

GRADUATE COLLOQUIUM

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Monday, October 26th, 2015
11:30-12:50
Cornett A129

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‘No maids here’: Intercultural mothering and the value of being ‘independent’ for Indonesian skilled migrant women living in Australia

As part of the SSHRC funded project on ‘Southeast Asian Women, Family and Migration in the Global Era’, I will discuss the research component based on fieldwork amongst Indonesian skilled migrant women (teachers, nurses, doctors) in Melbourne, Australia. A particular focus is on their intercultural mothering practice and the often-communicated value of being ‘independent’; for themselves and their children. Intercultural mothering describes their experience raising children (Eurasian, Chinese descent, ‘adopted’) in a mix of cultures and negotiating the competing values and associated challenges. Communicating the value of being ‘independent’ also brings up the sense of loss of ‘dependence’-- both on their extended family, and on the Indonesian middle class privilege of domestic help or having a ‘maid’. While differentiating themselves from the common perception of Indonesian female migrants as low-skilled domestic



An Indonesian language high school teacher with her Anglo Australian husband

workers (‘I’m not a maid’), they also narrate the challenges of performing the mother’s ‘labor of love’; doing housework and childrearing, having ‘no maids here’. I therefore examine how intercultural mothering and the value given to the ‘independent’ agentive self become ways to negotiate the various structuring discourses of idealized Indonesian-Australian femininity.

EVERYONE WELCOME.