

## Lockdown *Ibuisism*: Experiences of Indonesian Migrant Mothers during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Aotearoa New Zealand

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### Introduction

1. When it comes to the question of how non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) such as lockdowns have impacted upon practices of care and relations of caregiving, research published during the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic has made two things abundantly clear. The first is that reconfigurations of everyday life and social contact needed to slow the spread of the Novel Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (for example, via the implementation of 'lockdowns') have confronted people the world over with economic, personal and relational challenges that have been, for many, unprecedented in their duration and intensity.<sup>[1]</sup> In particular, the very truncation of social networks that makes lockdown measures effective at diminishing viral transmission between households risks depriving those households of the support they usually rely on to meet care needs. These forms of support could be formal, such as day-care centres and schooling, or informal, such as care provided by neighbours or extended family.<sup>[2]</sup> Households in lockdown thus face the challenge of meeting care deficits with their own resources. In the context of school closures, many households face additional challenges such as needing to 'homeschool' children. While these circumstances can make lockdowns stressful and demanding for many, it is nevertheless far from certain that such difficulties are experienced equally. Indeed, the second thing that has become clear from research on the pandemic to date is that the burden of responding to these challenges has fallen disproportionately upon women.<sup>[3]</sup>
2. This article contributes to ongoing conversations about gender and inequality during the pandemic by exploring the experiences of Indonesian migrant mothers residing in Aotearoa New Zealand (hereafter 'NZ') as they lived through the nation's first countrywide lockdown, implemented by NZ Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern on 25 March 2020 and lasting in various stages until mid-May 2020. We explore multiple questions: What happened to gender roles within families during lockdown? What impact did increased childcare responsibilities have on mothers and fathers, especially during Alert Level 4 (25 March–27 April), when schools were closed and NZ residents were required to stay in their 'bubbles' (exclusive social groups, usually coterminous with a single household).<sup>[4]</sup> Moreover, we consider how the experiences of Indonesian migrant mothers both paralleled and diverged from that of other mothers in NZ: a nation currently renowned for its high levels of gender equality and progressive feminist policies, especially under the premiership of Jacinda Ardern, herself the mother of a young child.<sup>[5]</sup> We posit that although Indonesian migrant mothers faced an increased care burden—much like many other mothers in NZ (and beyond)—their experience of meeting this care burden was differentiated by two key factors. First, by the way Indonesian ideologies of *Ibuisism* (motherism) shaped their outlook regarding kinship roles and responsibilities; and, second, by the specific challenges arising from their status as 'non-native' speakers of English. We thus emphasise the value and importance of an intersectional analysis,<sup>[6]</sup> arguing that the specificity of their experience as Indonesian migrant mothers both supported and compromised their wellbeing during lockdown.

### Approach and methods

3. Cross-cultural research reveals subtle variations in gendered responses to COVID-19 care burdens, with a key mediating factor being the impact of lockdown policies upon national labour markets. In both India and Italy, for example, high levels of men's unemployment led to *decreasing* disparities in the number of hours spent on domestic work and childcare by men and women.<sup>[7]</sup> Nevertheless, even in these cases, not only did a disparity persist but the number of hours women spent on care work and domestic duties still increased in absolute terms. Meanwhile, surveys of the UK and Hungary and a comparative study of Australia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam reported a growing disparity between men's and women's contributions to domestic labour, which the authors associate with a

deterioration in women's wellbeing and mental health.[8] Indeed, research in Germany found that women also experienced a higher cognitive care burden than men, with childcare (and other caring obligations) featuring more prominently in their concerns and 'mental load' than in those of men.[9] Studies of the UK and New Zealand found the challenge of balancing family and work commitments to be more stressful for working mothers than for working fathers.[10]

4. Faced with such striking and recurrent patterns of inequality, Helen McLaren et al.[11] advocate for an analytic approach centred on the 'triple burden' of productive, reproductive and community labour that women are expected to undertake in patriarchal societies and highlight how pandemic responses 'dra[w] on women's vulnerabilities and acquiescence to additional burdens.' Whilst noting that such an analytic framework risks downplaying the heterogeneity of women's experience, they nevertheless find it useful to highlight commonalities; a stance which draws support from Sonia Orrefice and Climent Quintana-Domeque's observation that the 'multifaceted gender gaps' in labour allocation that emerged in their UK study were 'not driven by differences in age, ethnicity, education, family structure, income in 2019, current employment status, place of residence or living in a rural/urban area.' [12] However, while we agree with these researchers that there can be value in analyses that take 'women' as an undifferentiated category—not least in highlighting the enduring patriarchal fault-lines that may belie public rhetoric of 'gender equality'—we are also concerned about what is submerged by this approach.
5. This concern is heightened by our recognition that, to date, many studies of gender inequality during COVID-19 have been grounded in quantitative measures of shifts in time allocations and wellbeing, rather than in qualitative explorations of what such shifts involve or how they are experienced. For example, although Orrefice and Quintana-Domeque may be correct to note that educational status has little impact on the increased childcare burdens faced by British mothers, Jake Anders et al. found that non-graduate mothers (and fathers) in the UK felt less confident homeschooling their children, and spent less time doing so, than their graduate counterparts.[13] We thus adopt an intersectional approach, believing this to be better suited to capturing both the diversity of forms of 'care' practised under lockdown and the specific challenges lockdowns can present for differently situated women.
6. Our commitment to specificity also leads us to eschew a quantitative approach, in which research participants are invited to interpret their experience through the lens of researcher-generated metrics, in favour of a qualitative approach in which salient themes and terms of analysis are drawn from the narratives of research participants. In this article, we thus draw primarily on insights gleaned from in-depth interviews conducted in Indonesian with eight Indonesian mothers living in Auckland, New Zealand. These were conducted by Nelly Martin-Anatias, in May–June 2020, and then subjected to a thematic analysis by the entire research collective.
7. The eight interviewees were recruited via social media and word-of-mouth. All participants had at least one child, and all were heterosexually married to Indonesian men, and living in New Zealand. As such, the dynamics we describe in this article may not be the same as those affecting queer Indonesian mothers, single mothers, divorcees, or those in transnational relationships. The participants' ages ranged from mid-twenties to early-forties, and their length of time spent in NZ ranged from five months to nine years. Three were pursuing post-graduate studies in NZ, the other five had moved to NZ because their husbands were relocating for work purposes. These five women had thus had to leave their careers as professionals in their home country, experiencing the upheaval characteristic of the interrupted life of a 'trailing spouse.' [14] Moreover, while all five women were university educated, they all reported struggling with English proficiency, particularly during lockdown homeschooling.
8. These interview data were also analysed in relation to the free-text answers collected by three non-probability online surveys, conducted at Levels 4, 3 and 2 of NZ's lockdown. These surveys were advertised via word-of-mouth and a Facebook ad campaign inviting respondents to share their experiences of Level 4, their plans for expanding their bubble (or not) at Level 3, and their feelings about the transition to Level 2. We received a total of 3644 valid responses. Of these, 2726 were from women, 1121 of whom explicitly indicated that they had, like our Indonesian migrant interlocutors, spent the Level 4 lockdown in bubbles with their children or stepchildren. Free-text answers to open-ended questions in the survey were then subject to a thematic analysis, in which we explored both the range of experiences narrated and those narratives that occurred sufficiently frequently, and amongst respondents of sufficiently diverse backgrounds, for us to reasonably understand them as widespread (for further discussion of the surveys, including a full breakdown of respondent demographics,[15] and a full schedule of survey questions.[16]). Juxtaposing material from the interviews and the surveys enabled us to identify some of the specific factors that were mediating gendered experiences of the NZ lockdown. Two stood out: the Indonesian ideological framework of *Ibuisism* that made emergent disparities in gendered workload less conflictual than for other NZ women participating

in our research, and the structural inequality of being a second-language speaker, which made certain aspects of lockdown childcare, especially homeschooling, *more* stressful.

## Ethnographic context

9. Indonesians have been moving to NZ since at least the 1950s,<sup>[17]</sup> and diplomatic relationships were formalised in 1958. In 2018, approximately 4000 Indonesians were registered as living in NZ, with another 1250 Indonesian students studying in NZ.<sup>[18]</sup> In Indonesia, Indonesian is the national language spoken by almost 300 million people.<sup>[19]</sup> English language is a compulsory subject throughout the Indonesian school curriculum, and learning English is seen as a way to project one's perception of modernity, cosmopolitanism and higher social status.<sup>[20]</sup> However, many Indonesian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners experience a high level of anxiety regarding their learning and exhibit a lack of confidence in their abilities.<sup>[21]</sup> While Indonesians receiving work or study visas to migrate to NZ are likely to have a high degree of English proficiency (NZ immigration rules for 'work visas' specify that English ability must be sufficient to perform one's duties correctly; migrants on study visas must meet their institutions' entry requirements), it is thus far from assured that this will be true of their accompanying kin.
10. Due to the lack of social security from the Indonesian government, family and kin networks are key sources of support for many Indonesian families. This leads to a tight-knit family system, familial patronage in both private and public domains, and strong emotional attachments to extended kin networks.<sup>[22]</sup> Nevertheless, under President Suharto's developmentalist authoritarian New Order regime (1965–98), the Indonesian state worked tirelessly to promote small, nuclear households as the 'ideal' family form to facilitate Indonesia's emergence as a 'modern,' 'orderly' and 'developed' nation-state.<sup>[23]</sup> Such ideal-type of family also involved a marked gendered division of both domestic labour and domestic authority. As Suzanne Brenner remarks, 'While the state almost always takes it for granted that the head of the Indonesian household is male, it is women, in their role as wives and mothers, who have been treated as linchpins of the family's domestication.'<sup>[24]</sup> Central to this vision is an understanding that Indonesia's destiny as a nation rests in the quality of its citizens' upbringing. Childhood has thus been problematised as a period of life demanding 'concerted cultivation'<sup>[25]</sup> via active practices of 'intensive mothering,'<sup>[26]</sup> including a sustained commitment to the promise and practice of education.<sup>[27]</sup>
11. Julia Suryakusuma corroborates these insights, analysing the ideology of *Ibuism* that pervaded New Order politics and that persists, albeit in an increasingly Islamised form, in post-Suharto Indonesia.<sup>[28]</sup> She emphasises how state *Ibuism* not only normalised the expectation that Indonesian women would become doting mothers and loyal companions for their husbands—who remain 'heads of household' even in novel formulations of 'the democratic family'<sup>[29]</sup>—but also borrowed the Islamic concept of *kodrat* to frame this as their 'destiny'. Heteronormative marriage and the presence of children has thus become integral to national constructions of being both a complete human being and a 'good' woman, in what Venetia Kantsa,<sup>[30]</sup> writing of Greece, describes as a 'domestic model of gender.'<sup>[31]</sup> Such visions of 'good' womanhood coalesce in the figure of the *ibu rumah tangga* (literally, a 'household mother'; often translated as 'housewife'), a term that conflates women's womanhood, wifehood, motherhood, and domestic labour. Importantly, while the housewife role does not preclude a woman pursuing activities beyond the household, it should always be her priority. As Gita Nasution explains, 'being a good mother who is able to provide perfect care for children is a status symbol for many middle-class women.'<sup>[32]</sup> Women who sidestep or neglect their kinship 'duties' can be subject to considerable stigma.<sup>[33]</sup> However, as Ariane Utomo notes, women in Indonesia frequently draw on kin and neighbourhood networks for support in these activities, something that is much harder for Indonesian migrant mothers, for whom the task of raising children and managing the household is typically an 'isolated and privatised' burden.<sup>[34]</sup>
12. NZ is also characterised by a cultural logic of childrearing that emphasises the 'concerted cultivation'<sup>[35]</sup> of children, despite local figurations of a New Zealand childhood as 'relaxed'.<sup>[36]</sup> However, there are differences in the way that 'intensive mothering' in NZ is understood. Catherine Kingfisher and Michael Goldsmith describe how the influence of neoliberal globalisation and liberal feminism on NZ policy in the late-twentieth century led to both a shift 'away from an ideal homogeneous population composed of similar nuclear-family units' and a shift in women's social role from '(gendered) mother to (generic) worker.'<sup>[37]</sup> In this context, mothering may itself be viewed as a form of 'work'<sup>[38]</sup> rather than 'destiny,' and men are often expected to contribute to domestic and reproductive labour by sharing in childcare or undertaking distinctly 'masculine' forms of care work, such as home maintenance.<sup>[39]</sup> While these features do not negate the ultimately gendered nature of NZ kinship, in which women typically 'take a large share of the responsibility for running households and providing care for children,'<sup>[40]</sup> they do enable domestic divisions of

labour to be objects of reflection and negotiation within families in ways that ideologies of 'state *Ibuism*' do not. This difference in gender ideologies between Indonesian migrant mothers and their NZ counterparts had a significant impact on the ways each group navigated and experienced the lockdown.

### Mothering during lockdown

13. The widespread emphasis on 'concerted cultivation'[41] discussed above meant that mothering in NZ is frequently 'intensive' (in Sharon Hays's sense of it being 'emotionally absorbing ... time-consuming and labor-intensive')[42] even when one is not living through a lockdown. The specific challenges of living in a bubble—with no access to school, extended family, friends, or leisure facilities—could make it even more so. Whether acting alone, or in conjunction with other household members, many mothers in NZ found that lockdown life required them to become an even more assiduous financial planner, household manager and activity organiser.[43] A mother who would normally have had some discretionary time might now need to spend that time organising her children's daily activities—in many cases whilst also fulfilling her own work or study responsibilities. Amidst the challenges of a global pandemic, many of the women taking part in our research still put their husband and children's needs at the centre of their lives.
14. For Indonesian migrant mothers, such undertakings were in line with the ideology of *Ibuism* that also defines women as financial planners and household managers. Their practices, for the most part, also catered to the daily schedules of their husbands, who were usually the main financial providers.[44] For Lintang, a full-time housewife,[45] this cultivation required her careful attention and organisation, since she needed to cater to both her husband and her children's needs, 'I need to make sure that all should be done before 8 a.m. My children need to be done with their breakfast by 8, so there will not be any noise, because (their) daddy needs to start his work. Whenever he will have a meeting, he will inform me of the meeting time. In one day, he can have several meetings. He will let me know the time in advance [so that I can make sure the children are quiet].' Pre-lockdown, interviewees might have been more flexible when organising the daily activities for their children and husband. However, lockdown required many mothers to painstakingly reorganise family members' daily activities.
15. The most pronounced experience reported by Indonesian mothers was having to assume primary school-teaching responsibilities. As Lintang shared, 'I have never done it at all before. I didn't even know what home learning is ... That is a new experience. I become a home teacher.' Similarly, Tina, an Indonesian mother enrolled in a PhD program, needed at least two weeks to orient herself to this new role, 'I found that the first two weeks were the most challenging time, the adaptation time.' Becoming a teacher during the lockdown was uncharted territory that was 'forced upon' (*terpaksa*) them, as Dewi, another migrant mother in her early 30s, described it. Saras, meanwhile, reported that her new role as teacher was 'required,' 'forced' and 'demanded'. The term used, *terpaksa* ('required,' 'demanded' or 'forced') signalled mothers' sense that they lacked agency, highlighting the complex nature of their participation in homeschooling practices during the global pandemic.
16. Due to the nature of her work as an assistant chef, Saras could not work from home. Receiving a government COVID-19 subsidy, Saras thus temporarily paused her employment and 'became a teacher.' 'The most drastic change [during the lockdown] was when my child (9 years old) didn't go to school,' she explained. 'I needed to [literally] stand by my son from 9 to 3. So, for me personally, as an *Ibu* (mother), I was forced (*terpaksa*), to be actively involved [in his lockdown homeschooling] ... I didn't have to work, and received the government's subsidy, but then, I had to compensate (*menggantikannya*) for it by becoming a teacher at home; I had to teach my child.'
17. This new role as a teacher often required the Indonesian mothers to be physically present for their children, as part of their continuum of childrearing tasks. Pre-lockdown, Indonesian mothers in NZ were already heavily occupied with mothering responsibilities, even when they were also pursuing education or work outside the home. During lockdown, these responsibilities multiplied. For Intan, these increased responsibilities were not initially something she viewed as problematic, 'You know, [as an] *Ibu RT* [*Ibu Rumah Tangga*],' she explained, putting herself squarely in the 'housewife' role, 'in the beginning, I was happy to learn that my children were all at home.' However, the pressure reached a point that she could not take care of herself. As Intan further narrated, 'We [(Indonesian) mothers] didn't have time for ourselves, you know ... So, in brief, my time was largely spent taking care of them [the children].' This sense of 'lost time' during lockdown was echoed by Saras, whose attitude towards homeschooling her son shifted as the lockdown went on. Speaking of herself in the third person as '*Ibu*' (Mum), Saras described how, initially, she 'used to feel that school was pleasant, lots of fun, but then suddenly, it was becoming ...' Unable

to find the right word to encapsulate her experiences, she began to narrate what they had been: 'I couldn't afford [any time] to shower, was unable to eat, [all I did was] to accompany, to be by my child doing his online learning from 9 in the morning to 3 in the afternoon.' Siska, meanwhile, described how her children needed to use her laptop for online school lessons during the day, requiring her to work on her own doctoral work late at night. Such narratives illustrate how 'obedient' and dedicated these mothers expected themselves to be when it came to their children's education, even during a time of difficulty: an attitude that seems likely to have been acquired and solidified through their exposure to the ideology of *Ibuisism* during their time in Indonesia.<sup>[46]</sup>

18. Such reports of homeschooling as demanding, time-consuming and disruptive of existing routines were echoed by mothers in our broader survey, many of whom reported the difficulties of 'juggling' their multiple duties and their frustration that, as one 35-year-old Pākehā (NZ European) mother put it, 'You always feel you can be doing a better job of parenting, teaching your kids, and doing your actual job.' However, two important factors differentiated the experiences of Indonesian migrant mothers: the specific challenges of homeschooling as a second language speaker, and their attitude towards the gender relations within which their intensified intensive mothering was embedded.

### English language and homeschooling

19. Due to the NZ government's success in eliminating the virus nationwide, homeschooling during NZ lockdown was short-lived, lasting approximately ten weeks. During this period, school-age children were expected to learn from home for at least two to three hours each day. A variety of support systems were put in place to facilitate this. The government endeavoured to ensure that all New Zealanders were well covered for their homeschooling by providing laptops, school supplies and free Wi-Fi access to those who needed them. Meanwhile, schools supplied a range of analogue and digital resources, ranging from quizzes and worksheets to live teaching on Google Hangouts, and followed-up with parents and guardians whose children had not been submitting work or attending online classes. However, the resources that children needed to learn were not always delivered successfully—while the activities that they were set, and the amount of online teaching with which they were provided varied considerably not only from school to school but also from teacher to teacher. New Zealanders thus had quite diverse experiences of homeschooling during the national lockdown.
20. For our migrant interviewees, the challenge of homeschooling lay not with the material provision of computers, internet, etc., which they had in ample supply, but with the practice of pedagogy itself. Though they were provided with guidance by their children's teachers—for example, Lintang, Saras and Dewi all described receiving a syllabus from their children's schools—they were nevertheless expected to take an active role in supporting much of their children's learning, and to report their children's progress to the respective teachers on a regular basis. The Indonesian mothers repeatedly mentioned concerns around their ability to homeschool their children given they were not 'native' English speakers: they not only found the lockdown physically and mentally demanding, but also linguistically challenging. Dewi, a 33-year-old mother of two children living in Auckland described her difficulties as follows:

It was hard especially for us who used to learn the concept in Indonesian, in a different language. Here, I needed to teach (my child) in English. So, I had to learn the language (English) first, then after that, I had to learn the materials. It was hard, especially the literacy, because I have a very limited English.

Becoming a homeschooling teacher in a country for which they lacked language fluency posed considerable challenges to Indonesian mothers.

21. Of all home-education lessons, reading and writing were the most challenging. Interviewees readily conceded that writing in English did not always come naturally for them. To overcome the language issues, Dewi said that she needed to prepare for at least one day before the 'teaching day' so she was able to deliver the lesson to her own child. Similar concerns were reflected by other participants who testified to 'having headaches' and 'feeling stressed' by literacy and writing lessons. Except for Tina and Siska, the PhD students, most of our interviewees informed us that their English was a hindrance in their 'home teacher' role.
22. The linguistic issues encountered by these migrant mothers were seemingly not anticipated by the government or by their children's schools, shedding light on the way that structural linguisticism (or linguistic discrimination) served to marginalise non-English speakers during the NZ lockdown.<sup>[47]</sup> The government's homeschooling policy was

premised on a linguistically imperialist assumption that English was a language that everyone speaks.<sup>[48]</sup> Government slogans that were used assiduously during lockdown, such as 'be kind' and 'we're in this together,' often jarred uncomfortably with the daily reality of migrant mothers' lives, as they confronted numerous structural and process-related barriers while sealed within their bubbles. This lends itself to an immediate policy recommendation: that government attention and educational policy during future lockdowns—and indeed the enterprise of *planning* for future pandemics and similar emergencies—should do more to anticipate and cater for the needs of residents with little to limited English proficiency.

23. However, the difficulty faced by Indonesian migrant mothers in their homeschooling struggles is more complex than a mere case of structural linguicism, since even households in which mothers felt highly compromised in their English language abilities contained a parent who was proficient in English: the fathers. Our interviewees' husbands worked in a wide range of settings in which a good command of English was required, including an engineer, a university lecturer, and a PhD student. Despite this, however, the burden of homeschooling continued to fall disproportionately—indeed, almost exclusively—on Indonesian mothers. Moreover, those fathers who had received government COVID-19 wage subsidies due to the nature of their jobs, such as one man who worked as a chef, still believed lockdown homeschooling to be a woman's responsibility. Having comparatively more 'free' time than his wife did not prompt him to assume the homeschooling role.

### Reinforcing traditional gender roles

24. As per the findings of the international surveys cited earlier, our research indicated that lockdown in NZ was typically (though by no means universally) associated with distinctly gendered care burdens. Women from a wide variety of demographic backgrounds repeatedly described how they had found themselves expected (and often expected themselves) to take on a greater variety and greater load of work in the household than the men with whom they lived. As Tia, a 32-year-old woman of mixed Māori and Pākehā descent, wrote in our survey:

I am finding it extremely difficult to juggle working from home with managing my children and my household. I have found traditional gender-role expectations have become more pronounced even though I have a more higher-powered job than my husband.

In some cases, the developing imbalances in care work were linked not only to cultural expectations and gender roles, but to structural factors, such as gender pay gaps. Elaine, a 40-year-old Pākehā mother of four explained:

Whilst it is technically possible for me to work from home (also same for my husband) we quickly realised it was not practically possible for us to work from home at the same time. We need one person to keep the peace across the four kids so the other parent can work. Ultimately that means I can't work and have to take annual leave as well as unpaid leave as I am the lower paid of us both. This is going to have an impact on my future career trajectory.

25. Such reflections were commonplace amongst mothers responding to our survey, who often reported needing to relinquish their own priorities to support their spouses and/or children. A few of these mothers explicitly critiqued how NZ society in general still upholds sexist attitudes, leaving fathers 'off the hook' of household responsibilities that they, as women, were expected to assume:

For full-time working parents this has been a bit of a nightmare—not because we don't love spending time with our kids, both my husband and I have actually really loved the slowly-paced quality time with [our daughter]. But because employers—even government employers, who talk a big game about flexible working—have been totally unreasonable in their expectations of what is able to be achieved while in lockdown. Lockdown and/or working from home has not been the problem—it's the fact that as a society we are only able to work because we have school/childcare/extended families to do the unpaid work of looking after our children. With that support removed, we were left to juggle. What that highlighted for me was: employers, even females, uphold sexist expectations that the father in the family has no childcare responsibilities and the mother is the primary carer (Emma, 40-year-old Pākehā mother of one).

26. Testimonials such as Emma's, Elaine's and Tia's illustrate many quintessential features of the NZ ideologies of kinship and gender sketched earlier. Mothering is seen as 'work' that can potentially be allocated to other 'workers' beyond the mother herself: these could be institutions or support networks, as in Emma's case, or a father, as in Elaine's testimony (which presents the idea of father-as-caregiver as a plausible possibility, if only her own salary had been higher). All three women also see themselves not just as mothers but also as workers, two roles that they must 'juggle.' And yet, despite the apparent negotiability of domestic work allocation, and all three women's reflexivity regarding gender inequality, it was ultimately they, as women, who had to shoulder the burden of both productive and reproductive labour. The burden of lockdown mothering was thus accompanied by a reflexive anger or frustration that circumstances could, and perhaps *should*, have been otherwise, and yet were not. Though by no

means a universal experience, similar testimonies were frequently shared by mothers participating in our survey. A separate survey of heterosexual NZ couples with young children, conducted by Nina Waddell et al., similarly found that the NZ lockdown had resulted in highly gendered divisions of labour that both women and their male partners characterised as 'unfair,' and which led a majority of women to report decreased satisfaction in their relationships.[49]

27. Such sentiments were, however, not expressed by the Indonesian migrant mothers taking part in our research, despite their husbands' limited participation in childrearing, homeschooling and domestic work. Many of the women pardoned their husbands' lack of involvement, explaining that fathers were not attuned to be caregivers. Tina, for example, stated that 'fathers are usually not as *telaten* [diligent or attentive] as *ibu-ibu* [mothers],' while Lia and Heni emphasised that mothering and childrearing were 'a woman's duty.' Due to the heightened mothering roles she needed to undertake during the lockdown, Lia often fantasised about how she might receive help from a domestic helper (*pembantu*) or her mother or mother-in-law if she were back in Indonesia. Her husband, by contrast, was visibly missing and absolved of responsibility for childcare and household chores. A similar understanding was shared by Heni, who brought her mother with her to NZ, so they could alternate taking care of her one-year-old baby while she was attending university. When asked, Heni argued that it was 'only logical' that she, rather than her husband, take care of the baby since she still needed to nurse her baby. This all shows how centrally mothering featured in our interviewees' conceptions of a woman's role both before and during lockdown, such that it seemed 'only logical' that their responsibilities should increase during lockdown.
28. This finding of mothers expecting their responsibilities to increase is in line with the intensive motherhood framework where another woman is seen as an alternative caregiver, not the husband or other men.[50] In other words, the father is seen as an invalid caregiver and his lack of involvement is normalised and naturalised,[51] often on the basis that a father is the main financial provider for the family.[52] Indonesian fathers could thus be exempted from taking on duties such as homeschooling, despite the fact that the role of 'teacher' is widely held by men in Indonesia, and despite their English fluency rendering them better suited to the task than their wives. Indonesian migrant families instead treated homeschooling as a domestic chore that fell into 'mothering' territory, leaving the fathers, who were also staying at home, unaccountable. While this finding is in line with other studies noting that homeschooling tends to be treated as a 'woman's job,'[53] it was striking how readily these Indonesian migrant mothers accepted such patriarchal and heavily gendered attitudes, unlike some of their fellow NZ mothers who could, as seen earlier, actively critique such arrangements, if not always break free of them.

### Lockdown *Ibuisism's* patriarchal bargains

29. While Indonesian migrant mothers' willingness to undertake heavy loads of intensive mothering and homeschooling is entirely in keeping with the ideology of *Ibuisism* to which they would have been introduced during their childhoods, it is important to emphasise that, within the context of such an ideology, the experience of lockdown itself could be both rewarding and demanding. In her discussion of how women find a way to thrive in classically patriarchal societies, Deniz Kandiyoti argues that women will often accommodate and internalise dominant expectations and subsequently 'adopt strategies that maximize their security through the manipulation of the affections of their sons and husband': a tactic she describes as the 'patriarchal bargain.'[54] Similarly, whether it was viewed as a 'strategy' or simply as a moral duty, the Indonesian migrant mothers that we interviewed depicted their decision to respond to the challenges of the NZ lockdown by further intensifying their 'intensive mothering' as allowing them to cultivate the affections of both their husbands and their children, leading to heightened emotional security in their family relations.
30. As Lintang stated, 'As an *Ibu rumah tangga*, so far, I think I have enjoyed the lockdown time. I do feel that I could spend more time with my children, then, I could actually learn, ... how can I say it, I am able to learn what my first born (an 8-year-old son) actually learns at his school.' She acknowledged that she had not paid particularly close attention to her son's school lessons before the lockdown, explaining that she had been told by their teacher that learning during lockdown was set so that the parents could have more 'quality time' with their children. She explained,

I was actually happy during the lockdown because I became aware of what he actually learned when in school ... So, I had more quality time with him ... But since lockdown, we both sit together and learn ... So, there is an advantage during this lockdown, for mommy, as a mum, we could get to know what he has learned so far.

Mothering during the lockdown, while challenging and time consuming, could nevertheless lead to feelings of joy that they could now understand their children more fully. As Jean Miller and Irene Stiver note, 'Women's sense of self and of worth is most often grounded in the ability to make and maintain relationships.'<sup>[55]</sup> Aspects of their children's lives that interviewees may have taken for granted, such as school activities, had come to light during the lockdown.

31. Moreover, the lockdown brought into proximity the previously distant ecologies of work-life and family life. For the Indonesian mothers we spoke to, this narrowed distance between the worlds of home and work allowed their husbands to appreciate more fully their wives' roles and responsibilities within the home, while the mothers in turn could gain more insight into their husbands' work. Lintang explained how she could 'communicate much better with my husband during the lockdown and he appreciates me more, and I have come to appreciate the hard work that he does for the family.' Lockdown provided space to uncover the 'hidden truth' of each partner's worlds, helping to fill the void between this couple. By bringing office work to the sphere of the home, husbands could directly witness the volume of cooking, housework and childcare being undertaken by their wives—appreciating the amounts of work involved in tasks that are usually undervalued because of being 'invisible.'<sup>[56]</sup>
32. Lia, who moved to Auckland due to her husband's doctoral study, recounted her gratitude that her husband had helped her with domestic tasks like cooking and claimed that lockdown had made her husband more aware of the daily work of a 'housewife.' Such narratives demonstrate how minimal husbands' involvement had previously been in Indonesian migrant households and how little appreciation of their wives' domestic roles had been expressed. The household is seen as a gendered space belonging to a woman<sup>[57]</sup> such that a man's cooking is a marked effort, while women's work is taken for granted.
33. Ambivalence towards the value of women's work was sometimes evident during our interviews, as when Lia opened sentences by saying, 'Even though I am only a "housewife" (*Ibu RT*),' a formulation that appears to denigrate the role of housewife relative to that of other women's professional careers—or that of her husband. On the other hand, she clearly welcomed the long-overdue recognition that she was beginning to receive. So did Lintang, who explained how, in lockdown, 'I needed to spend 24 hours with them [her husband and children], I had time to cook for them. I would cook all meals for them,' before remarking happily that her husband 'would thank me for the food I have prepared for them.' Such remarks highlight how the role of *Ibu Rumah Tangga* (housewife), despite having been posited as central to Indonesia's development and modernisation, remains widely unappreciated, not only by family members but also by women themselves. In this vein, lockdown has provided an opportunity for Indonesian migrant mothers to begin to realise how much devotion, dedication and strength a housewife needed to keep their 'bubble' together.
34. Such outlooks were strengthened and further rationalised in the widespread idolisation of the NZ Prime Minister who our interviewees saw as sharing similar mothering challenges. 'Jacinda Ardern is extraordinary,' explained Saras, 'I am a mum (*ibu*), and she is a new mum (*ibu baru*) who has a baby ... She is actually a PM. But I feel like she knew my problem [that I am tired and can't do anything related to myself], she knew all the *ibu-ibu*'s problems here.' While the complexity of their household responsibilities, coupled with linguistic barriers, resulted in stress and mental exhaustion, these mothers found that mothering in lockdown was not a solitary experience. After all, 'Jacinda' was also going through this, and communicating her experiences in a relatable manner, such as when she provided an update on social media dressed in casual clothing and noting that she had just tucked her baby daughter, Neve, into bed. This provided hope for these mothers that they could get by despite the stress, exhaustion and pressures on their time. With Jacinda Ardern as a role model, any subtle acts of resistance seemed to be suppressed and motherhood during the lockdown gained a certain nobility, as part of their *kodrat* (destiny) as a woman. Notably, however, none of the mothers mentioned the involvement of Clarke Gayford, Ardern's partner, despite his having once been celebrated as the world's 'most important stay-at-home dad'<sup>[58]</sup> and describing on national television how he was 'trying his best' to support Jacinda during lockdown, for example by taking her a healthy lunch every day.<sup>[59]</sup> Nor did any of the mothers mention the involvement of Ardern's parents, who had joined her Level 4 bubble in Premier House. 'Jacinda' was instead a receptacle for *Ibuist* projections, such that even Indonesian women who had lived for many years in NZ embraced the ideology of *Ibuism* and mothered diligently and intensively.

## Conclusion



35. Our research corroborates prevailing conclusions offered by existing work on gender relations during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic in NZ and beyond. Both our survey and our interviews indicated that many women, particularly mothers, experienced increased demands on their time and emotional energy in comparison to men, particularly in fields related to childcare and domestic labour, and that they also experienced a decline in wellbeing linked to heightened levels of exhaustion and stress. Nevertheless, by focusing on specific experiences of Indonesian migrant mothers and juxtaposing them with themes that emerged from our broader sample of NZ residents, we have identified some critical differences that such conclusions might otherwise submerge. For Tia, Emma and Elaine, for example, decreases in wellbeing during lockdown were linked not only to the increased demands of childcare, but also the pressures of the 'bubble juggle'; lockdown made it especially difficult for them to reconcile being good mothers with their other core commitments and desires; moreover, their awareness of the unfairness of the gendered burden that they faced added to their frustrations.
36. By contrast, the Indonesian mothers that we spoke to rarely reported any sense of being compromised in being the kind of woman they wanted to, or felt they ought to, be: if anything, this aspect of their lives was enhanced by the increased recognition they received from their husbands and the 'fuller' relationships they got to enjoy with their children. Their stresses were instead linked to feelings of anxiety, frustrations and inadequacy with homeschooling their children in English, something that made the 'imposition' of homeschooling even more burdensome (psychologically and in terms of preparation time) than it was for mothers who spoke English as a first language. While the lockdown proved challenging for many, and our account of the Indonesian experience is by no means exhaustive, our research indicates that both second-language speaking status and a prevailing gender ideology of 'state *Ibuisism*' (as opposed to neoliberal feminism) were critical factors differentiating Indonesian migrant mothers' experiences from those of many other mothers in NZ.
37. Such differences matter when it comes to thinking of policy responses that might support women through future lockdowns. For example, while Emma and Elaine would have benefited from policies encouraging greater paternal involvement in childcare, [60] it is unclear whether this would have eased the burden of the Indonesian migrant mothers we interviewed, since the barriers to their husbands' involvement in childcare were ideological rather than structural. By contrast, for Indonesian migrant mothers, it seemed that practical support with the challenges of educating their children in a foreign language would have made the biggest difference to their wellbeing. While feminist scholars are certainly correct to highlight the pervasiveness of gendered inequality during lockdown, an attention to distinct meanings of womanhood and motherhood afford a more nuanced approach, illuminating how lockdowns can offer not only gendered challenges but also gendered rewards, and cast light on measures that could be taken in future to enhance the experience of living through a lockdown in one's intersectional specificity.

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## Appendix

### Pseudonyms

Dewi. A housewife, a mother of two sons (8 years and 3 years old), accompanying her husband for his post-graduate study since mid-2019, a midwife (in Indonesia).

Heni. Pursuing her master's degree in NZ with an Indonesian scholarship, moved to NZ with her mother and her infant baby, to pursue her post-graduate degree, a government employee, her husband is about to pursue his master's degree in Japan.

Intan. A housewife, graduated with a master's degree from a USA university; mother of three children (15 years, 12 years, 3 years), accompanied her husband for his post-graduate studies in USA before moving to NZ in 2016. Her husband is a university lecturer, with the highest education degree.

Lia. A housewife, a mother of a 4-year-old child, moved to NZ in early 2018 to accompany her husband who is pursuing his doctoral study.

Lintang. A housewife, a mother of two (8 years and 2 years old), a professional career woman in Indonesia, moved to NZ due to her husband's work relocation in 2011. Husband works in a multinational software company.

Saras. A housewife, a mother of a 9-year-old son, moved to NZ to join her husband in 2017. Used to be a career woman and now works as a part-time chef. Her husband is a chef who received a government subsidy during the national lockdown.

Siska. A doctoral student, a mother of three (12, 10, 8 years), a researcher in Indonesia, moved with the family to NZ in 2017. Husband works in the private sector.

Tina. A doctoral student, a mother of two (8 and 6 years old), a lecturer and a researcher in Indonesia, moved with the family to NZ in early 2018. Her husband holds a master's degree from the Netherlands and is working for the NZ government.

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