partner.

Impact of ‘social remittances’ on the local community

Transnational practices affect not only a geographical movement of people; they also involve multiple transactions of monetary resources, goods, symbols, and political and cultural practices (Faist 2000; Guarnizo and Smith 2002). Although such flows influence the daily experience and social relations of migrants tremendously, they also impinge upon the livelihoods of people who have never migrated. The contradictory role of remittances—both promoting economic and social development of the migrants’ families and local communities and widening the socio-economic discrepancy between migrants and non-migrants—have been thoroughly evaluated (Stark and Lucas 1988; Taylor 1999; Taylor and Wyatt 1996). However, there has been less examination of the ideas, social values and practices which are transmitted back to the sending countries and challenge the attitudes and cultural practices of people in the country of origin.

The term ‘social remittances’ is suggested by Levitt (2001: 54-60) to refer to the ideas, behaviours, identities, and social capital in the host country which are transmitted to sending communities where they generate new cultural products which emerge and subsequently challenge the lives of those who are left behind. These social remittances are transferred intentionally and unintentionally by migrants when they return home, when non-migrants visit migrants in the receiving country, or through the exchange of letters, videos, e-mails and telephone calls. This concept tends to emphasise the interaction of migrants and non-migrants with the global cultural flow. These ordinary people, according to Levitt (2001: 55), can act as cultural creators and carriers who receive, expand, interpret and transform the values and practices to which they have been exposed.

When I applied the concept ‘social remittances’ to my study, I found that the idea of overseas affluence which the Thai women select to present in their contacts with people at home reinforces the already entrenched high social value of living abroad among non-migrants and stimulates their preference for international migration. As mentioned earlier in relation to the

expectation of a successful overseas livelihood and the cultural idea of *raksa na* (saving face), the migrant women do not reject the misconception of an affluent Europe completely. Instead, they conformed to it consciously or unconsciously by remitting regular sums of money, sending photos of their fantastic trips to London, Paris or Rome, and displaying their wealth during their visits to Thailand. This presentation means that the cycle is destined to be repeated by the many non-migrant women who dream of international migration. Bun, for example, recalled that when she and Daan, her husband, visited her family in Thailand, either her relatives or other villagers often asked her to introduce their daughters to one of Daan's Dutch male friends in the hope that their daughters would finally migrate to the Netherlands and send them remittances.

Significantly, the hardship of adjusting to a new society and the necessity of adapting to a partner from a different culture are barely shared with potential migrant women, although such exchanges could be useful in preparing them before their departure to another country. As long as the financial advantages of living abroad are overemphasised at the cost of concealing the physical hardship and draining emotional consequences, it is not surprising that many women experienced a clash between their dream and the reality of their life upon arrival in the Netherlands (an issue I have already discussed in Chapter Four).

However, this evidence should not be interpreted simply as if the pioneer migrant women and their potential counterparts are naïve cultural receptors. Indeed, it indicates an encounter with global and local culture in which the migrant women play a mediating role. They are exposing themselves to varied global ideas and life-styles when they earn their living in Dutch society, but they are careful to display only what they believe that the non-migrants at home expect to see. Conversely, the prospective female migrants are also likely to select those elements from what the migrants present which correspond to the Thai imagination of overseas affluence. The following opinion of Pla, who participated voluntarily for several years in the activities of the Thai community in the Netherlands and in Europe, gives a good impression of the selectivity in the reception of global culture among non-migrants:

In 2007, the officials [of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security in Thailand] in collaboration with the association of the Thai Women Network in Europe,

made trips to many villages in the North-east from where various Thai women marry and migrate to Europe. Our mission was to provide the female villagers with the information necessary to understand about living conditions in Europe. When we explained about the difficulties of adapting to a new society, some women questioned why if it were not good, had you [pioneer migrants] moved to Europe? Others listened to us, but they still wanted to marry and to move. The idea of overseas affluence holds them strongly in its thrall. I realised that we [pioneer migrants] should not forbid them to migrate. What we are able to contribute is to give them an explanation of how important it is to acquire a little bit of the language of the host society and how necessary it is to improve their employment skills before they depart.

The ‘social remittances’ in the form of the women’s presentation of the material achievement and of ‘successful’ intermarriage shape the villagers’ attitudes towards both local and *farang* man and to some extent stir the beginnings of a transformation of marriage choice in the local community. A negative image of a Thai man is reconstructed presenting him as a person who is financially irresponsible, has a proclivity for mistresses or is addicted to gambling largely because various migrant women had had negative experiences with their former Thai husbands.¹⁴⁴ By contrast, the *farang* man is perceived as a (financially) responsible partner and a generous son-in-law, since many women had told their parents that the remittances they have been sending home were provided by their Dutch spouses, even though this was not always the case. Coupled with a view of the Thai cultural ideal which expects women to aspire to hypergamy, marrying a *farang* man offers more opportunity for upward mobility than a marriage with a local partner.¹⁴⁵ This has combined to stimulate young female villagers to prefer a mixed marriage. Furthermore, studies of several local communities in North-eastern Thailand with a high number of women who have married and migrated to Europe reveal that the parents also develop a preference for having a

¹⁴⁴ See the remarks about the idea of Thai manhood in Chapter One.

¹⁴⁵ See the concept of ‘hypergamy’ in Chapter One.

foreign son-in-law, since he is considered to be a person who is better able to support the family than a local man (Prapairot 2005; Ratana 2005).¹⁴⁶

The flow of 'social remittances' may not necessarily cause drastic alterations in the daily practices of those who do not move, but it does expose them to a certain level of global cultural diffusion. During their visits to Thailand, some women, who have lived in the Netherlands for years, have frequent contact with Dutch people and absorb Dutch life-styles, explained to their families and friends how well-managed the public transport system in the Netherlands is and how good their quality of life is compared with that in Thailand. Nit expressed her perception of Dutch life and what she sometimes told to her family and neighbours in Thailand:

Here [the Netherlands] people have a fairly good quality of life. When they are unemployed or are unable to work, they receive a state provision or compensation from the employer. Or when people retire, they receive a state pension. In Thailand, people will not receive any payment if they have no job. The state does not provide the elderly with any pension [except for those who have worked for the government]. They have to rely on their own savings and their children.

Although the women hold a positive opinion about certain aspects of the Dutch welfare state,¹⁴⁷ they still strongly subscribe to the Thai family values of responsibility for the care of their elderly parents. This aspect validates the analysis given above which reveals that the migrant women should not be seen as passive cultural carriers who bring the values and practices of the host society back home. To some extent they are rather selective.

¹⁴⁶ The attitude of Thai men towards the marriage of Thai women with foreign husbands has rarely been studied. Only a few studies, which focus on rural villages from which a number of women have married a European man, reveal that some women used the choice of marriage migration to avenge themselves on their Thai husbands who had shown utter irresponsibility towards their families (Ratana 2005; Prapairot 2005).

¹⁴⁷ See further details on the Dutch pension system in Chapter Two.

‘Reversal of social remittances’: a preference for marrying a Thai woman

In the current theory on transnational migration, an insight has emerged which emphasises the perspective of the migrant, from which home and host society are defined as a single arena of social, familial, economic and political relations (Basch et al. 1994; Schiller et al. 1999). Levitt (2001) points out what she terms ‘social remittances’, which focus only on a one-way flow of ideas, symbols and practices from the receiving to the sending country. At the point, I would like to draw attention to the experiences of the hosts (Dutch family members, in-laws, friends and acquaintances), who are also exposed to a different way of life. I propose calling this the ‘reversal of social remittances’, as a reference to the flows of attitudes, values and cultural practices which are transmitted from the country of origin to the country of destination and shape the ideals and life-styles of the hosts who have contacts with immigrants in the receiving area. In this part, I will elucidate on the transformation of their marriage preference among a group of Dutch men as an example of the ‘reversal of social remittances’.

As described in Chapters Two and Four, after marriage migration to the Netherlands in the first place the women rely on the support of their Dutch spouses for their settlement and the legal details of their residence. In their efforts to win their husbands’ affection and to secure their legal residence, the women take care of them, physically and emotionally. Many women who had separated from a former Thai husband have devoted enormous efforts to keeping their marriage with a Dutch partner afloat because they are afraid of facing an unsuccessful marriage again. Other women, particularly from rural and lower-class backgrounds, are determined to work to acquire a foreign income. They battle to withstand all hardship and marriage problems they may have to endure. In such situations, the Dutch husband has social and cultural leverage in the Netherlands. The upshot of this self-effacement has been the growth of a specific perception of Thai women by other Dutch men. Compared with Dutch women, the Thai wife is viewed as relatively ‘traditional’, compromising, and less demanding. Some Dutch men have had the experience of a failed marriage with a Dutch partner and witnessed the ‘successful’ marriage of their friend with a Thai wife. Subsequently, they have personally preferred to follow their friend’s route. Resolved in this purpose, they have accompanied the Thai-Dutch couple to the

woman's home town in Thailand and asked her to establish contact with a female relative or fellow-villager. For instance, one of Lalita's Dutch brothers-in-law made such a trip to Thailand. Lalita introduced him to one of her Thai female friends, who showed him around during his stay in Bangkok. Later, they married and she moved to the Netherlands. There, three Dutch male friends of Lalita's brother-in-law observed that his Thai wife took care of him very well, serving him drinks and cooking for him. They too wished to have a Thai wife. Subsequently, they made a trip to Thailand in the company of Lalita's brother-in-law to find a Thai woman. A year later, they all brought Thai women to the Netherlands.¹⁴⁸

A similar preference for a marriage with a Thai woman is also observable among men from such other European countries as Germany, Switzerland and Denmark. Since his retirement, Jörgen, a German pensioner, has lived with his Thai wife, Thawi, in a village in Suphanburi, Central Thailand. He recalled that while he was still living in Germany the character traits of a Thai wife of his German friend had impressed him very much. She was considerate, compliant and industrious. Jörgen had asked his friend's Thai wife to introduce him to another Thai woman. As a consequence of this help, he finally married Thawi and they have been together for thirteen years.¹⁴⁹

Through the inevitable interaction of circles of family and friends and the preference of some European men for marrying Thai women, flows of women from specific local communities in Thailand to Europe are created. In the Netherlands, some women are relatives and friends of each other who come from the same village or region in Thailand (see Chapter Three), although admittedly the number I found was not high. A study of Thai marriage migration to Europe (Ratana 2005: 11) revealed that eighty-four women in the age group twenty to fifty-nine from one village in the North-east had married a Western partner.¹⁵⁰ Many of them had migrated to and were concentrated in the same cities in Switzerland. Or *Matichon* newspaper on 2 March 2004, as

¹⁴⁸ This does not mean that all Thai-Dutch marriages are successful. After suffering for many years, some women eventually separated from their Dutch husband. Or, some Dutch men experienced difficulty in living with their Thai wife and felt confronted with her financial demands. Yet, the stereotype of a 'traditional' Thai woman who is attentive to the needs of her spouse and easily controlled is in general still prevalent.

¹⁴⁹ See *Matichon* on March 2, 2004 (in Thai).

¹⁵⁰ They made up almost one-third of the total of 330 women from this age range. The nationality of their Western partners was predominantly Swiss (96 per cent); a small number came from Germany (2 per cent), England (1 per cent), and France (1 per cent) (Ratana 2005: 11)

already cited in the Introduction, described that various women from a village in Suphanburi, Central Thailand, had married a German man and migrated to Germany. This situation exemplifies a form of local and global interaction. The women have extended their local village globally through their migration and concentration in some specific cities in Europe. Similarly, within the next few decades, some specific local villages of returned migrant women with their retired foreign husband will emerge in Thailand.

Flow of retired Dutch husbands to Thailand

The flux of labour, refugees and family migration from poorer to wealthier destinations is often heavily accentuated. By contrast, recently a converse stream of international migration has emerged from higher-income to lower-income countries: retired labour migrants who return to their home countries and pensioners from wealthy countries seeking a better retirement life (Toyota et al. 2006).¹⁵¹ Some studies focus specifically on the international retirement migration of Northern Europeans to the USA, Australia and, increasingly, such Mediterranean countries as Spain and Italy. The decision of the pensioners to move, either as a couple or a remaining partner, is motivated mainly by their personal preference, the warmer climate, local culture, lower costs of living, and the relatively cheap health-care services in the chosen resettlement areas (King et al. 1998; Rodriguez et al. 1998). Nevertheless, the migration flow of European retirees to Asian countries in connection with a marriage with an Asian spouse has been relatively under-researched. This part aims to fill such a gap.

The mirror-image of the Thai migration to the Netherlands, the flow of the Dutch pensioners to Thailand is a gendered phenomenon. In the Introduction and Chapter Three, I described the higher tendency of Dutch men to marry a Thai woman than of Dutch women to wed a Thai man, which results in a female domination of the Thai community in the

¹⁵¹ There is also an intra-movement of pensioners within the country or between the wealthy countries such as from the North to the South of the USA, from Canada to the USA, or from England to Australia. The destinations of retirement migration are currently changing and becoming more diverse such as retirement moves from the USA to South Africa or from Northern Europe to Mediterranean countries (Warnes 2001; King et al. 1998).

Netherlands.¹⁵² A migration flow to Thailand of Dutch male retirees who are married to a Thai wife has already been observed.¹⁵³ A group of Dutch men now live in the home village of their Thai wife and a few of them have settled in a big city and run a small business such as a guest house or a grocery shop. Some men prepare their future in Thailand by renovating the houses of the women's parents or purchasing a piece of land, as cited earlier in this chapter.

Uneven global economic development allows the Dutch men to enjoy a better life in Thailand. The state and/or the employment-related pension that the Dutch male retirees receive may do no more than meet their essential needs in the Netherlands, but the purchasing power of their money is expanded when they spend their life in Thailand. On account of the much lower cost of living in Thailand, the Dutch men can afford a spacious residence, food of a good quality, a holiday in Thailand or neighbouring countries, and good medical care in a private hospital.¹⁵⁴ From my findings, it also seems that socially the Dutch male pensioners develop a sense of self-value as the elders are respected in Thai society and the 'white Westerners' are acknowledged by the Thai to be superior in terms of wealth. They also receive a warm welcome in the local community as a consequence of their wives' and sometimes their own financial contribution to the wives' families and communities. As the women and their Dutch spouses tend to build a house close to the relatives of the women, the social networks of the Dutch men are expanded. They will become involved in the women's extended families and be brought into contact with different generations, which diverge from the situation in the Netherlands where social networks and inter-generational relations tend to decrease in various degrees when people reach the age of

¹⁵² Neither the statistics about the Netherlands nor those about Thailand give numbers of Dutch men married to a Thai woman or of Dutch women married to a Thai man. However, the Dutch statistics do provide the number of Thai migrants in the Netherlands, among whom the women form the majority.

¹⁵³ There is no exact number of retired European migrants with a Thai wife in Thailand and they may not form high numbers yet, given the historical fact that the migration of Thai women to Europe started in the late 1970s. For the next few decades, a higher number of returned migrant women and pensioned European husbands to Thailand can be predicted.

¹⁵⁴ Apart from the migration of European male pensioners who have married a Thai wife to Thailand, there is also a flow of health tourism to Thailand. Pensioners from wealthier countries in Asia such as Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore make trips to Thailand both for a holiday and medical care, which is much cheaper than in their own country (Toyota et al. 2006). Through their connections with travel agencies, some private hospitals in Bangkok or other cities which appeal to tourists mainly provide medical service for these pensioners. The hospitals have modern medical equipment, superior rooms, and other facilities similar to a five-star hotel to satisfy this demand for medical care.

retirement. Older men can be more vulnerable than older women in this respect (De Jong Gierveld 1998; Risseeuw 2005).

Permanent resettlement in Thailand may, nevertheless, not be a simple matter. The couples' relationship with the women's natal families may be smoother when they lodge with their family members during a short visit to Thailand than when they reside permanently in the same house or their own residence nearby and have frequent daily face-to-face contacts. The couples may have to face more financial demands from the women's families and the Dutch men have to adapt to the filial obligations required of their Thai wives to their families. Interestingly, the women depend to a certain degree on their husbands, particularly in the initial period when they are earning their livelihood in the Netherlands. In Thailand the Dutch men may have to rely on their Thai wives, socially and emotionally and are surrounded by their wives' relatives. Therefore, the women have social and cultural leverage, which may lead to a reversal of power relations in the Thai-Dutch couples. And, at a certain moment, problems of inheritance will become an issue.

Some Dutch men in their late seventies expect to die in Thailand, while each season others who are younger move back and forth between the Netherlands and Thailand. When the Dutch men earn their living in Thailand as did their Thai wives when they lived in the Netherlands, they build up social networks and gather with friends and acquaintances from the Netherlands (or other European countries) with whom they share a country of origin, language or life-style. Jan, for instance, is currently in his early sixties and was granted early retirement on account of a chronic illness. With his wife, Rani, he moved to her hometown in Krabi, a popular tourist city in Southern Thailand and they reside in their own house which they purchased three years ago. They enjoy the warm climate in Thailand for six months from October to March, which is the winter season in the Netherlands. Jan's parents had already passed away many years ago and he keeps contact with his only brother who has remained single and lives in the Netherlands. When he is in Thailand, he makes an occasion phone call to his brother. He is in contact with Dutch and other European men from Switzerland, Denmark and Germany who also were married to a Thai woman and had migrated to Krabi after their retirement. He sometimes invites them to his house and his hospitality is reciprocated. They drink tea and chat about their

daily lives and the global news. When the temperature in Thailand soars to 35 to 37 degrees Celsius in the summer, Jan returns to the Netherlands. He stays there from April to September and enjoys a pleasant climate. As Rani has a business in Krabi, she does not accompany him to the Netherlands every time. During his times in the Netherlands, he maintains the contact with the other pensioners by e-mail and occasionally by phone calls. They will gather again in another six months when the temperature in Thailand has dropped.

These pensioned Dutch husbands also re-create their transnational life-style when living in Thailand. They instal a satellite television so that they are able to follow the global news and the events which happen in the Netherlands. They order Dutch or English books on the Internet and exchange them with Dutch and other foreign pensioners. Their demands for products from their own country, in combination with those of foreign tourists, had led to the emergence of import enterprises and small food shops in the local community in Thailand. A Dutch friend of Jan's, for instance, married a Thai woman and after his retirement has lived in Krabi for four years. He runs a bakery shop and produces various kinds of bread of a better quality than the bread made by local factories. He orders food products from the Netherlands and other countries from an import company in Bangkok and sells them in his shop. Consequently, the Dutch male pensioners lead their transnational lives and establish transnational communities by sustaining social linkages not only with their family in the Netherlands and their in-laws in Thailand, but also with other retired foreign men who have married a Thai woman and reside either temporarily or permanently in Thailand.

Conclusion

Globalisation and transnationalism in relation to marriage migration have challenged the conventional concept of community. Instead of terminating the ties with their community, the Thai women still assiduously maintain linkages with their families in Thailand, re-create Thai culture and renew their affiliation to their sending community while they earn their daily living in the Netherlands. Their sense of connectedness to community and 'home' is multi-dimensional and changeable, depending on the situations they face daily. The women redefine their sentiments

towards their home communities as a nostalgic place in which they were born and where their natal families still live. Likewise, the Netherlands is considered their 'home' because they form a conjugal family and develop a sense of membership of the Thai community, based on the sharing of an ethnic origin, collective interests and common experiences. When the women encounter conflicts both 'here' and 'there', they feel as if they belong to neither of the two places. In this context, their imagination of the connection to communities is as important as the actual physical presence in the communities.

Sending remittances is another way to keep up transnational relations with the non-migrants at home. Rather than having an exclusively positive or negative effect, my findings reveal that instead the remittances have an ambivalent economic and social impact on the women's households and local communities in Thailand. Unquestionably, they promote the economic well-being of the migrants' families and the social development of the sending communities. Nevertheless, they exacerbate socio-economic discrepancies between the households of the migrants and the non-migrants and economic rivalry among migrants' families.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the new economics of labour migration underlines the fact that the economic and political conditions in the sending areas irrevocably influence the deployment of the remittances. Besides being aware of this, I suggest that the use of remittances also has to be understood from the migrants' and non-migrants' viewpoints, which are shaped by the local perception of migration and overseas life, the migrants' family-life transition and the cross-cultural marriage couples' plans for their future.

Assuming a separate role is a flow of 'social remittances'—the ideas, cultural practices and social capital which are transmitted to the sending country and shape the attitudes and lifestyles of the non-migrants (Levit 2001). These social remittances initiate a transformation of international migration and marriage choice among non-migrants in the local community. The Thai migrant women are exposed to such various forms of global culture as different family norms and a sense of relative equality between people, but they choose to present only their financial achievement and successful intermarriage. What the non-migrants perceive as modern Europe may also differ from what is defined as modernity by the hosts. This evidence indicates that neither migrants nor non-migrants are passive carriers and receptors. They select and modify

those global ideas and practices which are relevant to their local cultures, in this case the Thai social value of a wealthy and modern Europe.

‘Social remittances’ should not be perceived as a one-way transmission from the receiving to the sending countries. Ideas, cultural values and practices are instead transmitted back and forth between places and to a certain degree challenge the lives of the hosts who contact the immigrants directly or indirectly. I term this the ‘reversal of social remittances’. A preference for marrying a Thai woman among a group of Dutch men who have witnessed the ‘successful’ marriages of Thai-Dutch couples is an instance of the ‘reversal of social remittances’.

Such experiences are not restricted to the Thai migrant women. The retired Dutch husbands also experience transnational life-styles when they move each season between the Netherlands and Thailand, follow the local and global events, and maintain contacts across places. Often there is a preponderant emphasis on the economic gain of migrant wives from poorer countries who marry a spouse from a wealthier country and then participate in the global labour market. I argue that, through marriage to a Thai wife, the Dutch husbands also benefit economically and socially, especially in their later stage of life.

Conclusion

This research has focused on the cross-cultural marriage of Thai women in the Netherlands and their transnational families. It was set up to investigate and study in greater depth four main research themes: the motivation and decision behind the women's marriage migration; the Thai-Dutch couples' confrontation with different ideas of family and friendship; the women's kinship and friendship based-social networks; and the impact of marriage migration and transnationalism on the women's and their family's life-courses as well as on the life of the sending communities. Below, I shall present the main findings of my research and stress their contribution to the relevant fields.

Marriage migration and its context

As discussed in the Introduction, the neo-classical economic perspective, which was initially developed to study labour migration, stresses that the economic discrepancy between the sending and receiving countries and material gains are the major factors which determine the women's marriage migration. I argue that, although this assumption does have some substance, it is also hampered by significant limitations. Principal among these is that it does not recognise that, in contrast to labour migration, intermarriage migration involves more than simply the geographical mobility of the migrant; it is also a significant confrontation with a partner from a different culture, religion and ethnicity.¹⁵⁵ A second important limitation is that it fails to realise that the geographical mobility and marriage of men and women in a specific society are controlled, culturally and legally, in different ways.

Given the limitations cited above, I suggest that it is essential to see marriage migration in its historical, structural and socio-cultural context. Taking this step offers an explanation of why

¹⁵⁵ I do not intend to dichotomise labour migration and marriage migration. It is possible that, after marriage and movement to the receiving country, some migrants participate in the labour market of the latter. However, there is a basic difference between labour migration and marriage migration in the way the migrants enter the host country. In the former case the migrants are allowed to enter on the basis of employment, whereas in the latter case they receive permission to enter by marrying a citizen of the host state.

the women migrate and also goes one step farther and reveals why their marriage to a foreign partner is socially acceptable. It can also certainly help to clarify the puzzle of why intermarriage emerges as a particular migration pattern in some sending countries and not in others. In the case of my study, marrying a Dutch partner is a specific means for the Thai women to move to the Netherlands and these brides form the majority of the Thai migrants to this destination. This marriage migration is inseparably linked to globalisation processes taking the form of the spread of tourism to Thailand, investments by international companies in Thailand and the advances made in transport and communications, all of which have opened up possibilities for contacts between prospective partners. Nevertheless, such an encounter does not necessarily mean that the women will eventually be able to enter into intermarriage. The Thai women's marriage to a Dutch spouse is made possible by a conjunction of favourable factors: the Thai Buddhist acceptance of a marriage with a partner from another religion and ethnicity; the decline in the stigma which sees women coupled to a *farang* man as a former prostitute; the gendered stereotype of a 'traditional' Asian woman and a 'modern' Western man; and, not least, the social value Thais attached to wealthy Europe.

The cultural ideas of family in both Thai and Dutch societies also facilitate the propensity of Thai women to marry a Dutch man and procure benefits for their natal families from this marriage migration. In the framework of Thai family values, the women are still counted as a part of their natal family and are expected to be a main source of care for their elderly parents, even after marriage. This family responsibility stimulates the women, particularly those with little education and from a rural area, to opt for marriage migration as a chance to earn an overseas income to support their families at home. In Dutch society, there is a separation in economy and residence between *gezin* (the two spouses and young children) and *familie* (extended bilateral relatives), which I shall discuss in greater detail later. This Dutch family script allows the Thai women some leeway to send some amount of their own earnings to their families in Thailand without having to face any large degree of intervention from their Dutch in-laws.

Furthermore, the disparate perceptions of Thai and Dutch manhood, which are reflected in the women's past and current marital relationships, are another factor encouraging the women to embark on marriage migration. Ideally, the gathering and drinking of men with their male friends

as well as the assumed right to have sexual experiences both before and after marriage have been relatively tolerated and are viewed as qualities of being a 'real' man in Thai society. Having been subjected to these trials, many women interviewed, especially from rural and lower-class backgrounds, have had a negative experience of a former Thai husband as a person addicted to alcohol, keeping a mistress and/or was irresponsible for his conjugal and natal families. In contrast to this sort of male behaviour, the women tend to form a positive attitude towards the Dutch men seeing them as responsible husbands. This has to do with the idea that a monogamous marriage is valued in Dutch society and a 'proper' husband should spend the bulk of his earnings on and leisure with his wife and children, particularly among middle-class Dutch families. Also weighing heavily in their favour is that many Dutch men do not view the Thai women's past marital experience as a hindrance to marriage and some of them show their generosity by giving the women financial support, especially in the initial period of their relationship. Therefore, the cultural prescriptions of family and manhood in Thai and Dutch society, the lack of concern of the Dutch men about any previous marriage the women may have had and their initial economic contribution to the women combine to stimulate the women's preference for marriage migration.

In making an analysis of the decision to embark on marriage migration, it is important to take into account the cultural scripts of marriage, which signify the interaction between individuals and their families in marriage decision making. First and foremost, my study illustrates that both the Thai and Dutch cultural ideas of marriage coalesce to encourage the occurrence of Thai-Dutch marriage. In Thai society, marriage is culturally viewed as a family matter, but bilateral kinship and the Thai women's active economic role in the family are factors which allow them a certain degree of freedom in geographical movement and in partner choice. In the Netherlands, the idea that marriage is based primarily on an individual's own choice enables the Dutch men to a certain degree to make their own decision to marry a Thai woman and encounter less interference from their families. The second page of my cultural script in my research indicates that, in practice, the extent of the families' engagement and the women's independence in marriage migration varies according to their age, past marital experience, socio-economic status and relationship with the family. Many women had already experienced labour migration in Thailand and had had a previous marital relationship. The social position these

afforded enhanced the possibility of their marriage migration; they are quite independent in making their own decision to marry a potential Dutch husband and to move to the Netherlands. The picture changes somewhat for the young, single and middle-class women who do initially face their parents' disagreement, but they too acquire more freedom of a choice in marriage migration as they grow older and/or experience separation from a former Thai husband. Finally, it should be remarked that marriage which is perceived as a family matter in Thai society does not mean that the women have no freedom in partner choice, as already discussed. On the Dutch side, my study found that, even though the idea of an 'individual independence'—in which a person should live his/her own life and find his/her own partner to marry—does not allow generous scope for family intervention, the family is still implicated in it, especially in the case of intermarriage. These findings deconstruct the dichotomous idea of 'traditional' other societies characterised by an extended family versus 'modern' European societies in which a nuclear family predominates. This perspective is very influential in studies of cross-border marriage. It tends to overstate the mediating role of the family in the marriage of Asian brides and, as a consequence, the Asian women are perceived as displaying a lack of agency and as being a victim of such a marriage. Conversely, the European men are often portrayed as persons who have total freedom in their marriage choice, which has led to an under-researched area of the involvement of the European family in decisions to marry.

Most studies on the marriage migration of Thai women to Europe have focused mainly on the experiences of rural, less-educated women from lower-class families as they seem to make up the majority of Thai migrants in most European countries. I argue that, contrary to this picture, the Thai migrant women do not form a homogeneous group and that the differences in their social positions and life-courses have a fundamental influence on their motivation in marriage migration. Among the young, single, educated women from higher- or middle-class families, the choice of a partner is prioritised and migration is the outcome of marriage. For women from this group in their late thirties, marrying a Dutch man is a means to fulfil their desire of establishing their own family and to overcome the difficulty they encounter in finding a suitable local match. The young single peasant women from a lower-class background opt for marriage as an instrument by which to assist their geographical mobility, opening up their chance to participate

in global labour market and consequently improve their families' well-being. The divorced women regard such a marriage as an opportunity to secure the future of their children from a previous relationship and to escape the stigma of their failed past marriage. Some women—regardless their socio-economic status—also mentioned affection, the appearance of the Western man and the chance of adventure as incentives. This analysis reveals that the women act strategically and assuredly have a certain degree of agency. Within the structural constraints and their limited social position, the women—especially divorced ones and/or from a rural, lower-class background—consider marriage migration a better alternative to remaining in Thailand.

What is the motivation of the Dutch men in marrying a Thai wife? Physical attraction and intimacy are two factors which occupy a large place. Need of physical and emotional care is another reason, not only for men who have a difficulty in finding a local woman, have experienced divorce and/or are somewhat older, but also for some young, educated men. Some men do actually consider the long-term socio-economic benefits in their later life, particularly after retirement when they expect to live in Thailand with their Thai wife.

Apart from the economic perspective, the motivation of the women in a cross-cultural marriage tends to be judged within the framework of a love-based marriage. Can the reasons elaborated above be interpreted as a marriage based on 'love'? Is indeed love the only condition for marriage? Marriage in Thai society is a combination of affection, the acquisition of economic stability and the creation of a social recognition from two families. In Dutch society, marriage is based primarily on the affection and happiness of an individual, but practically the social status of the potential spouse and the level of socio-economic security obtained from a marriage also play a part. Marriage in Thai and in Dutch society is therefore a means to pursue the satisfaction of physical, emotional and/or economic needs, even though at different levels and in different forms. This raise the question: Why is a marriage of the bride from a poorer country to a groom from a wealthier one considered with such scepticism? There are at least three cogent reasons of this. The most conspicuous of these is the stereotype that economic reasons and the lack of agency characterise the marriage migration of the bride is incompatible with the ideal that love and individual choice are the primary bases for a 'modern' marriage. The second is more historical. Marriage in North-western Europe has undergone changes over centuries and the current ideal of

'romantic love' is only one of many social constructions of marriage throughout its history. Despite its relatively newness, this Euro-centric idea is regarded as universal and adduced as a criterion for 'egalitarian' and 'real' marriage. As a result, the pragmatic dimensions of marriage which are more visible in other societies are downplayed. The third reason is based on cultural and emotional aspects. This dichotomous assumption ignores the cultural idea of manhood, which also influences the women's marriage motivation and disregards the dynamic feature of a marital relationship through which affection can be built up over time, both before and after marriage. As illustrated earlier, some women had formed the impression that, unlike their former Thai husband, their Dutch spouse was more responsible and would not take a mistress. On this pragmatic assumption, they decided to marry and gradually developed a feeling of affection to him. Therefore, it is this dichotomous explanation in terms of economic reasons versus a love-based marriage which makes the women's marriage migration problematic. My study postulates that the analysis of the inter-relationship of the structural and social determinants, the cultural ideas of family, manhood and marriage as well as the women's life-course and social position are more suitable coins of vantage from which to gain a better insight into the women's complex motivation for and decision to embark on marriage migration.

Everyday 'sociality' with family, in-laws and friends

Various studies often assume that when the cross-cultural marriage couples 'create a family' the couple is doing something 'natural' and universal. I take the example of the Thai-Dutch couples' perception of the Thai wife's financial support to her family in Thailand to illustrate the arbitrariness and equivocal social construction of the family. Sending remittances, which is the morally 'proper' action for the Thai women, is judged by their Dutch husband as 'unusual' because the couples adhere to different sets of family values. *Khrop khrua*, as it is interpreted by the Thai women, consists in both their natal family and in-laws. In contrast, marriage in Dutch society generates an independent economic unit strengthened by a residence for the two spouses and their young children (*gezin*), which is separate from the *familie* (extended bilateral relatives). The parent-child relationship in Thai and Dutch societies is constructed differently. The Thai

ideology of *bun-khun* relations defines that the adult offspring—particularly the daughters—must return their never-ending debt of gratitude to their parents by taking care of them physically, financially and economically. The obligation of the children, especially the daughters, to their parents overrides other family relations. In Dutch society, it is considered to be the parents' responsibility to give their children affection and care. Rather than an obligation, the children's care for their ageing parents is based on their voluntary decision to do so and the understanding that a *gezin* takes precedence over the *familie*.

The absence of a welfare state in Thailand is also a factor which makes the parents more financially dependent on their adult offspring, in contrast to relative financial independence of the elderly in the Netherlands. This does not mean that the Thai migrant women who are from upper- or middle-class families and whose parents have enough savings to be self-reliant are free from such a filial obligation. These women may not have to send their parents (or siblings) regular remittances, but they have to be on hand to offer both financial assistance and care when the situation arises. They are also obligated to provide their parents and relatives with gifts or cash and to pay for food and trips when the parents and relatives accompany them during their annual holiday in Thailand. All these contributions are a way to express their gratitude to and involvement with their parents and relatives; it assures that when they are in need they will also receive care and support from their natal family. Because of the differences in family values, inter-generational relations and (informal or state) welfare system, the Thai women feel obliged to provide their parents and sometimes other relatives with financial and emotional support, whereas the Dutch spouse does not expect his Thai wife to have economic obligations toward her natal families. It should be added that the women's actual practice in dealing with family responsibility is not governed purely by the cultural norm. It also relies on the quality of the relations between the women and their natal family, their dependence on relatives for family care, socio-economic standing of their family and the negotiations between the women and their family members.

In the Netherlands, the women also have to face and learn different ways of creating relationships and of keeping company, which is called 'sociality', with in-laws.¹⁵⁶ In Thai society,

¹⁵⁶ See the definition of this concept in the Introduction and its examples in Chapters Two, Three and Four.

hierarchy and reciprocity characterise linkages between affinal kin, whereas the voluntary basis and independence of the *gezin* allow the in-laws less opportunity to engage in the couple's daily life. From the anticipations nurtured by their cultural background, the Thai women expect the parents-in-law to be 'more present' in their daily lives, both in supporting them and in making demands on them. However, the Dutch parents-in-laws fail to do so, since they believe that such behaviour may imply their unwanted interference in the *gezin* of their adult son. This produces ambivalent feelings in the Thai daughter-in-law; unquestionably she obtains a certain freedom to run her own *gezin*, but she simultaneously receives little everyday support and care from her Dutch mother-in-law or other in-laws.

Beyond the bounds of the family, the cross-cultural marriage couples are also confronted with a different 'sociality' with friends. Many women have no relatives in the Netherlands; therefore having friends from the same country of origin offers an important source of support. The women often share Thai food with their female Thai friends because the Thai idea of having food together implies a nurturing of social ties. They also maintain mutual obligations, both materially and emotionally, with their friends. By contrast, emotional aspects and a sense of voluntarism mark the traits of Dutch friendship. As a result, the Dutch husbands are initially unfamiliar with the practices of giving food, borrowing or lending money and the sharing of private family issues between their Thai wife and her friends. They also fail to recognise the flexible and reciprocal features of Thai friendship, in which mutual assistance can be returned in different forms and can be postponed as well.

These unspoken rules are not readily discernible, since people learn them through socialisation and take them for granted as part of their lives. This has also resulted in the lack of comparative research on the everyday 'sociality' with natal families, in-laws and friends. My study highlights that an awareness of these different cultural relational scripts and forms of everyday 'sociality' allows us to see that, in marriage migration, the bride experiences not just the crossing of geographical borders; she also has to transcend socio-cultural boundaries. Specifically, she has to adapt to a new physical environment and sometimes has to face difficulty in keeping up everyday relationships with their husband, in-laws and friends in uncharted water. Importantly, marriage migration does not end after the migrant wife has married and moved. It is an ongoing

process, because even after maintaining contact for years the women and other family members, especially their Dutch spouses and their Dutch in-laws, remain exposed to disparate concepts of family and friendship. Some of them do learn and adjust to each other to a certain extent. Obdurately, others view their own ideas as the norm and find it difficult to accept differences, which can easily lead to marital and family conflicts.

Social networks of kin and friendship

Among scholars of migration, there is a dominant assumption that kin and friends invariably provide the newcomers with resources and assistance in the process of migration and settlement in the receiving country. In this context, migrants' kinship and friendship networks are apparently perceived as self-sustaining. The significant role of female relatives and friends in facilitating the women's internal migration in Thailand and subsequently marriage migration to the Netherlands have been definitely observed and recorded in my study. Nevertheless, there are nuances and to reveal these I have employed the anthropological concept of 'relatedness' (Carsten 1995; 2000) which allows the space to understand the underlying meanings and expressions of the relationships of Thai migrant women with their relatives and friends in the Netherlands as well as their local (Thai) words for shades of friendship. There is more to be understood than the circumscribed formal kin relationship. One example was to investigate how feelings of intimacy, trust and being connected are conceived in order to be able to experience their maintenance over long distances and long time periods as natural. Another aspect permits the discovery of how friendships among Thai women in the Netherlands are formed, maintained and renewed as well as how conflicts are handled. In its examination of social ties with kin, my study underlines that sharing blood alone does not guarantee the maintenance of *khwam pen yat lae phi nong* (being each other's relatives and siblings) between the Thai women and their relatives in the Netherlands. Importantly, it is the social dimension of kinship based on sharing geographical propinquity, economic resources, mutual assistance and emotional support which nurtures the relationship between them. Such an analysis also reveals that it cannot be taken for granted that ties between the Thai migrant women and their siblings will be prioritised and constitute more

obligations than those with extended relatives. The actual quantity and quality of mutual assistance between closer and more distant kinsfolk depend on the previous and present relationships which have been cultivated over time.

Only a handful of studies focuses on the perceptions and practices of friendship in Thai society and such pieces of research tend to view Thai friendship as a dichotomy composed of ‘eating friends’ (*phuean kin*), who enjoy only jollification, and of ‘friends to death’ (*phuean tai*), on whom one can rely in calamity. I found that the term ‘relatedness’ is rather useful for this sort of analysis as it allows us to see the gradations of friendship among Thai women in the Netherlands, which can be expressed in nuanced Thai words, signifying different levels of contact, obligation and emotional involvement. The women create relationships devoid of any emotional strength with other Thai female expatriates, who are called *khon ruchak* (acquaintances). Such relationships are handy for receiving information about employment, for gaining economic benefit in the form of *kan len chae* (playing shares), *huai* (informal lottery) and *ngoan khu* (informal loans), and simply fulfilling their social needs with those who share the same mother language and life-style. After some time, the women develop a closer linkage with few of the *khon ruchak* with whom they can get along well and who share similar interests and socio-economic backgrounds, defining them as *phuean* (friends). They sometimes gather with these friends and they accompany each other to participate in the Thai festivals, but they are not people usually sought when mutual assistance is required. Friends who can be on hand in an emergency or when the going gets tough are called *phuean thi di* (good friends), but the women may not necessarily develop close friendship with these friends if they have only occasional contact. Instead, friends who maintain daily contact, indulge in joyful activities, observe reciprocity and have shown mutual trust for years are preferred and counted as *phuean sanit* (close friends). This evidence demonstrates that the reciprocal attribute of Thai friendship is valued, but that the emotional aspect also becomes very significant, especially when the migrant women live at a considerable distance from their relatives at home and face great difficulty in having frequent face-to-face interaction with them.

The social networks of relatives and friends among the migrants should not per definition be regarded as invariably supportive and/or cohesive. In fact, these ties can also suffer from

conflicts and sometimes break down. It is possible that the pioneer migrants will take advantage of their relatives and friends who have to rely on them during their initial stage of settlement or that some migrants may fail to reciprocate the assistance of the relatives or friends who have helped them earlier. Gossip also forms a potentially powerful element in making or breaking ties with kinsfolk and friends. Quite clearly, the absence of daily contacts, a refusal to maintain reciprocity and lending or borrowing money can cause tension or even the collapse of the Thai migrant women's kinship and friendship networks.

As discussed previously, the Thai women and their Dutch husbands experience different ideas and practices of friendship, a discrepancy which results in the Dutch men's problem in accepting the sharing of material support and mutual obligations between their Thai wife and her Thai friends. I elaborate in more details how the different ways of creating friendship, keeping each other company and dealing with conflicts among friends in Thai and Dutch societies, coupled with the Thai women's inadequate mastery of the Dutch language, are a significant reason, among other matters, to explain why the Thai migrant women so seldom or never have a development of *khwam pen phuean sanit* (being each other's close friends) with Dutch women.

The Thai ideas of kin and friend relationships are dynamic and flexible. Relatives of a similar age, who have been brought up in the same dwelling and share reciprocal help can also be counted as friends. Likewise, it is feasible that friends who have often sustained contact and mutual assistance for years feel as if they are relatives. However, my data do not allow for the latter conclusion. At this juncture, it is also good to formulate some crucial questions for future research: What kinds of relations are expected when the women and their Thai friends in the Netherlands return to Thailand permanently? Will they call on each other for support? Or will the women then turn to their relatives in Thailand for assistance as they will live in the vicinity of these kin?

Consequences of marriage migration and transnationalism

One of my major findings has been evidence which underlines the paradoxical and uneven impact of marriage migration and transnationalism on the women's livelihoods, their families'

life transition and their origin communities. The classical anthropological concept of 'hypergamy' assumes that the women and their family acquire a higher socio-economic status as the women often marry a man whose family has a slightly higher status than theirs. I question such a simplistic explanation and illustrate that marriage migration may not lead straightforwardly to an opportunity for the women to marry up. Instead, the women's perceptions and experiences of social mobility through marriage migration are shaped by their social position, coloured by their fantasy about affluent Europe and the economic disparity between the sending and receiving country. The women from rural areas with less education do indeed receive a great social boost from marriage migration. They have acquired both upward geographical and social mobility by migrating from a less developed country such as Thailand to a developed country such as the Netherlands and by improving the economic welfare of their natal family from their overseas incomes. Compared with their less-educated counterparts, the upper- and middle-class women with a higher education have been at a disadvantage in a sense that they have experienced what is termed by Constable (2005a) 'paradoxical hypergamy'. They married up in the form of geographical movement. However, they have experienced downward occupational mobility because they have encountered great difficulties in procuring a skilled profession in the Netherlands.

Geographical mobility requires the women and other family members to readjust family care. Some research describe to a situation in which the migrant mothers leave their offspring in the care of their female kin at home as quite 'unusual', since it often generates a traumatic experience for mother and child. My exploration of child care in Dutch and Thai societies reveals that the ideas of motherhood and the practices of mothering have a cultural specificity, which varies by society and class. In Dutch society, the biological mother is ideally defined as the primary and exclusive source of child upbringing, particularly among the middle classes, hence the mother-child separation may be perceived by the Dutch women as an 'improper' situation. By contrast, living apart from the children and sharing child care with other relatives at home may not always be regarded by the Thai migrant mothers, their families and children as uncommon because the Thai cultural script signifies that child care can be performed by the mother, extended kin and occasionally even neighbours. Furthermore, before migration to the Netherlands

many rural, lower-class women who faced economic difficulties and had to search for employment in other cities had already had a previous experience of separation from their children and received assistance in child care from their relatives in Thailand. Apart from assisting in daily child care, the significant role of the female relatives in lessening the children's emotional upheaval caused by the mother's absence and in nurturing the children's affection and a good relationship with their mother should not be underestimated. Moreover, the concept of 'transnational motherhood' tends to be applied predominantly to those migrant women who have left their children behind. I suggest that forms of child-rearing in the case of marriage migration might also include a mother-child reunion in the host country and the raising of children born to a foreign spouse. This broader view provides an insight into the participation of the foreign husband in child reunion and upbringing.

The women also rely heavily on their female relatives in Thailand for the provision of physical care for their elderly parents. From this form of sharing elderly care, it should not be simply implied that transnational families are a field of solidarity in which all family members invariably pursue filial obligations in order to sustain their families' welfare. Relationships between these family members are also characterised by a form of interdependence in which the migrant women give financial support to reciprocate their female kin who perform family care and to build up moral commitment so that these relatives will take care of the women in old age. Although such a family is an ideal typed, it should not be overlooked that transnational families are sometimes a site of tension, especially when the women are confronted with the two different forms of morality of family care in Thai and Dutch societies and with the conundrum of having to perform this care responsibility in the Netherlands and Thailand simultaneously. Moreover, in the case of marriage migration transnational families expand to include not only the women and their families at home, but also the foreign spouses, the in-laws and children from a previous or recent marriage. This perspective permits us to understand the complex social relationships which are maintained by the migrant women and other family members across geographical borders.

Weighing up the situation of Thai migrant women and their family care, there are some remarkable issues which require longitudinal studies. As mentioned in the Introduction, the Thai women migrated to the Netherlands quite late—in the late 1970s—and the majority of them were

between their middle twenties and their late forties when they entered the Netherlands. Receiving care in their old age may not yet loom as an urgent matter for them. My thesis merely points out the women's prospects for care-receiving when they grow older. It would be of interest to examine later after the retirement of both the women and their Dutch spouses whether the women will actually live in the Netherlands or return to Thailand permanently and which sources of care (the Dutch husband, offspring, relatives, friends and/or formal care) they can really rely on. Should the women have children by their Dutch husbands will these half Thai-Dutch children adhere to the Thai family values and inter-generational relations? Will they become 'Dutch'? Will they provide elderly care for their Thai mother? If so, which forms of care? How do the Thai migrant women perceive the arrangements of elderly care in Dutch society? A more specific question is: Is old age gendered? Do men obtain the same security of care from such social ties? Does perhaps their financial power allow them more options, such as greater reliance on formal care?

The social ties the women maintain with their families in Thailand are not simply in terms of family care. Consciously or unconsciously, they also renew their attachment to their families and home communities through their daily consumption, communications with their family in Thailand and the sharing common symbols by participating in Thai and Buddhist ceremonies in the Netherlands. The women construe a sense of multiple affiliations to communities which embraces not only their national homeland (Thailand), but also the regional community in Thailand from which they originally came and the Thai community in the Netherlands. This ideal construction does not preclude that their perception of community and home is not invariably harmonious. Not unnaturally, it is ambivalent and changeable. This mutable perception serves as their strategy, essential in their endeavours to respond to their experience of living away from their origin country, to counter discrimination in the host society and to cope with conflicts in their daily lives. Community membership today is therefore not always necessarily based on actual physical presence and face-to-face interaction. It is flexible and can be imagined through the migrants' ability to sustain contacts and activities within the transnational fields.

Providing financial remittances is another prominent means the women use to maintain their relationships with their family and non-migrant neighbours in Thailand. The importance of

the economic aspects of remittances and their clear-cut positive and negative effects tend to be overstated. My research indicates uneven economic and socio-cultural consequences of remittances, which indubitably promote the welfare of the migrants' families and the development of their communities, but also generate forms of socio-economic disparity between the families of migrants and of non-migrants as well as encouraging financial competition between migrants' families.

The way in which remittances create social and economic inequality is a subtle process. It does not have to be an increase in the existing inequality, but is instead a newly created inequality based on access to overseas income and on the migrants' view. Remittances enable the rural, lower-class migrant women and their families to enjoy a more luxurious life-style, emulating people in upper- and middle-class families. In this sense, to a certain degree the disparity between the rural, lower-class women and the urban, middle-class women is lessened. The negative aspect is that these overseas earnings may widen the inequality between the migrants and non-migrants in the local communities.

Many studies on Thai migrant women in Europe often overstate the empowering nature of transnationalism, tending to stress that the women's economic contribution to their families allows them to acquire more power in family decision making. In contrast to their conclusions, my findings point to its ambivalent features. The women do indeed obtain a certain degree of power, which generally involves making decisions in the household. However, the power they gain is not likely to challenge the existing cultural idea of gender role within the family; they are still expected to undertake family care and face incessant financial demands from their families. I argue that such a generalisation should be examined in greater detail in order to discover under which circumstances the women have the final decision within the household, in which situations they are at a disadvantage and how far such power reaches.

The women and their families often spend their overseas incomes primarily on basic family needs, conspicuous consumption and life-passage rituals. Rather than evaluating this deployment within an economic frame, either as 'wasteful' or 'productive', it is essential to see its social and symbolic meaning, which is defined by local perspective, in this case the Thai cultural ideas of family and community, of wealthy Europe and of saving face (*raksa na*). Using

remittances on organising family rites and supporting the community projects symbolises the continuity of the women's membership with their natal families and their origin communities, ensuring a source of support at home on which the women can rely practically and emotionally. The Thai social value regarding Europe as an affluent region is another determinant influencing the women and their families to spend remittances on the enlargement of their parents' residence and luxurious consumption. Such activities may not generate any long-term economic sustainability for the women's families. However, they do obviously display the women's economic success deriving from marriage migration and in this sense both the women and their families gain social recognition from other villagers. The women's deployment of remittances is also relevant to their prospects. After their and their Dutch spouses' retirement, they plan to earn their living, either temporarily or permanently, in Thailand. As a consequence, they are likely to use their overseas income to purchase a piece of land and construct a house on it.

Using the concept of transnationalism, scholars have been increasingly recognising the maintenance of social linkages between migrants and non-migrants across borders. This concept is applied particularly to the study of the migrants' contact with those left behind in the form of sending remittances and the impact of remittances on the sending communities. Nevertheless, little attention has yet been paid to combining the concept of transnationalism with the idea of family and gender as a tool used to analyse how remittances are allocated and controlled among migrants and their family members in general and how the migrant wives and their natal families benefit from remittances in the case of marriage migration. Family norms and structures stipulate the different duties of a man and a woman to his/her natal family and in-laws as well as his/her rights to access and to control household resources in a specific society. In the case of Thai-Dutch marriages, both family systems offer the Thai women a certain amount of freedom to send remittances to their families in Thailand. As a result, their natal families really do gain economic benefit from their marriage migration. Specifically, marriage in Thai society does not require the renunciation of the woman's rights and obligations towards her parents' family. As they have been raised with this idea constantly inculcated into them, many Thai migrant women still feel obligated to continue giving economic support to their family in Thailand, even though they have established their own conjugal family in the Netherlands. On the Dutch side, the income of the

two spouses should ideally be used only for the well-being of their *gezin*. My research has shown that many Dutch men can grow into accepting that their Thai wife sends a ‘reasonable’ amount of her own earnings to her natal family as long as she contributes financially to her own *gezin*. This is facilitated because, as a consequence of the ideal of an economically independent *gezin*, the women’s income is not seen as a part of the economic resources of their Dutch husband’s family (*familie*). Instead of also having to deal with their Dutch in-laws, the Thai women negotiate only with their Dutch spouses when they send remittances to their family in Thailand. Conversely, had the Thai women married into a family characterised by patrilineal kinship and patri-local residence as in some regions of Japan, or in Taiwan or Singapore, they would have been defined as a family member of their in-laws and their earnings would have been considered to belong to their husband’s family. The upshot would have been that the Thai women would have encountered a rather serious conflict if they felt obliged to offer their natal family regular financial support, whereas their in-laws would have expected them to contribute mainly to their household economy.

Significantly, remittances are not just financial; the importance of what are called ‘social remittances’ (Levit 2001)—ideas, symbols and cultural practices which flow to the sending area—should not be discounted. My findings illustrate that the ideas about a wealthy overseas life and ‘successful’ intermarriage which are presented by the Thai migrant women to some extent accelerate the already highly rated Thai value of living abroad and lead to the preference for marrying a white, foreign partner among female villagers in the rural communities. However, this does not imply that the global cultural diffusion constitutes an absolute power in changing the local attitudes and life-styles. I argue that both migrant women and non-migrants actually play a mediating role in expanding, selecting and modifying the ideas and practices to which they are exposed. In other words, not all of what the migrant women experience daily in the Netherlands is spelled out word for word to their families in Thailand. Instead, they present only what is pertinent to their families’ and non-migrant neighbours’ expectations. Their families and the non-migrants also choose to believe in what accords with their local social values of a life overseas.

Despite its importance, the concept of ‘social remittances’ does have the limitation that it seems to consider the flow of ideas, symbols and behaviours transferred from the receiving to the sending country. This obscures the fact that this movement is a two-way transmission, moving back and forth between two countries. I propose the term ‘reversal of social remittances’ to refer to values, attitudes and practices which also move from the sending area back to the receiving area and affect the opinions and life-styles of the hosts who come into contact with immigrants directly or indirectly. My study reveals that the idea of ‘successful’ mixed marriage influences not only the marriage preference of the female non-migrants in the villages in Thailand, but also of a group of Dutch men in the Netherlands. Some of them have had a failed marriage with a Dutch partner and are attracted by the stereotypical image of the ‘traditional’, tender Thai wife of their Dutch male friends. Subsequently, they have personally preferred to marry a Thai woman.

One other significant point which has emerged from my research is that the existing literature on migration tends to stress only a one-way flow of migration in which the migrants move from the less developed to more developed destinations and they benefit economically from such movement. My study argues that, alongside the migration stream of the Thai women to the Netherlands, there is also the converse flow of the Dutch men who have married a Thai wife moving to Thailand after their retirement. Similarly to their Thai wives in the Netherlands, to a certain degree these Dutch men also obtain socio-economic gain from their migration to Thailand.

The increased transnationalism and the migrants’ and non-migrants’ experiences of multiple localities do not imply the end of the power of the receiving state. Apart from the historical, economic and cultural determinants cited earlier, the role of the state in enacting immigration and employment regulations is unquestionably one of the significant factors which shapes possibilities for immigration. The occurrence of Thai-Dutch marriages illustrates the tension which emerges between an increased globalisation, transnationalism and capital flow—which create encounters between potential partners from different parts of the world—and the attempt of the receiving state to enforce restrictive border controls. These cross-border marriages also testify to the degree of the women’s agency, in which they search for any possible way to migrate within the structural and social constraints imposed from outside. Last but not the least, the everyday experiences of the Thai-Dutch couples are a remarkable example which shows that

ideas and practices of family, marriage, manhood, womanhood, motherhood and friendship all have a cultural specificity and differ by society.

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Glossary of Thai Terms

bun-khun	debt of gratitude to the parents
ching chai lae mai hen kae tua	sincere and not selfish
dok bia	interest
farang	white, Western men or women
huai	lottery
Isan	the North-east of Thailand
kan cham nam	to borrow from a pawnbroker
kan len chae	to play shares
khao nok na	literally ‘rice seedlings which have fallen outside the dikes of the rice-fields’ and used to illegitimate children born to foreign-Thai parents
khon ruchak	acquaintances
khrop khrua	the family of the two spouses, children and other extended relatives, regardless of whether or not sharing the same residence
khwamkatanyu	gratitude
khwam pen phi nong	being each other’s brother and sister
khwam pen phuean sanit	being each other’s close friends
khwam pen yat lae phi nong	being relatives and siblings
krathong	a piece of banana trunk, decorated with banana leaves, flowers, a candle and three incense sticks; it is floated on the water during the Loi Krathong festival
luk-khrueng	children of mixed parentage
luk chae	members of a share group
mae chii	nun(s)
miachao	a ‘hired wife’

mia luang	the principal wife
mia noi	a minor wife or mistress
mo lam	musician who sings folk songs in the North-eastern dialect
ngan dam	black work, tax-dodging
ngan khao	white work, on which income tax is paid
ngoan khu	loan(s)
pha pa ceremony	Buddhist ritual in which robes and such items as soap, tooth-paste and tea as well as some cash are offered to the monks
phanraya farang	the wife of a white, Western man
phi nong	siblings
phuean	friends
phuean kin	eating friends
phuean sanit	close friends
phuean tai	friends to death/bosom friends
phuean thi di	good friends
raksa na	to save face
sia na	to lose face
sinsot	bride payment which is given by the groom's to the bride's family
thao chae	manager of a share group
wong chae	a share collective
yat	relatives
yu mueang nok	living abroad, especially in Europe, North America, Australia or Japan

Appendix A: Demographic information and migration background of the interviewed women at the time of the interview in 2005

Name	Age	Area of origin in Thailand	Past marital status	Education	Duration of stay in the Netherlands (years)	Present occupation in The Netherlands	Number of children from a previous marriage	Number of children from a present marriage
Amphai	35	South	Divorced	Bachelor's Degree	3	Housewife	2	-
Bao	57	Bangkok and Central Region	Divorced	Primary (4 years)	25	Housewife	3	-
Bun	32	North-East	Single	Secondary (6 years)	4	Housewife	-	1
Chaba	29	Bangkok and Central Region	Single	Vocational Training (5 years)	5	Waitress	-	-
Charunee	39	North-East	Divorced	Vocational Training (3 years)	8	Masseuse	3	-
Chit	42	Bangkok and Central Region	Divorced	Secondary (3 years)	6	Masseuse	4	-
Chup	47	Bangkok and Central Region	Divorced	Secondary (3 years)	16	Owner of a Thai restaurant	1	1
Duang	45	North-East	Divorced	Primary (4 years)	15	Housekeeper	-	2

Name	Age	Area of origin in Thailand	Past marital status	Education	Duration of stay in the Netherlands (years)	Present occupation in The Netherlands	Number of children from a previous marriage	Number of children from a present marriage
Kamon	42	North-East	Divorced	Primary (6 years)	4	Housekeeper	-	-
Kanok	30	Bangkok and Central Region	Single	Master's Degree (in the Netherlands)	3	Cashier	-	1
Kung	38	North-East	Divorced	Secondary (3 years)	3	Waitress	2	-
Lalita	39	North-East	Single	Bachelor's Degree	8	Nurse	-	-
Lan	41	Bangkok and Central Region	Single	Vocational Training (5 years)	3	Housekeeper	-	-
Maeo	48	South	Divorced	Bachelor's Degree	15	Owner of a grocery shop	1	-
Mali	29	North-East	Single	Bachelor's Degree	1	Waitress	-	-
Mon	30	North-East	Single	Primary (6 years)	9	Owner of a massage parlour	-	-
Nam	33	North-East	Single	Secondary (6 years)	10	Owner of a Thai restaurant	-	-

Name	Age	Area of origin in Thailand	Past marital status	Education	Duration of stay in the Netherlands (years)	Present occupation in The Netherlands	Number of children from a previous marriage	Number of children from a present marriage
Nang	40	Bangkok and Central Region	Single	Vocational Training (3 years)	20	Sales service staff at an international airline	-	-
Nipha	33	North-East	Single	Vocational Training (5 years)	3	Housekeeper	-	-
Nit	40	North-East	Divorced	Primary (6 years)	6	Cook-assistant	2	-
Nong	24	Bangkok and Central Region	Single	Vocational Training (3 years)	5	Waitress	-	-
Nonglak	25	South	Single	Bachelor's Degree	4	Hotel maid and waitress	-	-
Phai	40	Bangkok and Central Region	Single	Master's Degree (in the Netherlands)	8	Financial consultant at a bank	-	-
Phen	50	North	Divorced	Bachelor's Degree	10	Housekeeper	-	-
Phimon	39	North-East	Divorced	Secondary (6 years)	11	Cashier	1	1
Phloen	33	North-East	Divorced	Secondary (6 years)	1	Cook-assistant	1	-

Name	Age	Area of origin in Thailand	Past marital status	Education	Duration of stay in the Netherlands (years)	Present occupation in The Netherlands	Number of children from a previous marriage	Number of children from a present marriage
Ploi	47	North	Single	Bachelor's Degree	20	Owner of a Thai restaurant	-	1
Pla	54	North-East	Single	Master's Degree (in USA)	14	Freelance Thai and Dutch language teacher	-	-
Rani	38	South	Single	Secondary (6 years)	10	Owner of a small business in Thailand	-	-
Ruang	43	North	Divorced	Secondary (6 years)	13	Factory worker	2	-
Siri	25	North-East	Single	Secondary (3 years)	1	Housewife	-	1
Somsi	44	North	Divorced	Primary (4 years)	5	Masseuse	3	-
Son	45	North-East	Divorced	Primary (6 years)	6	Masseuse	3	-
Suda	38	North-East	Divorced	Secondary (6 years)	9	Hotel maid	3	-
Suksi	35	North-East	Single	Bachelor's Degree	5	Masseuse	-	-
Suwan	51	North-East	Divorced	Primary (4 years)	11	Housekeeper	-	-

Name	Age	Area of origin in Thailand	Past marital status	Education	Duration of stay in the Netherlands (years)	Present occupation in The Netherlands	Number of children from a previous marriage	Number of children from a present marriage
Suwipha	38	North-East	Divorced	Vocational Training (3 years)	3	Housewife	2	-
Tawan	54	Bangkok and Central Region	Divorced	Primary (4 years)	5	Masseuse	-	-
Thian	50	Bangkok and Central Region	Divorced	Vocational Training (5 years)	9	Factory worker	3	-
Tiwa	39	Bangkok and Central Region	Single	Master's Degree (in Thailand)	1	Housewife	-	-
Tong	30	North-East	Divorced	Secondary (3 years)	2	Cleaner at a Thai restaurant	1	-
Tum	27	Bangkok and Central Region	Single	Bachelor's Degree	2	Cashier	-	-
Wanna	45	Bangkok and Central Region	Divorced	Secondary (6 years)	16	Cook at a Thai restaurant	1	-
Wong	33	North-East	Divorced	Primary (6 years)	8	Factory worker	1	-
Yui	32	Bangkok and Central Region	Divorced	Primary (6 years)	5	Waitress	1	-

Summary

This thesis examines the marriage migration of Thai migrant women to the Netherlands and the ups-and-downs of their everyday life of creating and maintaining their cross-cultural and/or long distance relationships with their Dutch husband, Dutch in-laws, Thai relatives and friends in the Netherlands as well as family and non-migrant neighbours in Thailand. The objective of this research is to study four main questions: 1) What factors influence the Thai women to marry and to move? 2) What are the underlying family values in Thai and Dutch societies which shape the marital relationship of the Thai-Dutch couples and their interaction with natal and in-law families? 3) How do the Thai migrant women form, sustain and renew their relationships with kin and friends in the Netherlands? 4) What are the consequences of migration and transnationalism on the women's and their families' life transition and on daily experiences of non-migrants in the sending community? I have applied a qualitative approach and such ethnographic research methods as a review of relevant literature, in-depth interviews and participant observation to the data collection and its analysis.

Cross-cultural marriages of Thai migrant women to the Netherlands may not constitute a high figure, but such marriages form some specific features. First, it is a novel phenomenon and links to the process of globalisation, transnationalism and the improvement of transport and communication, which generate contact between the Thai women and Dutch men and allow them to maintain a long-distance relationship in an initial stage. Second, such intermarriage is a particular way Thai women use to move to the Netherlands. By marrying a Dutch husband, the women form a majority of Thai migrants in the Netherlands. In 2008, the total number of Thai migrants was 14,281 and 10,225 of them were women. Among first generation migrants, the women make up of 8,260 persons (81 per cent).

Chapter One argues that economic gain and the opportunity for migration are not the only stimuli which drive the Thai brides to marry and to move. Other historical and socio-cultural determinants as well as gender enter the picture. The chapter also deconstructs the Euro-centric idea of modern marriage which is based on an individual's own choice and 'romantic love'. Family on both sides does engage in the decision to enter a cross-cultural marriage, although in

different ways and degrees. The socio-economic status and life-courses of the Thai-Dutch couples also shape their marriage motivation and the extent of family involvement in such marriage. By delving into the cultural and practical dimensions of marriage in Thai and Dutch societies, this chapter challenges the idea that 'love' is the only basis for marriage and illustrates that marriage preference and rituals form a cultural specificity, which is defined differently in a given society.

Another important fact pertaining to cross-cultural marriage concerns the confrontation between the two different sets of family responsibilities of the two spouses, which are analysed in Chapter Two. The Thai family scripts define both natal and affinal relatives as members of *khrop khrua* (family) and place a high value on adult children's gratitude towards their parents. On the Dutch side, there are two clear-cut family concepts: *gezin* (two spouses and their young children) and *familie* (extended bilateral relatives), which rarely share residence and household economy with each other. As a result, it is a priority for the Thai migrant wife to contribute to her parents' well-being and sometimes to extend this help to the entire family. Often this can be a problem as a Dutch husband does not expect his new bride to have financial commitments to her family at home. As the women are socialised to the Thai idea of reciprocity between relatives and in-laws, they also have difficulty in making sense of situations in which the Dutch in-laws undertake fewer obligations and when these in-laws fail to provide them with daily assistance and care. The last part of this chapter illustrates that the couples negotiate and compromise about different family norms and this is reflected by the various arrangements of their household economy.

As mentioned earlier, I pointed out that marriage, 'love', intimacy and family are subjected to the different cultural meanings and perceptions, varying according to society. This awareness allows me to become acquainted with how the different forms of kinship and how 'families' are conceptualised and given shape. It also provides me with the knowledge from anthropological studies of kinship and new insights in this field, which has moved away from the predominant orientation towards formal 'form' of kinship into a more nuanced understanding of meanings and individual's space to reshape/recreate their relationship. In Chapter Three, the concept 'relatedness' (Carsten 1995; 2000; Strathern 1992), for example, is applied to investigate the more open meanings as well as the social and emotional aspects of the ways of being relatives

and friends among Thai migrant women in the Netherlands. Instead of assuming kinship to be one of the most special relationships and something self-perpetuating, this chapter suggests that sharing blood alone does not have to guarantee constant assistance between pioneer migrants and their newly arrived relatives. Being each other's relatives is a situation which also has to be nurtured through sharing material help, mutual assistance and emotional support over time. These qualities mark the continuation or the breakdown of their ties. Furthermore, I underscore the dynamic features of friendship among the Thai migrant women by illustrating that they define, select and establish various forms of acquaintanceship and friendship with their female expatriates, which are reflected by a range of Thai words used to describe them. This chapter also presents the fact that disparate ideas and practices of Thai and Dutch friendship result in misinterpretations and sometimes marital conflicts among the couples.

Chapter Four indicates that marriage migration influences not only the women's geographical movement, it also affects the transition in their life-courses and family care. The women do not define their experiences of relocation, career change and disruption and social mobility in the Netherlands in the same way. Instead, their perceptions are determined by their social position, socio-economic backgrounds of their natal families and the Thai imagination of overseas affluence. To cope with great distance and change in family life-cycles caused by marriage migration, the women adopt various arrangements for the upbringing of children. This chapter reveals that the ideas of motherhood and the practices of mothering are socially and culturally influenced. The biological mother may be viewed as an exclusive source of child care, particularly among middle classes, in Dutch society. By contrast, child-rearing is performed by both the mother and a wider cycle of relatives in Thai society. This chapter finally points out that the women's economic contributions to their natal families should not be perceived as simply a way to fulfil filial obligations; they are also an exchange for family care with their family members.

Marriage migration and transnationalism shape the women's linkages with the families they have left behind and unavoidably affect the livelihood of non-migrants in the origin community, which is discussed in Chapter Five. The women form multi-dimensional and changeable feelings of community and 'home' to deal with the geographical separation from their

natal families and the situations they face daily. The remittances the women send home have ambivalent consequences; they improve the welfare of the women's families, but also generate socio-economic inequality between families with migrants and non-migrants. Not only cash, but also 'social remittances'—ideas, symbols and practices which flow from the receiving to sending countries (Levit 2000)—are combined with the Thai perception, which views Europe as a wealthy region, instigating the female villagers' preference for marriage migration. This chapter proposes the term 'reversal of social remittances' to demonstrate that values, ideas and practices are also transmitted back to the receiving area and to some extent challenge attitudes and lifestyles of the hosts who contact immigrants. In this case, a group of Dutch men who witness the 'successful' marriage of Thai-Dutch couples and later wish to follow such a route are an example of the 'reversal of social remittances'. This chapter ends with an analysis of the reverse flow of the retired Dutch men and their Thai wives to Thailand and their adaptation to resettlement in Thailand.

Samenvatting

Dit proefschrift onderzoekt de huwelijksmigratie van Thaise vrouwen naar Nederland. Het laat de wisselvalligheden zien van een dagelijkse leven waarin zij interculturele en/of lange-afstand-relaties aangaan en onderhouden met hun Nederlandse echtgenoot, hun schoonfamilie, Thaise verwanten en vrienden in Nederland, maar ook met hun familie en achtergebleven dorpsgenoten in Thailand. Vier hoofdvragen staan in dit onderzoek centraal: 1) Welke factoren brengen de Thaise vrouwen er toe om te trouwen en te verhuizen? 2) Welke Thaise en Nederlandse familiewaarden liggen ten grondslag aan de huwelijksrelatie van Thai-Nederlandse paren en aan hun contact met hun eigen familie en hun schoonfamilie? 3) Hoe vormen, onderhouden en vernieuwen Thaise vrouwen hun relaties met familieleden en vrienden in Nederland? 4) Welke invloed hebben migratie en transnationalisme op het verloop van het leven en de dagelijkse ervaringen van de niet-migranten in het land van herkomst? Het onderzoek volgt een kwalitatieve benadering en gebruikt voor het verzamelen en analyseren van de data etnografische onderzoeksmethoden, zoals literatuurstudie, diepte-interviews en participerende observatie.

Hoewel het aantal interculturele huwelijken van vrouwelijke Thaise migranten beperkt kan worden genoemd, hebben deze huwelijken enkele specifieke kenmerken. Allereerst gaat het om een nieuw verschijnsel dat verband houdt met het proces van globalisering, transnationalisme en verbetering van transport en communicatie. Dit proces maakt een ontmoeting van Thaise vrouwen en Nederlandse mannen mogelijk en stelt hen in staat om in de beginfase van hun contact een relatie op lange afstand te onderhouden. In de tweede plaats is een dergelijk intercultureel huwelijk voor Thaise vrouwen een bijzondere manier om naar Nederland te komen. Dank zij een huwelijk met een Nederlandse man vormen Thaise vrouwen de meerderheid van de Thaise migranten in Nederland. In 2008 waren er in Nederland 14.281 Thaise migranten, onder wie 10.225 vrouwen. Onder de eerste generatie Thaise migranten vormen de vrouwen een meerderheid van 81 procent met 8.260 personen.

Hoofdstuk 1 betoogt dat economisch profijt en de kans om te migreren niet de enige prikkels zijn die Thaise vrouwen ertoe bewegen om te trouwen en naar Nederland te verhuizen. Andere historische en sociaal-culturele invloeden spelen tevens een rol, evenals gender.

Daarnaast deconstrueert dit hoofdstuk het Eurocentrische idee dat het moderne huwelijk uitsluitend gebaseerd is op de eigen keuze van het individu en ‘romantische liefde’. De familie van beide kanten is betrokken bij de keuze voor een intercultureel huwelijk, zij het op verschillende manieren en in verschillende gradaties. De sociaal-economische status en de levensloop van de de Thai-Nederlandse paren vormen mede het motief om te trouwen en zijn ook van invloed op de mate waarin de familie bij een dergelijk huwelijk betrokken is. Door de culturele en praktische kanten van het huwelijk in de Thaise en Nederlandse samenleving bloot te leggen, laat dit hoofdstuk zien dat huwelijksvoorkeuren en huwelijksrituelen tussen samenlevingen kunnen verschillen en trekt het de aanname in twijfel dat ‘liefde’ de enige grondslag voor het huwelijk is.

Een ander belangrijk kenmerk van het interculturele huwelijk is dat het twee verschillende en soms strijdige opvattingen van verantwoordelijkheid ten aanzien van de familie omvat. Dat is het onderwerp van hoofdstuk 2. In het Thaise ‘script’ behoren zowel de eigen familie als de aangetrouwde familie tot de *khrop khrua* (familie) en wordt er veel waarde aan gehecht dat kinderen – ook wanneer ze volwassen zijn – hun dankbaarheid tegenover de ouders tonen. Aan de Nederlandse kant staan er twee noties van familie tegenover elkaar, *gezin* (de twee partners en hun jonge kinderen) en *familie* (de meer uitgebreide kring van verwanten aan beide kanten). Gezin en familie leven meestal niet samen en vormen zelden een gezamenlijk huishouden. Het gevolg van de Thaise verwachtingen is dat ook de vrouwelijke migrant wordt geacht bij te dragen aan het welzijn van de ouders en soms zelfs aan dat van de hele familie. Dit kan makkelijk tot een probleem leiden aangezien de Nederlandse echtgenoot niet verwacht dat de vrouw met wie hij net getrouwd is financiële verplichtingen heeft tegenover haar familie. Omdat de vrouwen zijn groot gebracht met de Thaise notie van wederkerigheid tussen verwanten en schoonfamilie, kunnen zij op hun beurt moeilijk begrijpen dat de Nederlandse schoonfamilie zich minder verplicht voelt dagelijkse hulp te bieden en zorg te verlenen. Het laatste deel van dit hoofdstuk laat zien dat de echtparen over dergelijke verschillen in familienormen onderhandelen en compromissen sluiten. We zien dan ook verschillende manieren waarop het huishouden geregeld wordt.

Zoals eerder gezegd heb ik benadrukt dat huwelijk, ‘liefde’, intimiteit en familie per samenleving verschillen, uiteenlopende culturele betekenissen hebben en anders worden

waargenomen. Dit inzicht stelt me in staat beter te begrijpen hoe ‘families’ worden geconcipieerd en vorm krijgen. Het verschaft me ook de kennis van antropologische studies naar verwantschap en van de recente inzichten op dit gebied. Dit onderzoeksterrein heeft afstand genomen van de overheersende aandacht voor de formele ‘vorm’ van verwantschap en streeft in plaats daarvan naar een meer genuanceerd begrip van de betekenissen en individuele ruimte van mensen om hun relaties te veranderen en te hervormen. In hoofdstuk 3 wordt bijvoorbeeld het concept ‘relatedness’ (Carsten 1995; 2000; Strathern 1992) toegepast om zowel de meer open betekenissen als de sociale en emotionele aspecten te onderzoeken van de verschillende manieren van ‘verwant zijn aan’ of ‘bevriend zijn met’ onder Thaise vrouwen in Nederland. In plaats van aan te nemen dat verwantschap een unieke relatie is en zichzelf in stand houdt, suggereert dit hoofdstuk dat alleen het feit dat vrouwen elkaars bloedverwant zijn nog niet garandeert dat een vrouw die als een der eersten gemigreerd is, voortdurend hulp zal bieden aan een verwant die zojuist is aangekomen. Wil men verwant van elkaar zijn, dan moet die situatie gevoed worden door het uitwisselen van materiële steun, wederzijdse hulp en emotionele bijstand. De aan- of afwezigheid van deze kwaliteiten bepaalt of de onderlinge band wordt voortgezet of juist verbroken. Ik benadruk tevens de dynamische kenmerken van de vriendschapsrelaties tussen de Thaise vrouwen door te laten zien dat zij het hebben van vrienden en kennissen op uiteenlopende wijze definiëren, selecteren en creëren. Deze verschillende vormen van vriendschap worden aangeduid met een reeks van verschillende Thaise woorden. Dit hoofdstuk laat tevens zien dat ongelijke ideeën over en andere praktijken van vriendschap onder Thai en Nederlanders aanleiding kunnen geven tot misverstanden en soms tot huwelijksconflicten.

Hoofdstuk 4 laat zien dat huwelijksmigratie niet alleen van invloed is op de geografische verplaatsing van de vrouwen, maar ook op veranderingen in hun levensloop en op de zorg voor de familie. De vrouwen definiëren hun migratie-ervaringen, verandering en verstoring van carrière en hun sociale mobiliteit in Nederland niet op dezelfde manier. Hun percepties worden veeleer bepaald door hun sociale positie, de sociaal-economische achtergronden van hun familie en de Thaise mythe van ‘het rijke Westen’. Om met het probleem van de grote afstand en met de veranderingen in hun levenscycli ten gevolge van hun huwelijksmigratie om te kunnen gaan, maken de vrouwen zich verschillende praktijken eigen om hun kinderen op te voeden. Dit

hoofdstuk laat zien dat de ideeën over en praktijken van moederschap maatschappelijk en cultureel zijn geconstrueerd. De biologische moeder wordt vaak gezien als de enige bron van zorg voor het (jonge) kind, vooral in de Nederlandse middenklasse. In de Thaise samenleving kan het kind daarentegen worden grootgebracht door de moeder, maar ook door een bredere kring van familieleden. Dit hoofdstuk maakt ten slotte duidelijk dat de economische steun van de vrouwen aan hun familie niet moet worden gezien als alleen maar een manier om te voldoen aan familieverplichtingen van de dochter. Het is ook een tegenprestatie verleend aan familieleden in ruil voor de zorg die zij aan haar familie hebben gegeven.

Huwelijksmigratie en transnationalisme beïnvloeden de banden van de vrouwen met hun achtergebleven familie en hebben onvermijdelijk gevolgen voor het leven van de achterblijvers, een onderwerp dat centraal staat in hoofdstuk 5. De vrouwen hanteren multi-dimensionele en veranderlijke gevoelens met betrekking tot ‘gemeenschap’ (community) en ‘thuis’ teneinde om te kunnen gaan met de geografische scheiding van hun familie en de situaties waarmee ze dagelijks worden geconfronteerd. Het geldt dat vrouwen naar huis sturen (‘remittances’) heeft ambivalente gevolgen; het verbetert de welvaart van de familie van de vrouw, maar schept tegelijkertijd sociaal-economische ongelijkheid tussen families met en families zonder migranten. Niet alleen geldt maar ook ‘social remittances’ —ideeën, symbolen en praktijken — vloeien van het land van bestemming naar het land van herkomst (Levit 2000). Die worden daar gecombineerd met de Thaise waardering van het ‘rijke Westen’ en veroorzaken bij de vrouwen in de dorpen een voorkeur voor huwelijksmigratie. In dit hoofdstuk wordt de term ‘reversal of social remittances’ voorgesteld om te laten zien dat waarden, ideeën en praktijken ook naar het land van vestiging worden teruggestuurd en dat die op hun beurt, althans tot op zekere hoogte, de attitudes en levensstijlen van de inwoners van het gastland problematiseren en uitdagen. Als voorbeeld van de ‘reversal of social remittances’ wordt er ingegaan op een groep van Nederlandse mannen die, nadat zij het ‘succesvolle’ huwelijk van een Thai-Nederlands paar hadden gezien, daarna hetzelfde pad wilden volgen. Ik besluit het hoofdstuk met een analyse van de ‘reverse flow’ van gepensioneerde Nederlandse mannen en hun Thaise vrouwen naar Thailand en van de manier waarop zij zich daar opnieuw vestigen.

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Curriculum vitae

Panitee Suksomboon was born on the 30th of August 1976 in Singburi, Thailand. She received her Bachelor's Degree in Sociology and Anthropology with the first-class honour from Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand in 1998 and her Master's Degree in Sociology from the same university in 2002. She was also appointed as a lecturer in 1999 and had worked at Faculty of Sociology and Anthropology, Thammasat University until 2002. In August 2002, she was granted a scholarship by the Civil Service Commission, the Royal Thai Government, to pursue her second Master's study at International School for Humanities and Social Sciences (ISHSS), University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. She obtained her Master's Degree in Social Sciences from this university in January 2004. She continued her PhD study in July 2004 at the Research School of Asian, African and Amerindian Studies (CNWS), Leiden University with a scholarship provided by the Civil Service Commission, The Royal Thai Government. Her research focuses on cross-cultural marriage and families of Thai migrant women in the Netherlands. After her graduation, she will return to Thailand and continue her academic career at Faculty of Sociology and Anthropology, Thammasat University.