

## Mother Tongue, Mothering, and (Transnational) Identity: Indonesian Mothers in Canberra, Australia

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► Utomo, A. (2014). Mother tongue, mothering, and (transnational) identity: Indonesian mothers in Canberra, Australia. *ASEAS – Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, 7(2), 165-182.

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This article focuses on the cultural-linguistic maintenance rationales, efforts, and experiences of a group of Indonesian mothers residing in Canberra, Australia. The conceptual framework rests on the premise of a bidirectional relationship between migration and mothering, and how this dynamic shapes the identities of both migrant mothers and, potentially, their children. The article's auto-ethnographic approach centers on my involvement in a small community organization in Canberra that runs Indonesian language and dancing classes, primarily targeting young children of parents with Indonesian background. I argue that, while mothers' collective efforts in this institutional setting may not be effective enough in achieving a native level of language proficiency among second generation children, the club facilitates the production of shared transnational identities among migrant mothers and the mothers' collective aspirations for their children's transnational identities.

**Keywords:** Indonesian Diaspora; Migrant Mothers; Migration; Mothering; Transnational Families

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Dieser Artikel beschäftigt sich mit kulturell-sprachlichen Erhaltungsprinzipien, -bemühungen und -erfahrungen einer Gruppe von indonesischen Müttern in Canberra, Australien. Der konzeptionelle Rahmen basiert auf der Annahme eines doppelt gerichteten Verhältnisses zwischen Migration und Bemutterung, sowie auf dem Einfluss dieser Dynamik sowohl auf die Identität der migrantischen Mütter, als auch deren Kinder. Der autoethnografische Ansatz fußt auf meiner Einbindung in eine kleine Organisation in Canberra, die indonesische Sprach- und Tanzkurse mit einem besonderen Fokus auf kleine Kinder von Eltern mit indonesischem Hintergrund anbietet. Es wird gezeigt, dass auch wenn die kollektiven Bemühungen der Mütter in diesem institutionellen Setting nicht effektiv genug sein mögen, um ein muttersprachliches Niveau unter Kindern der zweiten Generation zu erreichen, der Verein dennoch die Produktion von geteilten transnationalen Identitäten unter migrantischen Müttern und das kollektive Bestreben der Mütter für transnationale Identitäten ihrer Kinder erleichtert.

**Schlagworte:** Bemutterung; Indonesische Diaspora; migrantische Mütter; Migration; transnationale Familien

## INTRODUCTION

Within the literature on migration in the West, there is a consensus that “migrant families orient significant aspects of their lives around their country of origin” (Haller & Landolt, 2005, p. 1183). Along this line, segmented assimilation theorists treat the family as a social institution within which children of migrants receive an ethnic and linguistic socialization (Haller & Landolt, 2005; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Ruben G. Rumbaut, 1994; Zhou, 1997). Furthermore, according to recent scholarship on youth and transnationalism, the family plays a crucial part in the formation of transnational identities across different generations of migrants and their children (Goulbourne, Reynolds, & Zontini, 2009; Levitt & Schiller, 2004). This interest on intergenerational identities of migrants has expanded across a wide range of disciplines in the social sciences. Economists, for example, provide further quantitative modeling of the socialization of cultural traits in migrant groups, holding that parents have a set of “well-defined preferences over the cultural traits acquired and developed by their children” (Bisin & Verdier, 2000, pp. 956–967).

Central to the discussion on identity formation in migrant families is the practice of mothering. In her decadal review of scholarly work on mothering, Terry Arendell (2000) concludes that in the interdisciplinary space, the definitions of mothering share a common theme. Mothering is “the social practices of nurturing and caring for dependent children [and] is associated with women because universally, it is women who do the work of mothering” (2000, p. 1192). Through their practice of mothering, mothers shape the “transmission of culture”, the “constitution of kinship”, and the family and societal reproduction (Barlow & Chapin, 2010, p. 342; Gedalof, 2009).

There is a growing body of research on the effects of transnational migration on the family, kinship, and particularly on gender ideology and practices within the family as well as on the identity formation of migrants’ children (Coe, 2011; Ho, 2006; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Levitt & Waters, 2006; Nora Chiang, 2008; Wu, 2009). At the same time, there are also studies that examine the effects of motherhood on cross-cultural adaptations of migrants (Guo, 2013; Moon, 2003; Sigad & Eisikovits, 2009; Tummala-Narra, 2004). While migration adds a layer of complexity to ideas of mothering, the scholarship on the topic of motherhood among overseas Indonesians is still limited (cf. Doxey, 2007; Tsai, Chen, & Huang, 2011; Winarnita, 2008).

In this article, I built upon literature in the field of population studies on gender and migration and upon interdisciplinary scholarly work on mothering to examine the mothering experience of Indonesian women residing in Canberra, Australia. With an estimated population of 382,863 people (ACT Government, 2013), Canberra provides a unique setting for the Indonesian diaspora in Australia, not least as it scores highest in the wellbeing index of the country (OECD, 2014). According to a recent study, Canberra hosts only 1.6 percent of the Indonesian diaspora in Australia (Muhidin, 2013). By crude social groupings, the Indonesian diaspora in Canberra is largely composed of Indonesian nationals working in the embassy, university students, marriage migrants, and a small but increasing number of professionals who came to Canberra via the various skilled/business migration schemes. The Indonesian community in Canberra is comparatively smaller and more close-knit than in

other major cities in Australia such as Sydney, Melbourne, or Perth. There is a range of community groups established largely for the benefit of the Indonesian diaspora, including student organizations, family associations, and prayer groups.

The conceptual framework of this article rests on the premise of a relationship between migration and mothering. Based on this assumption, the following arguments are based on the question of how dynamics in this relationship shape the practices and identities of migrant mothers and, potentially, their children. The article's auto-ethnographic approach (see Anderson, 2006) centers on my involvement in a small community organization in Canberra that runs Indonesian language and dancing classes, primarily targeting young children of parents with Indonesian background. The core volunteers in this organization are tertiary-educated mothers<sup>1</sup> from Indonesia with young children, all of whom are first-generation migrants with either an Australian Permanent Residency Visa or an Australian citizenship.<sup>2</sup>

Auto-ethnography is not a new analytical approach in migration research (Kusow, 2003; Marvasti, 2005; Turgo, 2012). Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010) define auto-ethnography "as an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience" (p. 1). I use my own selective hindsight on migrant mothering and relate it to a broader research context on migrant mothering as well as to the experiences of other mothers engaged in this community organization. In doing so, I draw upon semi-structured interviews conducted in Bahasa Indonesia with four mothers between 35 and 42 years old who are active members of the club and whose children attend language and dancing classes. These mothers are tertiary-educated and have permanent migrant status in Australia. Two of the mothers were employed at the time of the interviews. Two of the mothers are married to Indonesians and the other two are married to Australians. Together, these mothers have five Australian-born children. Due to the small interview sample and the fact that these mothers – including me – are from roughly the same socio-economic background, I am aware of the limited potential for generalization of my study.<sup>3</sup>

As an aspect of mothering, the cultural-linguistic maintenance rationales, efforts, and experiences of Indonesian mothers residing in Canberra are my point of departure. My initial research question thus focused on mothering from the perspective of gender and migration research. Building on participant observation and a pre-

1 All mothers have tertiary education; some completed their university degrees in Indonesia, and some completed post-graduate degrees in Indonesia/Australia. A number of mothers hold Australian non-university tertiary level qualifications (e.g. graduate certificates or associate diplomas).

2 In general, current Indonesian law does not allow an Indonesian citizen to have another citizenship. However, dual citizenship is an exception for children of Indonesian nationals overseas or children from mixed marriages who were born on or after 1 August 2006 (Law No. 12/2006, retrieved from the website of the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia, Perth, Australia: <http://kjri-perth.org.au/index.php/indonesian-citizen/dwi-kewarganegaraan/>). The majority of mothers in the committee have Australian Permanent Residency Visas obtained through the dependent spouse visa scheme or through the general skilled migration scheme.

3 In effect, the social proximity that I share with the participants of my research had contributed to my decision to avoid the discussion of class altogether in this article. Future work on class and gender dimensions of migrant mothering would benefit not only from the budding scholarship on transnationalism, networks, and connectivity among overseas Indonesians, but also the under-theorized role of mothers in international migration studies (Gedalof, 2009).

liminary round of interviews with four active members of the language and culture club, I explore whether and how bilingualism and biculturalism play a role in the practice of migrant mothering, in shaping migrant mothers' identities, and in their perception of the development of their children's identities. I argue that, while the mothers' collective efforts in running a language club may not be effective enough to achieve a native level of language proficiency among their children, the club serves to produce shared transnational identities among migrant mothers, and to promote migrant mothers' collective aspirations for their children's transnational identities.

The article is organized as follows: I start by looking at pertinent scholarship and demographic data supporting my choice to approach the issue of transnationalism from a cultural-linguistic and a gender perspective. I then outline my auto-ethnographic account on the complex interplay of migration and mothering practices. Here, I present my relatively recent involvement in a community organization that aims at promoting native language (Bahasa Indonesia) use in early childhood among young second-generation children of Indonesian migrant mothers. In attempting to localize my rationale and experiences in involving myself and my children in this organization in a broader context, I outline interviews with other mothers participating in the same organization, which show the diversity and the commonalities in bilingual and/or bicultural mothering. Finally, I situate language retaining efforts in the context of the ongoing negotiation of mother-child relations and identities in transnational families.

### MIGRATION, TRANSNATIONALISM, AND LANGUAGE RETENTION

Since the early 1990s, there have been several waves of transnational migration scholarship (see Levitt & Schiller, 2004 for a seminal review). Distinct to classical assimilation theorists (e.g. Gordon, 1964) who proposed that immigrants in the West<sup>4</sup> would ultimately lose their homeland ties and practices, the transnational perspective highlights the enduring connections that generations of migrants maintain to their place of origin at the same time as they are gradually incorporated into their host countries. In the burgeoning literature on transnational migration, these enduring connections are discussed in terms of transnational identities and sense of belonging, transnational networks and kinship, and socio-economic, cultural, and religious practices across national borders and boundaries.

One issue that has emerged out of the complex layers and multiple dimensions of transnationalism in migration studies is the question of whether "transnational migration is an ephemeral first-generation phenomenon" (Levitt & Schiller, 2004, p. 1005). This question of whether migrants can pass on their transnational identities and practices onto their children and grandchildren is the subject of an increasing number of migration research. One measurable outcome of such processes is language retention, whereby speaking a native language other than English at home became a common indicator of transnational identities among first and later generation migrants in English speaking countries (Lazear, 1995; Rumbaut, Massey, & Bean, 2006).

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4 Here, the West is comprised of popular OECD destination countries for international migrants, including, but not limited to the United States, Western Europe, and Australia.

There is a great variation in the extent to which a minority language can be successfully retained in migrant communities. For example, in Australia, second-generation Dutch migrants have the highest rate of progression of language shift, with about 96 percent speaking only English at home. In contrast, only about 11 percent of second-generation Vietnamese speak only English at home (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999). A longitudinal study of language retention among migrant communities in the US suggests that 'language death', rather than 'language retention' is the norm for migrant languages. Applying methods commonly used to derive life expectancies in mortality studies, Rumbaut et al. (2006) estimated linguistic life expectancies across generations of migrant groups in Southern California. On average, Mexicans have the highest generational span for linguistic life expectancy among all migrant groups in the study area. When defining linguistic life expectancy as the preference to speak in the mother tongue, a Mexican household is expected to retain such preference for less than two generations. However, when defining linguistic life expectancy as the ability of the migrant household members to speak the mother tongue well, it was found that no migrant language could survive further than the third generation (Rumbaut et al., 2006, p. 457).

Using a more qualitative approach and broadening the proxy of transnational identities outside of language retention, Tracey Reynolds (2006) points to the relatively limited attention given to the relationship between ethnicity and social capital. Her case study on the formation of transnational identities among second- and third-generation young people of Caribbean descent in the United Kingdom underlines the importance of "collective ethnic bonds", of "shared identities and values", and of the "networks of trust and reciprocity" that operate within minority ethnic communities. In particular, Reynolds (2006, p. 1098) highlights how Caribbean young people's participation in transnational networks and celebrations provided them with a sense of belonging and collective membership.

The above-mentioned discussions on the importance of collective ethnic bonds, migrant networks, and transnational childrearing practices in facilitating inter-generational transnational identities among migrant families serve as departing points of my analysis of the interrelation between migrant mothering practices and cultural-linguistic identities. Unlike Reynolds, who based her research on practices and identities among second- and third-generation migrants, my focus rests on the collective ethnic bonds, transnational identities, and language retaining efforts among a selected group of first-generation Indonesian migrant mothers in Canberra, Australia.

### **MOTHERING IN MOTHER TONGUE: THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT**

Since language retention is a quantifiable indicator of transnational identity among second-generation migrants, background statistics from the Australian Population Census relating to language retention in Australia can provide a first insight into the research field. Alongside this indicator, I examined the literature for the gender dimension of language retention practices in migrant families. Here, my focus rests on migrant mothers as the central figure of cultural-linguistic transmission across various marital settings in the West.

Data from the 2011 Australian Population Census on Indonesian migrants in Australia show that language retention varies by age and by degree of ancestry.<sup>5</sup> In 2011, fewer than 70 percent of children from 0 to 4 years with Indonesian as their first ancestry spoke their native language (Bahasa Indonesia) at home (Figure 1). Among young children with Indonesian nominated as their second ancestry, the percentage speaking Bahasa Indonesia at home was at only 30 percent (Figure 1). These figures suggest that the prospect of linguistic survival for Bahasa Indonesia in Australia is rather weak.

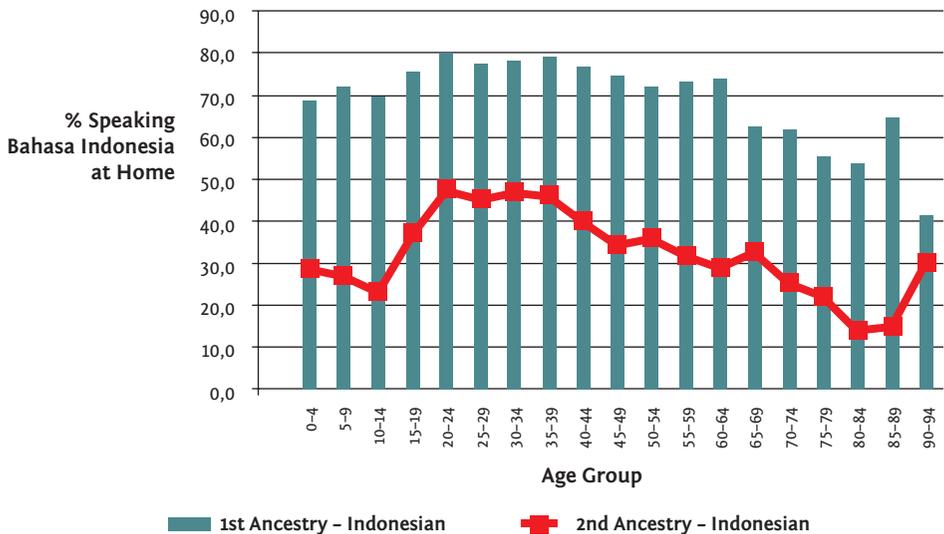


Figure 1. Population of Indonesian ancestry speaking Bahasa Indonesia at home.<sup>6</sup>

When using minority language retention as an indicator of the cultural-linguistic transmission of identities within the family context, the immediate question arises of who is primarily preoccupied with this transmission. In reviewing the literature on interconnections of gender, intermarriage, migration, and language retention, the following observations arose: To begin with, the literature acknowledges that there is a particular relationship between patterns of intermarriage and patterns of cultural-linguistic retention (Bisin & Verdier, 2000; Jan, 2013; Okita, 2002; Robinson, 1989; Winter & Pauwels, 2005). A study in the US found that ethnic language retention decreases with a rising rate of exogamy and increases with a rising rate of endogamy among East Asian men in the US (Jan, 2013). For women, ethnic language retention decreases with a rising rate of intermarriage for East Asian women (Jan, 2013). However, the exact direction of causality between intermarriage and language retention is less clear.

<sup>5</sup> Data from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (2013) suggest that by the end of June 2011, there were 73,940 Indonesian-born persons in Australia. There were slightly more Indonesian-born women than men (56 and 44 percent, respectively).

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from "Australian Population Census 2011: Customized Tables in TableBuilder", Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013.

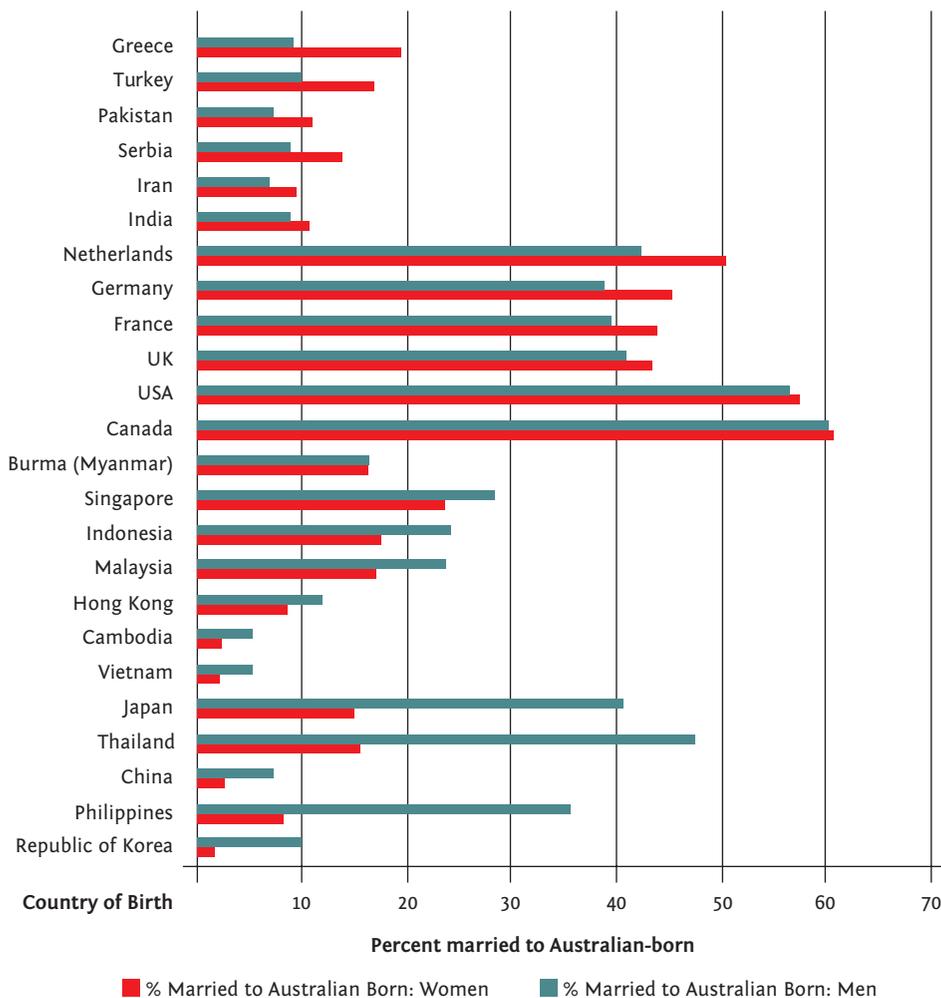


Figure 2. Overseas born men and women in couple families by birthplace: Percent married to Australian born partners, 2006.<sup>7</sup>

Because patterns of intermarriage between men and women differ, one may speculate on whether mothers or fathers of a particular ethnic background are more likely to promote their native languages (presumably a minority language) in exogamous marriages. In a study of intermarriage patterns in the US with a focus on gender, Jacobs and Labov (2002) found that among Asian Americans, “females are more likely to marry whites than are their male counterparts” (p. 621), while the reverse pattern could be observed among African Americans. Similar patterns can be observed among first-generation, overseas-born individuals in Australia. Using data from the

7 Adapted from “Table 7: Overseas-Born Men and Women in Couple Families, by Birthplace: Percent with Australian-Born Partner 2006”, by G. Heard, S.-E. Khoo, & B. Birrell, 2009, *Intermarriage in Australia: Patterns by birthplace, ancestry, religion and indigenous status* (p.17). Monash, Australia: Monash University Press, Centre for Population and Urban Research.

earlier 2006 Australian Population Census, Figure 2 outlines the percentage of overseas-born men and women in couple families in Australia who were married to an Australian-born partner. Such statistics may not offer an accurate measure for the rate of intermarriage; nevertheless, they serve as useful proxies for the intermarriage differentials by ethnic origin and gender. For example, a significantly larger proportion of women born in Japan, Thailand, and the Philippines were married to Australian-born partners, relative to their male counterparts of the same origin.

In the case of Indonesians in couple families in Australia, the following two points can be observed: First, significantly more Indonesians are married to another Indonesian than to an Australian-born partner. Second, the likelihood of marrying an Australian-born partner is higher for Indonesian women than it is for Indonesian men. Therefore, women are disproportionately represented as the bearers of minority mother tongue in Australian mixed marriages where one of the partners is Indonesian.

On the one hand, women's central role in socializing minority cultural-linguistic traits to their offspring in exogamous marriages is well expected. A study of French native language retention in mixed marriage families in Canada suggests that children are more likely to adhere to French when the mother, not the father, speaks French as a native language (Robinson, 1989). Okita's (2002) rich life stories of Japanese mother/British father families highlight the tensions experienced by migrant mothers in taking up the emotionally demanding and time-consuming tasks of cultural-linguistic socialization of their young children. On the other hand, studies on migrant families and cultural-linguistic retention point to the centrality of migrant mothers not only in exogamous but also in endogamous marriages. Winter and Pauwels' (2005) analysis of Australian studies shows that the transmission of the native language from migrant parents to later generations is seen as the responsibility of mothers, not of fathers.

This gendered aspect of minority language transmission supports the argument that the transmission of native language and cultural identities ultimately rests on the mothering practices of migrant mothers, irrespective of whether they are in an exogamous or endogamous marriage. The study of bilingual and/or bicultural mothering is thus a meaningful contribution to scholarship on transnationalism, kinship, and connectivity among overseas Indonesians. Taking up this endeavor, I continue with some auto-ethnographic reflections on bilingual and bicultural mothering as I recall my lived experience. I use the term bilingual and bicultural mothering to refer to a) my everyday language practice, using both Bahasa Indonesia and English in communicating with my children, and b) my conscious and unconscious efforts to socialize my children with what I perceive as moderated versions of my native cultural traits including religion, social values, and practices.

#### **THE EARLY YEARS: 'ISOLATED AND PRIVATIZED' MIGRANT MOTHERING**

I spent most of my formative years in Jakarta, Indonesia, and Canberra, Australia. I lived in Jakarta until the age of eight and moved to Australia in 1992 with my siblings and parents who had both received scholarships for their postgraduate studies. I had about 3.5 years of secondary education in Australia before completing

my undergraduate degree at an Australian university. In 2001, I received my Australian Permanent Residency Visa under what was then the newly introduced general skilled migration scheme. Upon receiving a PhD scholarship in 2003, I embarked on fieldwork in Jakarta and Makassar in 2004, working on my thesis on the interplay between gender roles, attitudes in marriage, and labor market expectations among university students.

I lived in Jakarta between December 2004 and mid-2006. These two years represented a demographically dense period in my life, in which I went through what demographers coined as two important markers of adulthood: marriage and child-bearing (Lloyd, 2005). Both my husband and I are native speakers of Bahasa Indonesia. We grew up in different parts of Jakarta and spent the parts of our formative years living abroad. In August 2006, I had to return to Australia to complete my PhD thesis. Reflecting on this period, my return to Canberra with my five-month-old son marked the beginning of a long and demanding journey inside the complex realms of migration and motherhood. In the past seven years, since the birth of my eldest son, I have become increasingly aware of and at the same time curious about the intricate nexus between migration and mothering: How has migrating to Australia from Indonesia at the early age of 14 shaped my mothering practices and how do these practices affect the identity formation of my children today? In turn, how has mothering in Australia influenced my maternal and cultural identities?

My early experience of mothering in Australia was imbued with feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and ambivalence. However, treading the water of motherhood in a social and cultural context that was significantly different to how I had been mothered in Jakarta during the 1980s had placed another layer of intricacy on my emotional and mental state. My initial beliefs of what good mothering entails often conflicted with the generational, cultural, class- and family-specific differences of what back then I interpreted as the mainstream parenting practices in urban middle-class Indonesia and the West. To give a more vivid example, upon my arrival back in Canberra with my five-month-old son, a neighbor invited me to join her mothers' group. The idea that other mothers in the mothers' group, most of whom were of Anglo-Australian origin, had a seemingly effective baby's sleeping arrangement practice in place was unfamiliar to me. I slept together with my son as it is a 'common practice' among new mothers in Jakarta, and not so much because I am an avid believer of attachment parenting. I was initially baffled to see parents taking their young babies to sleep clinics and coming home with the *nurse-play-sleep* routine.<sup>8</sup> However, as I directly experienced sleep deprivation and the absence of a relief mother in the house (and in the neighborhood), I began to see the importance of sleeping routines and later on, to the early promotion of child independence for my own benefit.

To me, migrant mothering in the twenty-first century meant living what Sharon Hays (Hays, 1996) called the "cultural contradictions" of a child-centered, intensive-mothering ideology that has taken central stage in the US and much of the Western world (Lupton, 2000; Maher & Saugeres, 2007) with much less social capital than I

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8 Currently, nurse(feed)-play-sleep is one of the recommended sleeping arrangements to help newborns and babies settle into their routine. Advocates recommend parents to feed or nurse their baby, play/interact with her or him, and then lay her or him in the cot to sleep. This is distinct to practices in which babies are fed on demand and in which mothers nursed their babies to sleep.

had grown accustomed to back in Jakarta.<sup>9</sup> In my son's early years, when the traditional support for childcare that I had enjoyed in the first five months of my motherhood were no longer available, I found myself facing a heavier domestic workload and progressing towards more of what Moon (2003) refers to as "isolated and privatized mothering" (p. 851) in her research on Korean migrant mothers in the US. There was no 'village' I could rely on and the responsibility to raise my child rested primarily on me.<sup>10</sup>

Undoubtedly, 'isolated and privatized mothering' moves increasingly towards the center of the social and cultural tensions experienced by first-time migrant mothers in the West. I was aware that 'back home', in Indonesia, the maternal role models in my immediate family and my contemporaries would tend to have their 'village' help them in looking after their children. My experience in living such contradictions has been well documented in recent studies on mothering among women of East Asian origin in the West (Ho, 2006; Moon, 2003; Nora Chiang, 2008; Wu, 2009).

In speaking about the isolation and privatization of migrant mothering, it is arguably easy not to speak of fathers' involvement. While acknowledging the contribution and support from my husband to date, I have had the larger share of parenting as he assumes the role of the primary breadwinner with long working hours.

Perhaps because I am married to another Indonesian with a transnational identity like myself, we assumed that our children would be 'like us'. Coming to live in Australia in our mid-teens, we both continue to have a good command of Bahasa Indonesia. We never experienced language loss and in my son's early years of childhood, we did not put much consideration into which language we used at home. Both my husband and I code-switched between English and Bahasa Indonesia in our daily conversations. We did not anticipate that our son would be a passive user of Bahasa Indonesia by the time he had finished preschool. On a number of occasions, when we returned to Jakarta and our young son began to speak English in public settings, we felt 'embarrassed' at our lack of success in teaching him to appropriately use his native language. In the first three years of parenthood, we essentially had no strategic plan to actively pass on Bahasa Indonesia to our children. My involvement in a collective effort to retain Bahasa Indonesia was largely incidental.

#### **THE LANGUAGE AND DANCE CLUB: MIGRANT MOTHERING IN A COLLECTIVE SETTING**

After completing my studies and the subsequent birth of my daughter in 2008, I somewhat veered into new and multiple circles of social networks of Indonesian mothers with young children in Canberra. Arguably, Facebook – being very popular

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9 The literature on the social and cultural contradictions of mothering in the West draws on the premise on the renewed desire to live up to the ideals of 'the good mother' that co-reside with increased demands for women to participate in the public sphere and paid labor. In demography, the conflicting expectations arising from women's higher educational attainment and workforce participation, on the one hand, and persistent gendered practices in family institutions, on the other, are seen as a central driver of low fertility levels in developed economies (McDonald, 2000).

10 I partly enjoyed the help of my mother. Later on, I started using on-campus childcare facilities while working on my thesis.

among both urban and overseas Indonesians – not only facilitated my connection to other Indonesian mothers with young children in Canberra, but also provided a visual map of Indonesian migrant groups in the city and their heterogeneous nature. It was through these virtual social networks of Indonesian mothers that I became a member of a Bahasa Indonesia playgroup that was later incorporated into a community language and culture club with a focus on dancing. In this section, I briefly outline the nature of the language and culture club, its effectiveness in language retention, and its role in promoting collective identities.

### **The Language and Culture Club and the Indonesian Diaspora in Canberra**

The Indonesian language and culture club had 30 registered pupils in 2013 aged between three and nine years and is currently registered as a community language school in Canberra. The club heavily relies on parents' volunteer activities for its organization and operation, including administration, fundraising, and teaching activities. It charges a small annual membership fee to families and receives some financial support from the Indonesian embassy and community grants from the local government. Parents, mostly mothers, also run fundraising campaigns through selling food at community and cultural events.<sup>11</sup>

In 2013, language and dance classes were held on Saturdays in a public library and once a week at a local school (usually in the afternoon after school activities during school semesters). In 2014, the venue for the Saturday class moved to a shared education and cultural facility provided by the Indonesian embassy. Saturday classes are generally attended by children of parents with Indonesian background, whereas the after-school language club is attended by students enrolled in that local school, regardless of their migration background. In contrast to the after-school language club with a steady student attendance, the attendance rate of the Saturday classes tends to vary and depends largely on the teachers' and/or volunteers' availability, as well as on the teaching content of these classes. Since 2011, I volunteer in both teaching and coordinating Indonesian dance classes. Every year, children are invited to perform at community and/or multicultural events. Despite the club's focus on language retention, dance classes seem to draw much more interest of both parents and students than language classes.

### **Language and Homeland**

Difficulties in language retention were experienced by mothers in either type of marriage (mixed and endogamous marriage). Interviews as well as broader informal discussions with other members of the club suggest that while language retention was the central rationale for running the club, in reality, none of the children had a native speaker's command of Bahasa Indonesia, the majority being passive speakers of the language. Most member families I observed did not consciously practice bilingual parenting in a strict sense. In some cases, some families had cultivated a

11 In the past, funds were mostly needed to meet rental costs. Meanwhile, with classes being held at a school and maintaining a public library, most of the club's revenues go to teaching expenses and school materials.

consistent practice of one parent (mostly mothers) speaking only Bahasa Indonesia to their children prior to joining the club. In a few cases, joining the club had inspired mothers to establish a 'consistent language policy' at home. But in most cases, mothers continue to mix English and Bahasa Indonesia when communicating with their children.

Until she was two years old, my daughter spoke Bahasa Indonesia 100 percent (of the time). But when I started working and she began attending childcare, she could not converse with others (in childcare). So I ended up speaking in English to her. Now, she has started showing interest (to speak Bahasa Indonesia) because Bahasa Indonesia is a subject at school. And she feels that, "oh, my mum is Indonesian, I have to be able to". So she started trying, (also) because my husband also speaks a little bit of Indonesian, so she wants to know (what we talk about).<sup>12</sup> (*Rosa, married to an Australian, with a daughter aged eight*)

In some cases, joining the language club encouraged mothers' willingness to use Bahasa Indonesia in their daily interaction with their children. Most interviewed mothers did not take the conscious decision to raise their children bilingually from the very beginning. These mothers acknowledged the early onset of language loss among second-generation young children of Indonesian background and also that it is difficult to overcome this loss unless at least one parent was very consistent in using Bahasa Indonesia from the very start, or unless the children had a relatively lengthy period of in-country experience. This last point was made by mothers who observed an increased fluency in Bahasa Indonesia in their children after a longer holiday in Indonesia.

I don't oblige my children to be able to read books in Bahasa Indonesia. The most important thing is that they can communicate. Maybe, that is what drives me (Sundanese: *keukeh*) to speak Bahasa Indonesia at home. ... Well, maybe if the father was an Australian, it is okay but in this case when both parents are Indonesians and their children cannot speak Bahasa Indonesia, it feels sad. (*Indira, married to an Indonesian, with daughters aged seven and four*)

In effect, without the consistent use of Bahasa Indonesia throughout early childhood, the attending of Saturday language classes itself is not effective enough in ensuring the children's mastery of their 'mother tongue'. However, the mothers interviewed were generally content with the club's success in *promoting*, as supposed to *retaining*, the use of Bahasa Indonesia. While they reported that having a child who can communicate in Bahasa Indonesia is important, a closer analysis of the conversations reveals also their desire for transnational identities in their children. Beside the Saturday classes, groups of mothers, children, and their families frequently gathered at play dates, birthday parties, and group holidays. For the mothers, the social capital maintained directly or indirectly through their engagement in club activities offers a sense of reassurance and belonging, asserting their transnational mothering practices and identities. In the context of these mothers' new collective identity, the idea of

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12 Quotes of the interviews are translated from Bahasa Indonesia. Informants and their families are anonymized.

imparting transnational identities to their children through communal mothering is important. For example, one of the members who is married to an Anglo-Australian man said that she wanted her daughter to feel Australian, but at the same time Indonesian, and more specifically Manadonese, a sub-ethnic identity.

I do not want my identity as an Indonesian, not only as an Indonesian but also as a Manadonese, to disappear. So that is what I wish for my daughter as well. I try so that she [would feel like she] is a Manadonese, not only Indonesian. She has been to Manado a couple of times and I sometimes use Manadonese or its accent when speaking to her. I don't think she will have the same experience like us, ya? I think for our children, it's not going to be like that: Javanese, Manadonese. I don't think they can make the connection because we live here [in Australia]. Except, maybe when the ethnic community group is strong, like the Batak kids maybe. How can we make them say that 'oh I am a Manadonese' when it is hard for them to say that they are Indonesian? ... Well, my daughter has to know that she is an Indonesian. ... Sure, she is Australian but my husband and I told her to say that she is both Indonesian and Australian. ... And through language, of course [in shaping identity]. Hopefully though. There were phases when my daughter refused to speak Bahasa Indonesia: "I don't want to speak Bahasa Indonesia, I cannot." (Linda, married to an Australian, daughter aged seven)

One mother expressed that her husband and she liked the idea of their children carrying some of her home culture.<sup>13</sup> The practice of socializing children according to common parenting practices and values in Indonesia, to common parenting practices in their current surroundings, or to a moderated mixture of these is expressed by all of the women interviewed. An example would be for the mother to say the words 'I love you' to her daughter, which she cited as a common practice in Australia, and for her daughter to express filial piety, for example, through *salim*, which is cited as an Indonesian sign of respect by kissing or putting an elder's hand on one's forehead or nose. The negotiation of these often-contradictory practices, values, and customs is illustrated by the following examples:

In Indonesia, no parents would say sorry for pinching (*nyubit*) or ear-pinching (*jewel*) their child. So here, we have to learn, no matter how upset and tired [we are] (*kesel*), smacking a child's hand (*ceples tangan*) means we have to say sorry. But compared to kids here, Bunga is like an Indonesian child, she will do what we ask her to do (*nurut*). ... But when speaking about Javanese culture, it is hard to impart it to her. What I think is important is for her to have her manners (*sopan-santunnya masih ada*). But I don't want her to be like completely Indonesian, what do you call it, too many don't do this and that (*terlalu banyak nggak boleh ini itu*). I don't want her like that. I want her to explore [the world] herself but she should know her limits too. ... Here, sometimes I get a bit worried that there is too much freedom. (Rosa, married to an Australian, with a daughter aged eight)

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13 Home culture here refers to customs and practices which the respondents were accustomed to in their family in Indonesia. The respondents grew up in different parts of Indonesia and had different ethnic and religious identities.

I do it [practice my family traditions]; in terms of religious perspective for instance, praying before eating. ... She also cannot say words like crazy, stupid, ugly. That's how my father raised me. ... I don't think Indonesians often say 'I love you', but I always say 'I love you'. Indonesian [parents] don't often express something that is personal. (*Linda, married to an Australian, with a daughter aged seven*)

The people here have a lot of freedom (*bener-bener bebas*) whereas we can't do many things (*nggak boleh ini, nggak boleh itu*), [can't be] impolite. We still try to enforce Eastern traditions. I mean, the people here have good manners, but we still give our children, what do you call it, cuddles? For example, we still sleep in the same bed with them. White people really don't like that. (*Indira, married to an Indonesian husband, with two daughters aged seven and four*)

Yes, I also don't have the heart to do that [to let her young son sleep in his own room]. Even though, now my [youngest] son is alright to sleep in the same room with his big brother, sometimes I just lifted him up and moved him back to my bed. (*Vonny, married to an Indonesian, two sons aged 15 and 4*)

The experience of the migrant mothers in the collective language and culture club setting highlights the club's function as a hub to expose their children to other young children with Indonesian heritage. In practice, the club's activities outside the language class allow children to identify with other children *like* themselves: Children who live in houses where shoes are taken off prior to entering and whose mothers cook similar food or speak loudly to each other in Bahasa Indonesia, while insisting that their children too should try to speak Bahasa Indonesia.

I am looking for a place (*wadah*) for Indonesian children groups here. It is for my own sake. I need a group where my daughter could meet other Indonesian children. So she could stay in-tune with our culture. (*Linda, married to an Australian, with a daughter aged 7*)

### Performing

At this point, I would like to draw upon my hindsight on the relative popularity of the dance class. In informal conversations, parents shared with me that the dance classes provided a fun alternative in relation to the classroom environment of language classes. One mother expressed that her daughter did not wish to sit in the language class but was very keen on participating in the dance classes. Its fortnightly frequency and more flexible attendance policy also meant that it was potentially less of a burden for families to meet the schedule of all their children's extracurricular activities. However, I also have the impression that dance classes offer a much gentler, less coercive way to introduce Indonesia and Indonesian identities to young children. Additionally, mothers often felt nostalgic about their children's public performances and were excited to see their children dressed-up in regional traditional Indonesian costumes. Between 2011 and 2013, the club staged three performances at the annual Indonesian Festival held at the grounds of the Indonesian Embassy in Canberra.

On these occasions, some mothers reminisced how they too had once performed at school and neighborhood events during their childhood 'back home'. Both mothers and their children were keen on ensuring the success of these performances, attending extra sessions outside the fortnightly slot if necessary. The shared experience of the mothers and their children before and during these public performances demonstrate the club's essential role in the maintenance and reproduction of shared transnational identities.

## CONCLUSION

Drawing upon the interviews and reflecting upon my own experience, I note the following preliminary observations: First, the language and culture club serves as a connecting hub for migrant mothers, their children, and an institutionalized migrant network that offers valuable social capital at the individual level. Second, the shared transnational identities generated through migrant mothers' networking overcome the 'isolated and privatized' aspect of (migrant) mothering, especially through the identification of a shared past, shared migrant mothering experiences as well as challenges of intermarriage across national borders. Third, the club and associated socializing groups have sustained not only collective identities of migrant mothers, but also what these mothers perceived and aspired to as collective identities of their children through the children's participation in a variety of social and cultural engagements outside the school context. As with other migrant community organizations, perceptions of a 'social clique' of mothers who run the club may have hindered the club's success to garner widespread support among other social groups of Indonesian migrant mothers in Canberra.

The Indonesian mothers I interviewed practiced what Gedalof (2009) refers to as the work of "reproducing heritage, culture and structures of belonging" (p. 81). While collective language retention efforts by migrant mothers may not be effective in preventing language loss among second- and later generation children of migrant parents, the social practices surrounding these efforts are crucial in creating and maintaining a shared transnational identity of migrant mothers and their children. Through promoting a sense of belonging both among mothers and their children, the language and culture club serves as both a connecting hub to a homeland as well as a piece of the homeland itself.

The emic perspective I offered in this article shall serve as a step towards a more detailed understanding of the centrality of mothers in the cultural reproduction of collective identities among overseas Indonesians. Collective language retention efforts among Indonesian mothers in Canberra mimic similar efforts run by other migrant groups on a volunteer basis, commonly by women. This particular example supports the idea that mothering is conducted not only on behalf of individual children, but also on behalf of the larger social group in which they are situated (Levitt & Schiller, 2004).



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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An earlier version of this article was presented at the Australian Anthropological Society Annual Conference 2013, held at the Australian National University in Canberra. I would like to thank the participants of the panel on Asian-Australian Youth – Transnationalism, Kinship, and Connectivity in the Asian Century, especially to the conveners Linda Bennett and Monika Winarnita for their encouragement and valuable comments. I am grateful to acknowledge suggestions and comments provided by the anonymous reviewers and the editors on earlier drafts. Any remaining errors are my own.