



University  
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

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BA (McMaster University, 2014)

**“Hunger in households of plenty: Indonesian domestic workers  
navigating towards food security in Singapore”**

Department of Anthropology

Tuesday, December 5, 2017

10:00 A.M.

Clearihue Building

Room B021

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Leslie Butt, Department of Anthropology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Margo Matwychuk, Department of Anthropology, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Emily Yates-Doerr, Department of Anthropology, University of Amsterdam

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Karen Urbanoski, School of Public Health and Social Policy, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

## **Abstract**

In Southeast Asia, many impoverished Indonesian women migrate to Singapore to work as domestic workers in households. Though employers are required to provide domestic workers with food and housing, there have been numerous reports of employers withholding food. This thesis explores the ways in which Indonesian domestic workers navigate towards food security in the context of social relations in their employers' homes in Singapore. I draw on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2016, where I interviewed Indonesian domestic workers and employers. Not only were the majority of domestic workers experiencing food insecurity, food was additionally symbolically used to denigrate them. Drawing on a concept I term markings, which denotes the process of demarcating social roles through symbols and boundaries, I argue that employers control food in order to produce markings that construct and reinforce relations of inequality in households. These relations around food emotionally and physically shape domestic workers in ways that allowed them to know their positions in the household. Despite their subordination, domestic workers use strategies to contest and endure their unequal conditions in Singapore in ways that demonstrate their resilience. This research demonstrates the importance of protecting the food security of migrant women, and advocates for the fair treatment of domestic workers.