

# Whose Stress? Emotion Work in Middle-Class Javanese Homes

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**ABSTRACT** *By attending to ways in which middle-class wives in Yogyakarta, Java, describe negotiating sentiments among family members (including children, maids and husbands), this article argues that domestic relations in middle-class homes in Java have been importantly inflected by state rhetoric on gender propriety and market ideas of work. As a result, both middle-class women and maids have come to conceive of emotion work as part of an array of domestic obligations central to social reproduction.*

**KEYWORDS** *Emotion work, maids, middle class, Indonesia*

In the summer of 1997, during a brewing national controversy on the effect of television viewing on Indonesian women and children, the Minister of Women's Affairs Ibu Mien Sugandhi weighed in on the debate. Suggesting that critics of women's television viewing were unaware of the difficulties in women's everyday lives and the positive role television narratives might have for women viewers, she argued 'I have myself become part of a televisual family (*keluarga pertelevisian*). And this much I can say: whenever there is criticism of Indonesian programs, I am always the one to neutralize it ... Particularly for women, certain shows can actually help erase stress (*menghilangkan stres*).'<sup>1</sup>

Significantly, the Minister's words were some comfort to the middle-class women in Yogyakarta whom I was coming to know during this period. Several women independently pointed out the Minister's comments to me in the days following her pronouncement, as evidence that what they had been telling me for some months had finally found an official voice.<sup>2</sup> This was that televisual domestic dramas that focused on feminine self-sacrifice provided a way to 'erase *stres*'<sup>3</sup> or act as a '*penglipur lara*,' or soother of cares, for women viewers.<sup>4</sup> This sequence of exchanges prompted me to push my friends further

about the experience and source of the *stres* they felt. What was this condition that both the women I knew and the Minister of Women's Affairs could reference generically and on which they could appear to agree? What were the stresses that women apparently needed to have soothed? Why would women who appeared to do little in the way of physical labor in their households, because of the presence of live-in maids, find their daily lives stressful? And what can learning more about this feminine *stres* tell us about how the domestic sphere in Indonesia has simultaneously served as an icon of national identity, and a less visible shock absorber for the significant social and economic changes in Indonesia in the past decade?

In this article, I argue that the domestic activities of middle-class women and their maids should be considered forms of emotional labor.<sup>5</sup> By attending to the ways in which middle-class wives in Yogyakarta describe negotiating sentiments among family members (including children, maids and husbands), I suggest that domestic relations in middle-class homes in urban Java have been importantly inflected by state rhetoric on gender propriety and market ideas of work. This is not to suggest that emotional labor, which as I show is undertaken by both maids and their employers, has simply been commodified, or that such labor dilutes the genuine human attachments and emotional bonds which household members enjoy. To the contrary, the sense that emotional management was based on voluntary affection rather than obligatory labor was central to how middle-class women described their familial relationships as uniquely Indonesian. Indeed, because so much of the physical domestic service (e.g., cleaning, childcare, cooking) is done by domestic maids in middle-class homes, emotional labor has become the currency of middle-class familial relationships. I first address the ways in which middle-class women's relationships with husbands and children can be construed as a form of emotion work, and will then discuss the employer-employee relationship between middle-class women and their maids.<sup>6</sup>

By 'emotion work' I refer to the exchange of gestures of deference, affection, gratitude or emotional sacrifice in a domestic economy.<sup>7</sup> I take emotions to be one set of resources among many (material, institutional, social) that are unequally produced and distributed among members of the household. Emotional resources were one among many kinds of resources which women in the Suharto New Order period were encouraged to recruit in pursuit of an ideal middle-class domestic life. Such gestures could be small, and involve little in the way of physical exertion or labor power; on occasion, they could require more extensive effort. The voluntary nature of emotional gifts could

conceal the unequal or commercial foundation of the relationship, structures which were particularly important to the relationship between maids and their employers. Arlie Hochschild (1989), in analyzing household politics in the United States, describes an 'economy of gratitude' in which marriages and the domestic sphere serve as 'shock absorbers' of broader social changes. In the American middle-class families Hochschild interviewed, men and women exchanged 'gifts' of income or housework that could be traced through a language of gratitude or luck. In Hochschild's research, women felt fortunate for a husband who helped around the house, while men often misrecognized additional income from a wife's employment not as a gift from her, but from him: his tolerance for letting her work. Through arguing that gestures of affection can be interpreted as forms of labor, I build on feminist scholarship in the United States which has sought to understand the connections between invisible acts in the domestic setting and the larger economy, thereby revealing how households are 'loci of political struggle ... rather than havens from the heartless world of industrial capitalism' (di Leonardo 1987:441).

The changing economic environment to which Hochschild refers includes the conditions of production in the late 20th century in the United States, under which maintaining middle-class consumption and social reproduction on the income of a single household earner had become increasingly difficult. These economic changes were not isolated to the United States. Changes in production that parsed and relocated industrial production to the postcolonial world – changes typically glossed as globalization – also situated much low-paying industrial factory work to Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia. The changing political and economic environment in urban Indonesia was thus as significant to urban Indonesian households as to households in the United States, but with different effects. By the late 1970s, employment in factory jobs had become an alternative to domestic service for rural and poor women migrating to cities.<sup>8</sup> This period also saw increased inflation and consumer expectations, making maintaining a middle-class household on a single income difficult, one of several factors driving many middle-class women to seek professional, white-collar work. While women in many Indonesian communities have long earned income outside the home, often as merchants in local markets (Brenner 1998; Reid 1993; Robinson 1996; Sen 1998), a shift to forms of employment that seemed 'modern' (office work for middle-class women and factory work for poorer women) marked an economic change which, when perceived by Indonesian cultural elite, seemed more like a change among the nation's women than a change in the nation's economy. Inequality-

ties of both class and gender generated under these conditions were thus often negotiated in private, household spaces. In addition, as women in urban Indonesia have increasingly entered the wage workforce, both as professional white-collar workers and into industrial labor, class differences among women have been increasingly construed as differences in femininity (Jones 2001; Tiwon 1996).<sup>9</sup>

Over the past several decades, the political terrain of postcolonial Indonesia has centrally shaped policies on gender and class. After declaring independence from the Dutch in 1945, the presidency of Sukarno, marked by years of economic and social instability, ended with General Suharto's assumption of the presidency in 1965. Suharto's rule was soon dubbed the 'New Order,' a name that contrasted with the chaos that Suharto perceived marked the Sukarno era. From a minute attention to the organization of family life to the aggressive recruitment of foreign investment, the New Order regime, which ended with Suharto's resignation in 1998, was thoroughly and consistently about *order*.

During this national attention to a new political and social order, the city of Yogyakarta served as a repository of an idealized and ordered ancient past. Indeed, Yogyakarta has figured prominently in studies of emotion on Indonesia, often as an example of an archetypal site of Javanese culture, one dominated by classical *priyayi* (aristocrats). This reputation, in part because the city is the seat of a royal sultanate, has lent the impression that Yogyakarta is both small in size and traditional in nature. In the last decade, however, Yogyakarta has seen an influx of migrants, both from rural settings outside the city, and of students from across the country seeking post-secondary education. These migrants bring a *mélange* of cultural backgrounds, often including little or no knowledge of Javanese language and even resentment of Javanese national cultural hegemony. Mixed with some multinational industrial production in the periphery of the city and increased national and international tourism, these changes have made Yogyakarta a city that is neither exclusively Javanese nor aristocratic. Many of these demographic changes have contributed to an emerging discourse in the city about the perils of urban life, suggesting that it is an inherently modern and stressful experience. As noted by Steve Ferzacca, Yogyakarta medical experts and popular psychological expertise interpret urban life as chaotic and emotionally unbalancing (2001). Such urban distress has numerous names, including *stres*, a term that has become ubiquitous in popular culture. For example, the pop star Rhoma Irama's hit song 'Stres' intensely conveys the difficulty of working-class life, while advice columnists in newspapers and magazines respond to letter writers (often suffering romantic

heartache) who describe experiencing a condition that, when called *stres*, both writers and readers comprehend. The term itself has become thoroughly localized into Indonesian vernacular through conveying the difficulty of urban, industrial, capitalist modes of living that are often contrasted with a perceived traditional past in which *stres* was less present.

### **Ordered Homes**

During the late 1990s the home figured in both official and mass mediated representations as an increasingly important private zone, a place of reparation from the stressful outside world. Middle-class women I knew imagined the home to not only be free of state interference, but the zone for their own personal responsibility and realization of family contentment. Because much of the physical labor of household work in such homes was done by one or more domestic servants, middle-class women took their work to be twofold. First, the scheduling and surveillance of maids' work formed a sort of managerial role, one that kept status differences between maids and family members legible. Second, middle-class women negotiated the sentiments and education of the members of the family, specifically the husband, children, and maids. This role, too, kept status differences between employer and employees clear, as middle-class women saw themselves as capable of the emotional refinement necessary to engage in more genuine, and less obsequious, caring work than maids. In this role, the wife's position in balancing her husband's affective needs and maid's moods (and therefore the maid's productivity) appeared to be central to maintaining a functioning household. The intersection of these worlds of work prompted Ibu Suryah's comment to me, 'You know, what I really am is CEO of the house,' taking comfort in the business-like legitimacy of the corporate title Chief Executive Officer.<sup>10</sup> Ibu Ratih further explained that her role in the home was not so different from an office 'team' (*tim di rumah*), in which her role was serving the moral, mental and physical needs of the home through caring expressions of love.

The image of the harmonious nuclear family was not new to the New Order regime, but it focused on gender difference and the role of the family in a broader vision of a hoped-for national culture. Suzanne Brenner has argued that the remarkable staying power of the New Order regime 'depended in large measure on its ability to insert itself deep within the domestic sphere throughout Indonesia' (Brenner 1998:226). The New Order period saw energetic official claims on the meaning of family emotions. State programs attempted to fix the husband-wife bond in the realm of national service, through

declaring that a wife's foremost duty was to care for her husband and children as citizens (see, e.g., Brenner 1998; Sullivan 1983; Suryakusuma 1996). Through language that modeled the development of the nation through the metaphor of the family, state programs attempted to make the family a domain of national control. This project was perhaps most visible in state organizations such as the PKK (*Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga* or Development of Family Welfare), *Dharma Wanita* (or Women's Duties, designed exclusively for wives of civil servants) and the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Official rhetoric linked publicly shared and appealing ideas of well-being and lack of conflict with social arrangements that involved inequality and women's self-sacrifice.

The national level of official commitment to producing the private sphere was paralleled in the unofficial worlds of popular culture, including the print and televisual media targeted at women audiences. The state's detailed injunctions on domestic management within the family overlapped with the information women viewers took from their favorite soap operas or magazines (Brenner 1999). Storylines in most televisual narratives focused on the myriad ways in which female characters could endure difficulty or sacrifice for the good of the family.

The notion that domestic responsibilities and rewards might be unique to women was a powerful product of the Suharto regime's gender policies. New Order programs celebrating domesticity as a full-time feminine commitment contrasted with older norms that associated household work with lower status workers, both male and female.<sup>11</sup> The image of the sparkling clean, emotionally harmonious domestic space had been harnessed by both official and advertising rhetoric in the New Order to appear as the exclusive focus of women whose work in the home was performed out of feminine love and caring, even as much of that work was done by maids. The timing of the emergence of state programs promoting full-time domesticity for women citizens paralleled the period of rapid industrialization of the Indonesian economy and a massive movement of migrant rural women into factory labor.<sup>12</sup> Scholars of gender in Indonesia have noted the contradictory representations of femininity in the New Order period, particularly for those women who lacked the financial resources to be full-time housewives. The celebration of domesticity in official rhetoric was not only a virtual impossibility for poor women who worked full-time if not overtime, but working-class women could be criticized for working out of a desire for consumer goods, and at the expense of their family duties (see, e.g., Sen & Stivens 1998; Tiwon 1996; Wolf 1996, 1992; see also Ong 1990 for similar evidence in Malaysia). Factory labor, while perhaps vital



Figure 1: A 1997 women's magazine cover promoting an article advising readers how to cope with the stress of having a husband who is attractive to other women. Photograph courtesy of Femina magazine.

to the nation's economic transformation, was not celebrated, while the New Order family model was.

Even though many of the women I knew both worked professionally outside the home and argued that the New Order's representation of domesticity was appealing to them, the degree to which women in my research were engaged with their domestic work, even if they were not the ones actually performing it, was significant. Because middle-class women hired maids whether they worked outside the home or not, domestic labor, physical or emotional, became not only feminized, but also increasingly class-differentiated. The woman of the house was best equipped to apply her more sophisticated skills to the

moral order of the home, while a maid was best suited to its physical order. In attempting to understand why middle-class women might be experiencing something called *stres*, I was frequently informed that this was a condition that women felt as a result of *melayani suami dan anak*, or serving one's husband and children. Such *stres* could take the mild form of a feeling of anxiety about hectic scheduling and juggling all one's responsibilities, or could be so severe that it required professional attention or medication.

'Caring for a husband and children' meant something very different from simply seeing to it that they had clean clothes to wear and food to eat. In addition to describing an idealized affect between husband and wife, this phrase was prominent in the advice and self-help literature which women found instructive. Columns in weekly women's magazines, such as *Femina*, sported titles such as 'You and Your Husband' and dispensed psychologically toned expertise on the ideal modern marriage (see Fig. 1). Women readers were exhorted to construe their family lives as continual projects on which members were always working. The marital bond required commitment, communication, and time. This may seem familiar to Americans well versed in self-improvement lingo that recommends applying the same neoliberal zeal from the work world to the private sphere. Indeed, much of this language does seem to have arrived in Indonesia via mass mediated advice columns and an industry of educational seminars aimed at both men and women.<sup>13</sup>

Romantic marriages were an important sign to middle-class Indonesians of their being modern, mirroring Jane Collier's description of the transformation of Andalusian marriages from 'duty to desire' (1997). Older Indonesian marriage patterns were construed as outdated because they privileged family interests over individual passion and were structured on male superiority and female subservience.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, the ideal modern marriage should be based on individual affection, egalitarian respect between partners, and open communication. A modern marriage relied on having two modern, or *maju*, partners who each took their marriage to be the focus of their lives. Many women complained to me that although Indonesian men might imagine themselves as *maju*, they were often not as progressive as they liked to believe. Indonesian men, they complained, were not able to express their feelings as openly as American men, were more susceptible to sexual temptations, and were generally still more needy of a wife's care.

For a woman to prove to herself and others that she was in a modern marriage involved key acts of emotion work. In spite of the proliferation of rhetoric around the work of household harmony, emotion work was not always visible

as work, particularly to those receiving its benefits. Emotion work was less about long therapeutic conversations with family members, although these occurred. Rather, small gestures of affection constituted 'serving one's husband and children.' That is, as Abu-Lughod and Lutz argue (1990), emotions were discursively and socially produced in moments of exchange, rather than incipient and concrete sentiments waiting to be expressed. Although each instance re-narrated the contingent relations among family members, such moments could also masquerade as a direct reflection of an underlying emotive state. Apparently simple acts were therefore important to re-fix family bonds. One example frequently cited to me was that of serving a husband a beverage whenever he returned home, rather than having a maid serve him. The message of such a gesture was to remind one's husband that in spite of all one's other duties, he was the primary focus of one's life. I knew several women who usually allowed their maids to prepare the beverage in the kitchen and then presented it to the husband herself. Achieving this often required challenging scheduling for professional women, in order to arrange to be home before one's husband. In practice, most women I knew rarely did manage to serve a beverage to their husbands; traffic or professional demands make it impossible to arrive home in time. Yet the notion that one's husband might tolerate the inconsistency of a wife's ability to offer such simple gestures was cited to me as something for which middle-class women should be grateful. A woman whose husband did not misinterpret her if she wasn't able to regularly be at home when he returned should feel 'lucky' or *beruntung* for having such a progressive and tolerant husband. Being unlucky could ultimately jeopardize a marriage.

The story of Ibu Nia is illustrative. Ibu Nia enjoyed her work as a secretary to a well-known professor, a job she had had for three years when she married at age 28. Before her marriage, she was open with her friends about her concern that her fiancé was considered especially handsome and worried that other women might tempt him into infidelity. However, she hoped that he was *maju* enough to be able to focus his affection exclusively on her. In the early months of their marriage, Ibu Nia would go to work early, skip lunch breaks and try to increase her productivity at work in order to leave her office by mid-afternoon. She felt that if she were able to be at home whenever her husband arrived, and therefore greet him personally (and not leave him alone at home, or only attended by the maid), he would recognize that she considered him her primary partner and return that affection.<sup>15</sup> After several months of juggling work and family duties, however, she found she was only able to

beat her husband to the house about half of the time, causing her considerable anxiety. She ultimately resigned her job. Although she said both she and her husband were much happier when she decided to be a full-time wife, her friends recounted her story with pity. They considered her husband an example of how Indonesian men, because they still needed to feel the full focus of a wife's affection, were not as modern as they liked to imagine.

The affective education of children was also described as a care-intensive endeavor that was best left to the superior sensibilities of the matron of the house rather than to maids. Although maids were capable of basic physical childcare, the overall moral responsibility for child rearing was a mother's task. Mothers monitored school-age children's homework by cajoling, shaming, or rewarding them. Fathers were not expected to aid with homework, and I only rarely saw instances of fathers assisting children on homework. Mothers were responsible for getting children accepted into competitive schools and universities, and thereby reproducing, or advancing, the family's class position. When one family I knew celebrated the good news of their daughter's acceptance to an extremely selective university, the father privately thanked his wife for her labors.<sup>16</sup>

The combination of personal and collective national goals, through the frame of sentiment, marks a striking postcolonial reworking of Dutch colonial family rhetoric. New Order state emphasis on having the appropriate woman provide disciplined, healthy care in the home parallels similar notions linking racial purity to manners and hygiene in the home during the latter decades of Dutch rule in the Indies. Ann Stoler argues that as political boundaries became increasingly acrimonious during Dutch rule, these tensions manifested in increasingly anxious notions about racial purity and contact (2002, 1996; see also Stoler & Strassler 2000). The proper production of European children in a purely European domestic space became a fraught task, in part because the presence of 'native' house staff in colonial homes provided intimate contact between the groups. Such contact required surveillance in order to preserve the reproduction of colonial authority. A century later, the Suharto regime resurrected similar strategies, particularly as state authority started to crumble. One such example was increased state pronouncements decrying the extent to which maids, rather than biological mothers, were raising the nation's children. The language of moral purity that had delineated racial boundaries between European and native women was strikingly redeployed as anxieties about classed boundaries, situating middle-class women in a structurally analogous position to white colonial women.

Keeping the affective boundaries clear within the Indonesian home therefore framed which tasks a wife should perform and which she should not. While a wife (rather than her maid) might ideally serve her husband a drink in the afternoon, were she to do all the domestic labor, their marriage would not be as modern as they each imagined. An example from the early married life of Ibu Ria (a teacher who was 44 years old, married with four children) illustrates this point. Ibu Ria recounted a six-month period in which her family was without a maid. As was not uncommon in middle-class homes, her previous maid had resigned to take a new position in a factory and Ibu Ria was slow to contact friends and family for recommendations for a new maid. Although she was working full-time herself, she was concerned that her husband not experience a disruption in his sense of domestic stability; she felt such order contributed to his professional productivity and reputation in the community. However, she said she could not simply do the housework in the evenings because her husband also perceived himself as *maju* and would feel badly about witnessing his wife perform manual labor usually suited to a maid. Her solution was to wake up in the middle of the night to do the dishwashing, ironing and cleaning while he slept so he would not be disturbed by the sight of her doing physical labor. She took his concern about her doing work as a sign of his love and generosity toward her, for which she felt lucky, so she always returned to bed in time for them to wake up for the morning prayers together, and he never noticed her absence. In recounting the period to me, she laughed at her and her husband's immaturity. She found amusing her own inability to realize that this work might be taxing (she finally broke out in hives and her doctor diagnosed her with a case of *stres*, leading to her finally hire a new maid). But also amusing to her was the fact that through all those months her husband had never once commented that the dishes that were dirty when they went to bed were miraculously clean when they woke up the next morning, or that he seemed to continually have clean clothes to wear.

Ibu Ria's housework in the middle of the night was not only an attempt to get the work done when she was not at her job. She did it in the dead of the night in order to protect her husband's emotions from the disturbing sight of her doing his laundry. She understood his love of her to be based in part on his image of her as a modern woman who did not do housework. He would have felt badly because the sight of her doing physical work would have been disturbing, in part because he was not fully aware of all the domestic labor in their household but also because he felt that a modern woman should express her affection for her husband through supervising the most basic dom-

estic labor, not actually performing it. Because she felt fortunate to have such a generous husband, she protected him from seeing anything that would contradict that self-image.

These actions that I am calling emotion work were therefore not simply verbal expressions of deference or affection. They were strategically mixed with forms of physical work, and they were consistently construed as the expression of close bonds unique to modern Indonesian families. Ibu Suryah and Ibu Ratih took pride in representing their roles in the house as managerial, a challenge that they saw as uniquely modern. Ibu Nia realized that her husband might not have been as *maju* as she originally thought, but was hopeful that once she was able to fully focus her attention on him she could achieve the kind of marital bond she desired. And Ibu Ria chose to perform domestic work in the middle of the night in order to maintain her husband's image of their home life as egalitarian.

### **Classing Emotion**

If middle-class couples imagined their home life as modern because of a particular view of a companionate marriage, this model had different implications for the relationship employers had with maids. The language of generosity, luck and family affection positioned maids as the beneficiaries of an employer's modern attitudes. Yet while middle-class women considered their domestic responsibilities as primarily managerial and affective, maids were not simply foils for these sensibilities. Rather, the interaction between employers and maids had significantly sentimental aspects. Even as the employers I knew described the care they showed their biological family members, they perceived this expression as a uniquely class-differentiated sentiment. The sort of refined understandings, sacrifices and efforts employers made on behalf of their biological family members were specifically urban, sophisticated – the antithesis of the emotional skills available to maids. Most maids were migrants to the city, from rural communities within an hour or two of Yogyakarta, and were rarely educated beyond junior high-school level. Maids were considered to be less capable of the sort of confident, egalitarian communication that was the basis of the apparently non-hierarchical caring their employers claimed to desire. This was in part because maids lacked access to material and cultural capital that taught the ways of middle-class refinement. Yet, this discourse of apparent desire for equality and free expression was itself one of exclusion and difference, simultaneously devaluing the emotional expertise and skills of lower-status women employed in the household.

The re-narrations of family bonds, through acts of caring, were thus paralleled by the re-narrations of difference between employers and employees. In my conversations with employers, maids figured most visibly in discussions of child rearing. Many employers expressed concern about the influence maids may have over the impressionable young minds of their children. As Ibu Ratih, a housewife and high-profile participant in Yogyakarta social life and *Dharma Wanita* said:

I feel very grateful for my maid. I wouldn't want to have any maid but her. She feels like a part of the family. In fact, I often help her out by doing additional ironing in the evenings. But we must still be very careful that the children don't only learn from her. Otherwise, they pick up incorrect language, or bad habits, that are inappropriate. You know, maids are provincial (*kampung*). They are coarse, and not always even clean. If we want our children to have proper morals, we must mediate between the maid and the child.

This model of middle-class domestic life and propriety was class-based, yet read as an index of *moral*, rather than economic, difference.

However, the use of emotion to convey position was not simply a one-way street. Employers did not feel themselves free to ignore their maids' emotions in the service of exclusive attention to biological family members. Employers explained that soothing a maid's feelings was vital to that maid's work performance. Were a maid feeling fragile, underappreciated or disrespected, this could result in decreased productivity. Indeed, it was clear that maids exerted emotional strategies in their relationships with their employers. Maids could use deference and junior status with an employer to achieve some limited material benefits. Dilemmas such as crises within the maid's family or the illness of a maid's parent or child could result in time off, loans, or advance payment of wages. When such instances occurred, employers were often confused about how to interpret requests: was it genuine dependency and thus appropriate for an employer to accommodate, or was it a ploy to extract extra perks? Maids explained to me that the benefit of working in a home, rather than in a factory or industrial labor, was that the familial nature of the work relationship could lead to greater support and sympathy in moments of personal crisis. However, no guarantees attached to this sense of obligation. As G.G. Weix has argued, 'To be accepted as domestic staff maintains an important fiction about money: that following an elite family can shield social dependents from the uncertainties of market exchange' (Weix 2000:152).

In addition to producing physical order in the home, much of what maids did could also be perceived as emotional labor. Caring for small children,

preparing favorite meals and snacks for family members (even before they might think to ask for them), taking special care with cleaning or laundry; all could be considered by maids to be acts of affection beyond the economic or basic description of the job. Yet such acts could also be erased just as quickly by those receiving those gestures as merely job performance rather than a gift from someone seen in some way as a social equal. Preference among employers for maids of differing educational backgrounds could play into this dynamic. Many employers I knew preferred to hire women with the highest possible education, presuming this would allow them to be better able to communicate and perhaps allow the wife to delegate some decision making regarding meal-planning, bill paying and even some children's homework supervision to the maid. Yet because of the even stronger discourses suggesting that maids should not be trusted with the most important affective elements of domestic life, a woman with a maid who could be trusted with unusual responsibility was still positioned as the moral supervisor of the home, the sort of woman for whom the maid was lucky to work rather than vice versa.

Thus, in spite of the language of family inclusion, maids could be easily reminded that they were not *really* family members. Dewi's experience exemplifies the tenuous nature of the relationship between employer and employee. Dewi had a higher level of education than most maids and was hired as a sort of personal assistant to her employer, a well-known and active woman on the Yogyakarta social and religious landscape, although she did help with cleaning and childcare when she had the time. Dewi considered her employer to be unusually kind, far more generous with praise of and trust in her household staff than many employers. Dewi's title was explicitly not that of maid (to have referred to her as *pembantu*, the term for maid, would have been considered offensive to all in the house), but rather of adopted daughter. In spite of this title, she did not enjoy the same benefits as the biological daughters in the family. She slept in the same room as the maid, and was expected to behave with similar deference and gratitude as a maid. This arrangement worked smoothly until her employer learned of a relationship Dewi had with a young man in the neighborhood. Because her employer disapproved of the relationship (she did not feel Dewi was entitled to date at all), Dewi was told that although she was called a 'daughter,' she was not, in fact, a daughter and that if the relationship continued, she would be let go. The employer went to great lengths to explain to her the difference between an adopted and a biological daughter, 'whom I couldn't just send out of the house.' Dewi's employer explained to me a day later that taking the time to define to Dewi the difference

between biological and adopted daughter was a generous gift on her part, designed to impart an educational aspect to an otherwise unpleasant exchange. She was confident that Dewi would be grateful for the opportunity to be so educated. For her part, Dewi was primarily grateful that she was not fired, and severed her relationship with her boyfriend.

Situating the expression and reception of grateful sentiments within the home is telling when placed in the frame of the two directions employers could orient such sentiment. Gratitude between wives and husbands was based on a wife's sense of good fortune for having a *maju* husband who tolerated or was even proud of his wife's career. Such fortunate wives would return this sentiment in the form of grateful gestures that were typically received by husbands as the expression of feminine nature, and therefore often unrecognized as effort. By contrast, when dealing with their maids, gratitude flowed in the opposite direction. Most of the women I knew were grateful for their maids, saying as much to me, but rarely to the maids. Instead, employers often chose to communicate that gratitude, and even praise, to maids in the form of patronage or dependency. In that way, what might have been gratitude from the employer was transformed into the reverse: the sense that maids should be grateful to their employers for the opportunity to provide caring service in an urban, higher-class home than their own. Maids were expected to perform their duties with deference and gratitude, not because they were paid to do so, but because that was inherent to their position as dependent women.

The modern family ideal that seemed to celebrate an equal marital partnership actually structured wives and husbands in an analogous way to maids and employers. While a husband who was tolerant of a wife's other roles seemed generous, so did a wife who treated her relationship with her maid as more than economic. An employer who cared enough to manage the maid's personal life and who considered her a junior family member instead of a mere employee conveyed her own *maju* orientation towards the domestic sphere. Her generosity, her gift to her maid, positioned her as the junior family member entitled to instruction and guidance.

## **Conclusion**

State and market ideas of work have strongly influenced what kinds of activity have been considered valuable in the social landscape of contemporary Indonesia. Through their combined and negotiated efforts, both middle-class women and their maids managed the domestic sphere in ways that mediated the significant social and economic changes Indonesia has experienced in

the past decade. While middle-class couples imagined their relationships to be more egalitarian and modern than previous generations' marriages, women felt fortunate to have modern husbands who tolerated a wife's professional employment. Similarly, maids were expected to perceive their employers' treatment of them as acts of generosity. Policing the emotional border between maid and employer was central to the demarcation of class difference in the home. Both levels of domestic interaction, between husband and wife and between employer and maid, reveal that the language of caring in official New Order development programs and in the privately-owned mass media has influenced private expectations of personal life in middle-class Javanese homes. These national and intimate contexts in part explained why maids and their employers claimed that Indonesian television serials, which typically recounted in dramatic detail the sufferings of women and the importance of feminine self-sacrifice, allayed the *stres* created by the unequal positions within the home that these shows celebrated. If the home was not, for many women, a haven from a heartless world, then why would domestic dramas be 'soothing?' Perhaps the simple act of watching television serials, frequently with family members, and often including maids, gathered around the TV, was a sort of 'time off' for women to relax, much as Tania Modleski (1982) and Janice Radway (1984) have argued for American women's involvement in romantic narratives. But additionally, for women who had taken the message of the importance of women's work in the domestic sphere seriously in the past decade in Indonesia, televisual stories which valorized the sufferings and sacrifices of women served not so much as models of ideal womanhood but as examples of women whose efforts mattered and received public acknowledgment as work.

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### **Notes**

1. *Bernas*, 7 May, 1997.
2. During the summer of 1997, a debate among government and cultural leaders swirled around the issue of imported television programming, especially soap

- operas, and their impact on Indonesian viewers. The controversy focused on whether TV viewers who watched dubbed versus subtitled melodramas were more vulnerable to what critics felt were inappropriately foreign values. For a history and analysis of this debate, see, e.g., Boellstorff 2003; Jones 2001; Lindsay, forthcoming. Such debates have not been limited to Indonesia. Purnima Mankekar details similar tensions in Indian public culture (1999).
3. The term stress is spelled in two ways in Indonesian public culture, both as a direct borrowing of the English *stress*, and *stres*. In this article, I use the latter spelling to connote the specifically Indonesian sense of the term.
  4. For analysis of the general themes of Indonesian television serials see Aripurnami 1996.
  5. In describing these households as middle-class, I mean that both the material and social position of the household were construed locally as middle-class. These households met Indonesian state census standards for middle-class status (measured through possession of key consumer goods). My informants also typically self-identified as middle-class or *kelas menengah*. Although there is a long history in Java and Bali of taking in needy, rural relatives as household helpers, even in poor households, a visible retinue of servants, often dressed in uniforms, has become an important new accessory of the wealthiest urban classes.
  6. This research occurred over one and a half years, from 1997 to 1998. In addition to general data collected from approximately 30 households, I focused closer interviews with 15 women, most of whom were employed in white-collar work outside the home.
  7. Emotion work is usually most visible as work when it occurs outside the home, but is still often naturalized to female workers. Anne Allison argues that Japanese women who work in corporate expense-account hostess clubs in Tokyo engage in acts of deferential service in exchange for income in ways that have commodified historical gender relations established in elite geisha work (1994).
  8. For a detailed history of these changes, and the relationship between global capital interests and the Indonesian state, see Winters 1996. For an excellent analysis of the migration experience of men and women employed in these new industrial jobs, see Lindquist 2002.
  9. Stereotypes of femininity masked and marked class differences during the latter decade of the Suharto era. In particular, women's consumer behavior and attention to personal appearance were read as signs of economic and moral status. For a fuller discussion, see Jones 2003.
  10. The title 'Ibu' is the generic honorific for a married woman in Indonesian, although it literally means 'Mother'. Ibu Suryah's use of the title CEO parallels statements other scholars have recorded about Javanese domestic life which emphasize the near total control wives have over household decision making, including jokes that women are 'ministers of the Interior' (borrowing from state terminology) (see, e.g., H. Geertz 1961; Jay 1969).
  11. These programs also contrasted with the Sukarno era's proliferation of official and unofficial organizations on gender relations. The Sukarno period (1949–1965) was marked by a wide diversity of women's associations, each suggesting different visions on ideal Indonesian home life. The promotion of housewifery as a full-time role was not prominent, however, until the New Order. In a sense,

- the New Order resurrection of colonial era celebration of feminine domesticity erased much of the Sukarno era energy that had focused on analyzing and to some degree questioning gender roles (see, e.g., Wieringa 1988).
12. Programs such as PKK and *Dharma Wanita* began in the mid-1970s, at the time the Suharto regime began to aggressively recruit global investment in an export-oriented economy. Although the formation of an industrial economy grew in the 1980s, the timing of these dual discourses, of domestically promoting feminine domesticity while internationally pursuing foreign investment that encouraged women's employment in factories, suggests that some of the anxieties generated by the latter were ameliorated by the former.
  13. Women described these seminars as an important cure for an imagined rising divorce rate in the urban middle-classes. In fact, statistics for Yogyakarta suggest that divorce rates have been generally decreasing, confirming my informants' claims that they felt increasing pressure to remain in marriages. In 1980, 2.6 percent Yogyakarta women were divorced (Hasil Sensus Penduduk Yogyakarta 1980, table 3.1) compared with 2.3 percent in 1990 (Hasil Sensus Penduduk Yogyakarta 1990, table 3.1). These statistics also indicate that divorce rates differed according to class, suggesting that poorer women originally from the rural communities surrounding the city were more likely to have multiple marriages than middle-class Yogyakarta women. This corresponds with comments from middle-class informants that their maids had greater freedom to divorce than did they.
  14. The romantic couple was a significant symbol for the independence movement in 1920s and 1930s in Indonesia. A love marriage, rather than an arranged one, suggested maturity and freedom in ways that symbolized a desired transition from colonized native to national citizen (Alisjahbana 1966, 1933; Siegel 1997). The image remains powerful in postcolonial Indonesia, used by citizens and the state alike to represent national belonging (see, Boellstorff 2004; Robinson 1996).
  15. Much of the anxiety circulating about men taking mistresses discounts the possibility that a man might have an affair with a maid. A maid would simply be too different from him to be a possible romantic match. Instead, men are thought to be more drawn to other professional women, often their own secretaries. My personal opinion is that the spectre of the maid as sexual threat is nonetheless real, in part motivating the need for wives to mediate between husbands and maids.
  16. To those familiar with the work mothers in other Asian countries invest in educational success, this pattern is not surprising (see, e.g. Allison 1996:12–122).

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