Education as a ‘Group Project’: Exploring Filipina Migrant University Students’ Stories of ‘Achievement’

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Abstract

Migrating for the sake of the family—its survival, its betterment, its future—is a prevalent narrative among most Filipinos scattered around the world. Yet the stories of 'the family', particularly those of Filipino migrant students, whose parents have invested and sowed their hopes, dreams, and aspirations, remain a narrative that is not well understood. The purpose of my research was to share the stories of Filipina (female Filipino) migrant university students, such that through the lens of their everyday realities and experiences, they could speak about the significance and nuances of their achievements. Guided by a theoretical framework that combines elements of social constructionism, narrative approach, and *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino psychology), I traced the meaningful threads within the photovoice *kuwentuhan* (storytelling or informal conversations) I had with six Filipina migrant university students in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. Particular consideration was placed on how indigenous Filipino cultural beliefs and values saliently textured the women's stories of achievement. What this thesis captures are the ways in which women's education, achievement goals, cultural identity, and the notion of self as Filipina migrant university students are deeply intertwined, rich in complexity, and filled with layers of meaning. In particular, this research explores the complex key themes of education as a group project, *utang na loob* (debt of the inner self) and *katatagang loob* (inner strength and resilience). Weaving all these together enables previously unexplored opportunities for understanding the interconnected and interdependent nature of being a Filipino student. This research brings to life the educational journeys and overall wellbeing of migrant students, allowing readers and the whole collective *kapwa* to find pride, confidence, respect, and resilience as they see themselves reflected in these stories.

Acknowledgements

In composing my gratitude, memories of a Filipino proverb come to mind: *"Ang hindi marunong lumingon sa pinanggalinan ay hindi makakarating sa paroroonan."* It suggests that to truly achieve your goals and progress in life, it is necessary to take a moment to reflect on and honour the journey that led you there. The sentiments that follow are in gratitude to my *kapwa*, who have enriched my work in unique and meaningful ways. Their wisdom, generosity, and unfaltering support have been utterly essential in guiding me towards the completion of this thesis.

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Introduction

My Story

I am a Filipino woman, and when I was about 8 years old, my family and I prepared to leave the Philippines and move abroad, because my parents wanted to find better employment opportunities and provide a more comfortable upbringing and education for me and my siblings. Committed to making this dream a reality, it was not until several unsuccessful job applications that my father, a civil engineer, received an offer as a quantity surveyor for a construction company. However, there was a catch; the recruiter stated that in order for my father to be considered for the position, he would have to fly to Aotearoa New Zealand for an in-person interview. For a young couple with three children in the early 2000s, finding suitable employment opportunities was already a challenging feat in the Philippines; therefore, after having to borrow money from extended family to purchase a ticket, my father was on a plane to Aotearoa New Zealand. He got the job, and within six months of his departure, my mother, myself, and my siblings followed our father to reunite our family.

Growing up hearing these stories and many others like them taught me that migration holds the promise of a better life abroad. In a similar vein, I have been told by other people, as well as by myself in later years, that getting an education, especially one gained overseas, is indispensable, a priority, and a pathway to success. This would increase my employment opportunities and financial capabilities, which I could then share with my parents as a gesture of my gratitude and appreciation for their struggles and sacrifices on our behalf. Since this concept of gratitude is a big part of my cultural upbringing, to this day I cannot help but obsessively monitor and manage my identity as a Filipina (female Filipino) student without signifying that my academic achievements are my responsibility to my parents. I feel that I must prove to them that their reasons for moving overseas for the betterment of our future were

not in vain. Coupled with this, I have also felt extremely overwhelmed, stressed, and disconnected from the ambitious achievement goals I set for myself, which all too often come at the expense of my overall wellbeing. However, it has not always been as if there was a dark cloud looming over everything. While I have, at times, cried, felt miserable, ashamed, and struggled over this self-imposed pressure of considering academic achievements as a means to meet filial obligations, I have also found pride, confidence, and respect for myself in it. In fact, it is this nuanced interplay of perspectives and emotions that fuels my interest in exploring this topic.

Experiences, thoughts, and pressures such as these are shared by many Filipina migrant students. Moreover, our experiences are intricately connected to broader social, cultural, historical, economic, and political narratives that have shaped and continue to shape our lives in Aotearoa New Zealand. Therefore, the conceptualisation of this research stemmed from an intention to document and further unpack the shared but also unique experiences of Filipina migrant students, like myself, here in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Situating the research

In this thesis, I unpacked and delved into the significance of migration, education, achievement, cultural identity, and notion of self with regard to Filipina migrant university students' stories of achievement. More specifically, I was interested in exploring the extent to which dominant Filipino cultural beliefs and values shape and inform the women's achievement goals.

To some extent, the inception of this topic of interest was inspired by my own personal experience as a Filipina migrant university student in Aotearoa New Zealand. I mention this to underscore that during the early stages of designing this research, it was in the process of reflecting on my own personal narrative that I first found myself immersed in the questions of

whether or not there are similarities between my story and the stories of other Filipina migrant university students. Thus, my decision to introduce this thesis with my own narrative was not arbitrary; rather, it was an intentional effort to highlight and illustrate the degree to which the topic of this research, about which I am deeply passionate, intersects with my personal and academic life.

My objectives for this research project are thus threefold: first, to investigate how fellow Filipina migrant university students living in Aotearoa New Zealand make sense of and experience their education in ways that are meaningful to them. Secondly, to explore the ways in which the context of migration, education, achievement, cultural identity, and the notion of self, shape the stories of achievement of migrant university students. Third, to examine how Filipina migrant university students navigate, negotiate with, and/or resist social and cultural norms and expectations concerning their achievement goals.

Thesis Outline

This thesis is comprised of seven chapters, beginning here with a brief overview of my story as the researcher alongside the research being examined.

Chapter One contextualises my study within the rich landscape of migration, education, indigenous and psychology theory and research. It begins by tracing a summarised history of Filipino migration within the global setting. The chapter subsequently delves into a selective and in-depth overview of existing literature discussing narratives surrounding migration and education, particularly relating to Filipinos. This is followed by a brief overview of literature on achievement goals and related motivations. Finally, this chapter details indigenous Filipino cultural beliefs and values such as *kapwa* (notion of self in relation to others), *hiya* (sense of propriety), *pakikisama* (companionship or 'getting along with others'), *utang na loob* ('debt of the inner self'), *katatagang loob* (inner strength and resilience), and

bahala na (determination and risk-taking) and how they relate to the experiences of Filipina migrant students.

Chapter Two elaborates on the methodology that informed the present thesis and defines the theoretical and practical strategies that were implemented in the collection and analysis of narratives by the Filipina migrant university students in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland involved in this research project. Here, I articulate the elements of social constructionism, narrative approach, and *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* research principles and methods that served as the methodological framework for my research. Indigenous *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* participatory methods, such as *pakikipagkuwentuhan* (storytelling or informal conversations), *pagtatanong-tanong* (asking questions), and *pakikiramdam* (feeling for another), are reflected upon in relation to my photovoice *kuwentuhan* (storytelling through images and personal narratives) with the participants. Finally, I outline the iterative and interpretive methods through which participant stories were analysed.

Chapters Three to *Chapter Five outline* the key findings of the study providing a cohesive understanding of the interconnected and interdependent social world of Filipina migrant university students. *Chapter Three* analyses the initial theme identified in the findings: education as a group project. The chapter draws *hiya* and *pakikisama*, together with the notion of perfectionism, to illustrate that the women's achievement goals are closely connected to the expectations their parents hold for them. Specifically, I note the significance of the internalised shame and commitment to maintaining smooth and harmonious relationships that the women experienced as they navigated, negotiated with, and/or resisted sociocultural narratives of what it means to be a 'good' Filipino daughter and a 'good' student.

Chapter Four delves into the women's experiences of emotional indebtedness, rooted in the belief that their education in Aotearoa New Zealand is a testament to the opportunities afforded by their parents. Leaning onto the concept of *utang na loob* and filial piety, I examine

the complex manner in which Filipina migrant university students construct their achievement goals and assume certain roles and responsibilities as a way to 'repay' or show gratitude to their parents. Drawing this chapter to a close, I highlight the concept of *kapwa* to argue that *utang na loob* transcends simple transactional interactions between Filipino parent-child relationships.

Chapter Five, the final analysis chapter of this research project, explores the women's ability to create meaning and discover strength and purpose within themselves to achieve their goals and dreams. In particular, I present a detailed discussion of the concepts of *katatagang loob*, *bahala na*, and *kapwa* to illustrate how the women navigated their discomfort and found meaningful solutions to handle life's inevitable challenges. In wrapping up this chapter, I underscore that *katatagang loob* manifests not merely as an individual characteristic but is deeply embedded within the Filipino way of being nourished and supported through *kapwa*.

Chapter Six brings this thesis to a close by delivering an overarching discussion of and conclusion to all the key findings presented in the preceding analysis chapters. I discuss the influence of cultural narratives, which are often neglected by mainstream psychological frameworks concerning educational achievement. Further, I elaborate on the intricate nature of migrants' cultural identities, highlighting that their lifeworld is both collective and individual rather than strictly one or the other. Through the chapter, I also establish how the process of migration is just a small part of a much larger unfolding story within the Filipino community. I end this thesis with a final discussion on the broader implications and potential avenues for future research, along with a reflection on the heart of this work on my own journey.

Chapter One: Literature Review

For many Filipinos around the world, migration unfolds as a story centred on family. Whether it is by means of engaging in temporary labour abroad to provide for our families left behind or permanently settling as migrants overseas, our stories demonstrate a remarkable degree of hope and resilience, fuelled by our goals to secure a more promising future for ourselves and, most importantly, our loved ones. Recently, it has been documented that a considerable proportion of the Philippine population, approximately 10%, currently lives and/or works across different countries around the globe (Peddie & Liu, 2021). We can reasonably expect that this statistic will continue to rise, as many Filipino migrant parents have long viewed their children's wellbeing, education, and future as substantial impetuses in their pursuit of opportunities abroad (Graham et al., 2012; Parreñas, 2005; Peddie & Liu, 2021; Roces, 2021).

Despite the decision to, and active move abroad often occurring as a family unit, the narratives of 'the family', particularly those of the Filipino migrant students whose parents have invested their hopes, dreams, and aspirations, remain a topic that is not well understood. Therein, this research centres on documenting and exploring the complexities of Filipina migrant university students' stories of 'achievement'.

To provide a contextual backdrop to the research, the chapter begins with an abridged history of Filipino migration within the global setting. This is succeeded by an overview of the historical events that have shaped the meaning and understanding of education within Filipino society, and conceptualise the notion of 'achievement'.

In the second section, I detail and explore the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* concepts and values of *kapwa, hiya, pakikisama, utang na loob*, *katatagang loob,* and *bahala na*. These

indigenous Filipino cultural beliefs and values hold significance for my research through fundamentally *creating* knowledge and understanding of how Filipino students' education are often viewed as a shared endeavour. I also argue that students' achievement goals are more dynamic, complex, and fluid than is often documented and traditionally discussed in literature.

Building upon this position, the third section turns to notion of self within the disciplinary context of psychology. I pay special consideration to the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* concept of *kapwa*, or the notion of self *in relation* to others, which is at the heart of the structure of Filipino psychology.

An overview of migration, education, and achievement in the Filipino context

The following streamlined and selective summaries of literature will serve as useful framing for the narratives that centre on the significance of migration and education within the Filipino context, as well as the narratives about the motivations behind achievement goals.

Migration for the family

The Philippines was a colony of the United States from 1898 to 1946. Owing to this historical relationship, en masse Filipino emigration into the nation began at the turn of the 20th century. As Roces (2021) explains, during the period spanning from 1906 to the 1930s, a considerable number of young Filipino men were employed as a migratory labour force in various locations, including the agricultural fields in California and the sugar plantations in Hawaii. Coming from a developing country historically viewed by the United States as a source of cheap labour (Rodriguez, 2010; Roces, 2021), such disparaging details held little significance to many hopeful Filipinos, for all that mattered was the opportunity to realise the 'American dream' that awaited them beyond the Pacific (Paligutan, 2021). Consequently, many remained in the United States and eventually became citizens. During the 1930s, the state

of California had an estimated 30,000 Filipino residents and over 100,000 in Hawaii alone (Fojas & Guevarra, 2012).

By the 1970s, the Philippine government had implemented the 1974 Labor Code of the Philippines as a tactical measure to deploy its labour force to the global job market, with the objective of alleviating the pressing domestic labour shortages and high unemployment rates confronting the nation at the time (Aguilar, 2014). Many consider this a pivotal step in the emergence of the OFW (Overseas Filipino Worker) (Encinas-Franco, 2015; Townsend, 2017). Concurrently, during these volatile circumstances, the Middle East was undergoing a period of substantial economic growth owing to an oil boom, resulting in a cascade of economic opportunities and encouraging massive labour migration pull to the 'land of liquid gold' (Postrado & Go, 1986; Battistella, 1999). Given the obvious economic benefits of overseas employment at the time, a significant proportion of Filipino labourers and professionals, or OFWs, uprooted from their homeland, leaving their families and communities behind in search of better employment opportunities (Jimenez et al., 1986; Hosoda et al., 2016). As per the report published by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (1983), a total of 992,749 Filipinos were duly processed as foreign land-based contract labourers between 1975 and 1983, trying their luck in the Middle East.

The Philippine government championed emigration as a temporary remedy to the country's economic crisis. However, in the course of time, this approach took on new dimensions, expanding well beyond its foundational purposes. Emigration has evolved into the Philippines' ongoing development strategy, where cash remittances have accumulated to a degree that presently contributes to and sustains the national economy at over 3 billion USD in September 2024 (Villanueva, 2024). In 2023, more than 2.3 billion OFWs departed from the Philippines, exceeding the pre-pandemic total of 2.1 billion in 2019 (Opiniano, 2024). As stated

by Petcharamesree and Capaldi (2023), the Philippines stands as one of the leading exporter of migrants globally, a testament to the nation's ongoing commitment to encouraging and promoting emigration (the process of leaving one's home country with the intent to settle elsewhere) among its people.

Growth in Filipino migration to Aotearoa New Zealand in particular can be attributed to the deepening connections between Aotearoa New Zealand and the Philippines. Filipinos represent the third largest Asian demographic living and working in Aotearoa New Zealand, with 108,297 'Kiwinoys' (Kiwi-Filipinos) accounting for 2.2% of the the overall population of the country according to the 2023 census (Statistics New Zealand, 2024). Filipino immigration to Aotearoa New Zealand experienced a notable increase starting in the 1980s, with a significant surge occurring in the 2000s (Walrond, 2005). The first waves of Filipino immigrants comprised skilled professionals, including IT specialists in the latter half of the 1980s, healthcare practitioners towards the end of the 1990s, and agricultural labourers, technicians, and electricians in the 2000s (Walrond, 2005; Teng-Westergaard, 2024). Following our earlier discussion about emigration, it becomes essential to clarify and emphasise that my focus is on immigration. That is, the process of entering a new country for the purpose of settling there.

In her exploration of the settlement patterns of the migrant Filipino community in Aotearoa New Zealand, Townsend (2017) highlights an important observation: Filipinos in Aotearoa New Zealand are different to the conventional OFWs spending years *away from* their families found in other global contexts, as many Filipinos here tend to *bring* their families with them in their migration journey. Approximately a quarter of the Filipino population in Aotearoa New Zealand consists of school-aged children, and in 2013, around 14 percent of the Filipino

population was born in New Zealand, with 34 percent of this group being under the age of 20 (Townsend, 2017).

Migrants from every corner of the world have many reasons for their migration that extend beyond, or complement, the pursuit of economic freedom. In my discussion of the Filipino migration thus far, I have touched upon the narrative found in scholarly literature and in broader societal perspectives, suggesting that migrants from developing countries such as the Philippines predominantly pursue opportunities overseas for economic motivations. These economic motivations are widely documented within the Western-centric 'push and pull' paradigms of migration studies (e.g., Jimenez, 1986; Kline, 2003; Perrin et al., 2007). Though these clearly outline the factors that drive and sustain migration, they often neglect to capture the collective motivations rooted in the cultural and psychological aspects unique to the Filipino experience—motivations that weave together economic needs with hopes and dreams about different futures and possibilities that extend *beyond* oneself. This present research aspires to contribute to migration literature by bringing attention to the social and cultural realities of Filipino migrants, and in particular, Filipina migrant university students.

Returning to the statement I made earlier in the chapter, migrating for the sake of the family is a prevalent narrative among millions of Filipinos scattered around the world. In her examination of the Filipino migration experience within a global context, Roces (2021) observes that the people whom she interviewed are no different. Particularly intriguing is how her research unveils the narrative of migration as a journey of 'sacrifice', mentioning the endurance and mental and emotional toll that Filipino migrants endure abroad in order to provide financial support to their families back home through remittances (Roces, 2021). These remittances often become essential for covering everyday expenses such as healthcare, housing, and education, thereby bringing the promise of a better quality of life for the family

closer to reality. The government also advances the narrative of OFWs as 'heroes' who sacrificially dedicate their lives for the greater good of the country, a notion that resonates deeply in both public and private conversations (Encinas-Franco, 2015; Onuki, 2007). Indeed, emigrants are admired as heroes by more than just their families, but equally by the Philippines as a whole, whose economy is sustained by remittances for supporting taxes and local income. In this respect, migration is an honourable act of selflessness—a 'sacrifice'—that stems from a cultural characteristic of Filipinos to be sensitive to others' needs, to prioritise family over self, and inadvertently, the nation over self, often at the expense of our own wellbeing.

Similar narratives were observed in Asis' (2002) study of overseas Filipina migrant workers, where she talks about how the majority of the women viewed migration primarily as a means to improve the quality of life and wellbeing of their families rather than as a means for personal gain. In particular, Asis (2002) documents a compelling reality. That is, a Filipino family does not need to impose expectations on its members to migrate. Rather, it emerges from a profound belief that supporting and providing for the family is inherently the "natural thing to do" (Asis, 2002, p. 77). More than merely framing migration as an individual decision or pursuit, the scholarships discussed illuminate the migration experience for Filipinos as a collective family decision, rooted in a culture that prioritises familial obligations. This line of thinking implies that culture is connected to migration decisions, shaping the many motivations behind why people migrate and the experiences that unfold throughout the process. This, however, is seldom investigated in studies concerning migrants.

For one, the body of literature on migration encompasses a wide range of disciplines, highlighting insights from sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists, among others (Caselli & Gilardoni, 2018; Castañeda, 2022; Mahalingam, 2013). Within the field of social

sciences, particularly psychology, most strands of research into migration revolve around discussions of acculturation, for instance (e.g., Berry, 2019; Bourhis et al., 2009).

A widely acknowledged model of acculturation, proposed by Berry (1997), outlines four distinct strategies through which acculturation may take place: *assimilation*, *separation*, *integration*, and *marginalisation*. *Assimilation* takes place when a group or an individual gradually chooses to adopt, embrace, and seek daily interactions with other cultures in place of their original cultural identity (Berry & Sam, 2016). As previously noted, this strategy does not occur instantaneously—it gradually develops over time and is shaped by societal influences, personal experiences, and the contextual environment (Berry, 2019). *Separation* takes place when groups or an individual give importance to holding on and maintaining their original culture and at the same time avoid interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds (Berry & Sam, 2016). This often occurs when people perceive greater benefits in maintaining their cultural heritage, whether as a result of personal choice or external influences, generally stemming from prejudice, ethnic discrimination, and cultural barriers (Berry, 2019). *Integration* takes place when a group or an individual holds onto their original cultural identity while engaging in everyday interactions with members of diverse cultural groups (Berry & Sam, 2016). This strategy is frequently seen as the means that allows people to navigate and engage with various cultures, all the while preserving their own cultural identity. Conversely, *marginalisation* takes place when a group or an individual loses their connection to both their culture of origin and any different cultural contexts, often resulting in experiences of isolation or exclusion from both (Berry & Sam, 2016). This may occur as a result of societal exclusion, systemic barriers, or personal struggles that impede full participation in either cultures (Berry, 2019). In the predominant literature concerning acculturation, integration emerges as the most commonly expected pathway for migrants to acculturate, with assimilation and separation

following, whereas marginalisation is perceived as the least advantageous (Berry, 2005, 2019; Berry & Sam, 2016).

Though Berry's model (1997) is often acknowledged as one of the most widely recognised and influential theories of acculturation (Berry et al., 2022; Hermans, 2001; T. M. Johnson, 2011; Ward et al., 2010), academics have noted certain limitations in its framework and its application within psychological studies that necessitate further exploration (e.g. Bhatia & Ram, 2001; T. M. Johnson, 2011; Ward et al., 2010). For one, the model operates under the premise that people can be neatly and systemically classified into one of the four specific strategies, where a migrant is conceptualised as pursuing a defined, consistent, and ideally advantageous strategy to acculturate with a definite endpoint. Yet, in reality, the process and journey of acculturation unfold as a dynamic and fluid experience. In the ongoing narrative of this thesis, it will become evident that life is far more complex and does not follow a neat script, contrary to what this acculturation model proposes. For instance, when looking at academic achievement, the acculturation of migrant students to the educational system of a host culture can shape their experiences in varied ways that may necessitate continuous negotiation, and this process may not reach completion. Even when they appear to have achieved integration in one context, they might experience separation in another (Bhatia & Ram, 2001). Thus, rather than a singular outcome or event, migration is a layered interplay of movement, changes, and belonging that is shaped and reshaped by the unique contexts in which it takes place (Hodgetts et al., 2020). It encompasses a mosaic—a complex web of cultural, social, and emotional adjustments that communities, families, and individuals must navigate, negotiate, and potentially resist as they continue make sense of their experiences throughout the process.

Building on this, the majority of research on acculturation has focused on changes that unfold at the individual level, especially emphasising the development of acculturative

strategies through decisions related to cultural maintenance and engagement with the broader society (e.g., David et al., 2009; Tadmor et al., 2009). However, this depiction of the individual acculturating to a new culture neglects the complex interactions that inherently exist between individuals, their social groups (i.e., their family, ethnic communities, and national context) (T. M. Johnson, 2011; Ward et al., 2010). It stands to reason, then, that an individual's acculturation experience is deeply intertwined with the perspectives, experiences, and cultural narratives (as relating to broader social, historical and political realities of communities) they share with those around them.

Finally, in the field of acculturation research, what typically emerges is the tendency to direct attention towards a deficit-oriented perspective, underscoring the psychological stress and coping migrants experience as they adapt to new cultural settings. Indeed, the exploration of stress experienced by migrants, such as identity loss and social isolation, is of considerable importance within the field of psychology. However, narrowing the focus through this lens may obscure the adaptive strategies, strengths, and resilience of migrants. Drawing on Hodgetts and colleagues' (2020) work, this thesis will narrate, migrants can and do act strategically in their interactions within multicultural settings. In a comparable context, indigenous peoples may strengthen or develop ways of being that are more aligned with and adaptable to the process of acculturation (Cassim et al., 2020; Hodgetts et al., 2020). In this sense, groups and people are seen as active participants who define and redefine their experiences within new cultural contexts, rather than as passive recipients of acculturative forces. This change in perspective allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced investigation of the ongoing process between navigating one's own culture and the surrounding culture. It redirects attention from viewing stress as an outcome of acculturation, which implies a restrictive narrative that stress invariably leads to unfavourable consequences, as though all people experience and respond to

stress in the same way. This, in effect, opens the door for acculturation research to explore the emotions that also blossom in the course of acculturation—pride, confidence, strength, resilience, love, care, and respect.

Woven into countless discussions in this thesis, it has been stated and restated that the decision and act of migrating for the sake of family go beyond individual beliefs or the stories handed down through generations to put others before the self; they reflect a cultural understanding that strikes a deep chord with the collective understanding of many Filipinos. Against the backdrop of Aotearoa New Zealand's pluralistic social landscape, it is important to consider that Filipino migrants will experience ongoing interactions with the dominant Pākehā or Settler Colonial culture, which idealises individualism and places significant emphasis on the pursuit of personal preferences, often celebrating these values. However, many may also interact with Māori and other collectivist cultures who think about and make sense of themselves as interconnected and interdependent beings, thereby reinforcing the cultural narrative that their achievements and beyond are deeply entwined to their interactions and relationships with others. In this present research, I explore the idea of culture as a dynamic and complex construct that shapes and informs people's decisions, actions, and behaviours in everyday life in context-dependent ways, while also being open to negotiation, adjustment, and change. There is a developing body of research exploring such complexities as relating to other Asian and South Asian migrants straddling hybrid identities (e.g., Cassim et al., 2019, 2020), and this work builds on that scholarship.

To introduce an added level of nuance, it is equally important to consider the connections between migration and education within the Filipino context. Within the scholarly literature in this space, the wellbeing and education of children have long been acknowledged as the main drivers behind parental migration. For example, in their compilation of research

investigating various migration and education experiences, Peddie and Liu (2021) illustrate that the availability of educational opportunities in host countries—opportunities that may have been less attainable in their home country—is a significant motivator for Filipino parents to seek a new life abroad with their families. Similar to other Asian parents, this motivation connects their economic and professional goals with their desire to provide a better and more promising future for their children (Peddie & Liu, 2021). Central to this body of literature is a collectivistic worldview that highlights the significance of education acquired in the host country. This education not only enriches the knowledge, skills, and abilities of migrant children as students but also plays an instrumental role in potentially enhancing the social mobility of the entire migrant family (Peddie & Liu, 2021). It should be noted, however, that research on these perspectives has generally focused on the documentation and theoretical exploration of the thoughts, experiences, and decisions of migrant parents, with a particular emphasis on their beliefs surrounding what is in their children's best interests (e.g., Cropley, 2017; Kewalramani & Phillipson, 2020; Park et al., 2006; Peddie & Liu, 2021). Additionally, such studies might examine the impact of parental involvement and socioeconomic status on students' educational outcomes (e.g., Ma & Wu, 2019; Ni et al., 2021). In other words, there is a scarcity of research that explores the viewpoints, daily realities, and lived experiences of migrant students. Regardless, this stream of academic work provides a helpful basis for us to begin to approach and make sense of the education of Filipino migrant students as embedded in their culture and familial relationships, especially with their parents, which lends context to the focus of this research. On that note, I now turn to explore the historical events that have shaped the significance of education within Filipino society.

The Philippine educational context

The education system in the Philippines draws considerable influence from the country's colonial past. First under Spain (1565–1898) (Barrows, 1907; Simpson, 1980; Torralba et al., 2007), where the common sentiment among underprivileged families in the Philippines, which endures to this day, viewed education as a means to break free from the clutches of poverty and achieve upward social mobility. This progressed into the twentieth century during the American colonial rule (1898–1946), when the United States introduced foreign concepts and values to the Philippines, such as meritocratic and individualistic worldviews (Eittreim, 2019; Coloma, 2013; Steinbock-Pratt, 2019).

The Spanish colonial education system contributed greatly to reinforcing social hierarchies in the Philippines by limiting educational access and opportunities primarily to the children of wealthy Spanish settlers, Filipino nobility and elites allied with the Spanish authorities (Torralba et al., 2007). Given the presence of these systemic barriers at the time, secondary, and even more so tertiary education, largely remained inaccessible for the majority of Filipinos (Simpson, 1980). Despite this, Filipino parents from economically disadvantaged backgrounds would make considerable sacrifices to guarantee that their children receive at least a secondary education, hoping that it will provide them a pathway out of poverty and allow them to advance in a society that presents them with inherent disadvantages **(**Torralba et al., 2007). In this context, social class is mobilised to uplift these families from the grips of inequality and austerity (Anthias, 2013; Cassim et al., 2020; Hodgetts & Griffin, 2015). I also draw parallels with scholarship from other postcolonial nations here (e.g., Cassim, 2017), to argue that this underpins the enduring sentiment that resonates across the collective consciousness of the Filipino people that education is a priceless *kayamanan* (treasure) that parents, regardless of their financial circumstances, can pass down to their children. While this

perspective has not yet been extensively explored in scholarly discussions, this is not atypical among Filipino families, particularly those from low-income households. This cultural sentiment creates a cycle in which Filipino students who are fortunate enough to attend school define the meaning and purpose behind their hopes and motivations for 'academic achievement'. Accordingly, it provides context to this study's qualitative exploration of how Filipina migrant university students make sense of and navigate their education in relation to the goals and expectations of their families, especially their parents.

Shifting to the American occupation of the Philippines, white educators sought to 'civilise,' 'educate,' and promote the belief that Filipinos in the Global South could attain a similar level of material success and status to Americans in the Global North by adopting achievement-motivated and individualistic worldviews (Eittreim, 2019; Coloma, 2013; Steinbock-Pratt, 2019). Consequently, there was an upward shift in the educational systems in the Philippines, placing increased focus on English language proficiency and achievements through competition and merit-based systems (Maca, 2017; Rafael, 2015). The use of literature and other teaching materials imported from the United States played a significant role in familiarising Filipinos with American culture and ideology (Maca, 2017). For instance, within the meritocratic framework of the 'American Dream' that align with neoliberal principles, many Filipinos were encouraged to embrace the idea of the successful, 'self-made' individual and that education is a product to be consumed through the promise of prestige and upward mobility (Maca, 2017). This largely implies that the only true measures of progress and success are those consistent with 'Western' (in this case American) norms and standards, and by extension, that personal inadequacy and failure seem all but destined for those who did not receive or complete their formal education. This commodification of education and self-motivated competitive mentality, however, deviates from and displaces the Filipino indigenous

way of being (David, 2013; Enriquez, 1992; Oropilla & Guadana, 2021; Labor & Gastardo-Conaco, 2021; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). I bring this into focus to underscore the fundamental complexities of the enduring colonial influence of meritocratic understandings among the Filipino people, especially concerning how Filipino students' academic achievements and failures reflect not only on themselves but also with their collective groups such as their families (which will be elaborated in more detail in *Chapter Three*) (Bernardo, 2008; Tan, 2022; Tan, 2008). After all, the legacies of colonialism intricately shape and influence multiple threads of everyday life through messy, complicated, and often contradictory entanglements. I will now briefly examine achievement goals in literature. In line with McInerney and Etten (2004), this thesis defines reasons and motivations for pursuing and engaging in tasks such as academic achievements as 'achievement goals'.

Achievement

Students often find themselves driven by an assortment of motivations for learning in their pursuit of academic achievement. For instance, consider a student who views the goal of performing well in school as stemming from an intrinsic pleasure in the process of mastering a particular subject (e.g., Marsh & Martin, 2011; Wu et al., 2021). Alternatively, another student may discover that their motivation is deeply rooted in their desire and goal to honour their family and fulfil familial expectations. In this context, it is hardly surprising that mainstream psychological literature has sought to formalise concepts and theories of motivation through the framework of achievement goals. *Personal investment theory* (Maehr & Braskamp, 1986) is an example of such scholarship.

Generally speaking, personal investment theory "is concerned with how individuals choose to invest their energy, talent, and time in particular goals or activities" (McInerney, 2008, p. 871). In the educational setting, it draws attention to how students' investment and

commitment to their academic endeavours revolve around three fundamental constructs of meaning: *perceived goals* (what the student wants to achieve), *sense of self* (who the student believes they are), and *facilitating conditions* (the socio-contextual factors that motivate or discourage a student's willingness to invest and commit to their studies) (King et al., 2019; Maehr & Braskamp, 1986; McInerney, 2008). These three fundamental constructs of meaning can be thought of as etic frameworks. Moreover, they reflect connections to both earlier and contemporary theories of motivation, which define the different categories of goals that give meaning, purpose, and value to students' academic endeavours. These include *mastery goals* (i.e., studying based on one's desire for learning and personal improvement), *performance goals* (i.e., studying based on one's desire to showcase one's ability and competence in comparison to others), *social goals* (i.e., a student's desire to fit in, gain approval, or maintain relationships with others), *intrinsic goals* (i.e., the extent to which a goal is inherently consistent with a student's notion of self or self-worth), and *extrinsic goals* (i.e., the external rewards, purpose, or value a student hopes to get from their education) (Elliot & Church, 1997; King et al., 2019; King & McInerney, 2012; Lee et al., 2010; McInerney, 2012; Urdan & Maehr, 1995).

While personal investment theory has broadened our knowledge and understanding of student achievement goal motivations, it primarily concentrates on and makes general allusions to socio-culturally embedded motivation concepts and definitions without explicitly contextualising or theorising them within a student's cultural milieu. In other words, scant attention is given in literature to the significance of how specific cultural beliefs, values, norms, customs, and practices may manifest and uniquely influence student 'achievement goal' motivations that are only meaningful within a particular cultural group. As such, the present

research delves into how indigenous Filipino cultural and psychological beliefs and values saliently texture Filipina migrant university students' 'achievement goals'.

Empirical research on Filipino students' 'achievement goals'

The ensuing discussion compiles some insights from existing literature concerning Filipino student achievement goals, categorising the scholarship into two overarching groups: (a) research that examined social-oriented conceptions of motivation (Bernardo et al., 2008; Galang & Reyes, 2009); and (b) research that employed *personal investment theory* (Bernardo & Ismail, 2010; King et al., 2019).

The first group of qualitative research employed open-ended survey methods with the intention to capture a broad spectrum of varying social perspectives and opinions regarding achievement goals from a wide selection of Filipino students. This scholarship purposefully avoided referencing any theoretical frameworks at the outset allowing concepts to emerge from the students' responses. Accordingly, the findings suggested that familial relationships, naturally emerged as playing a central role in defining and shaping the achievement goals of Filipino students' motivation (Bernardo et al., 2008; Galang & Reyes, 2009). For example, in questioning students to write and describe what they considered to be their goals for their school education, Bernardo et al. (2008) note that the desire for studying and learning among Filipino students is closely related to their motivation to fulfil significant achievement goals, such as meeting their parents' desires and expectations. Furthermore, it is thought that these motivations influence the construction of individual performance standards and expectations (Bernardo et al., 2008). In a similar vein, Galang and Reyes (2009) observed that beliefs regarding the wellbeing of the family and familial relationships can provide students with a narrative that, on one hand, instils a sense of purpose that is both self-gratifying and honourable, thereby motivating them to learn. Yet, what is interesting is that in other

circumstances, these beliefs and relationships may also introduce complexities in the goals students want to achieve for themselves, thereby underscoring the paradoxical nature of certain social relationships and achievement goals (Galang & Reyes, 2009).

The unique social experiences of Filipino students are equally significant within this research group. For instance, Bernardo et al.'s (2008) study highlights students' debt of gratitude, along with their desire to honour the sacrifices made by their families to provide them with educational opportunities, as a significant source of motivation for them to do well in school. This phenomenon was also observed in Galang and Reyes' (2009) study. However, Galang and Reyes (2009) speculate that students might have been expressing their subconscious beliefs—for example, how much they love their parents or how grateful they are for all the hard work that went into giving them a good education, thus the debt of gratitude—which, although sincere, may be inconsequential as motivators for academic achievement. This viewpoint however, neglects the considerable influence of cultural norms, values, and expectations on students' beliefs and attitudes—both conscious and subconscious—toward their education. Therein, while such a lens provides valuable insights into social-oriented conceptions of motivation, it could also be deeply intertwined with culture-specific constructs that offer a framework for understanding the boundaries of acceptable and expected behaviours within Filipino society that shape students' learning and 'achievement goals' with layers of meaning, calling for further exploration.

Building on this, the second group of research focuses on understanding Filipino students' 'achievement goals' in relation to personal investment theory. The main point here is that students' motivation to invest in or commit to their academic endeavours is more or less influenced by their beliefs, perceptions, feelings, and social and cultural surroundings (Bernardo & Ismail, 2010; King et al., 2019). This could assist scholars in delving into the

motivations behind *why* Filipino students want to achieve certain goals in their education, rather than solely focusing on *what* motivates them to achieve those goals.

Bernardo and Ismail (2010), for example, provide a quantitative cross-cultural analysis using personal investment theory to compare Filipino and Malaysian students, revealing how the meanings of achievement goals influence student investment and commitment to their academic endeavours in distinct ways between these two cultures. The authors observe that Filipino students had a greater inclination to adopt mastery goals (e.g., learning for the sheer motivation of personal improvement) in comparison to Malaysian students, while Malaysian students had a greater inclination to adopt performance goals (e.g., learning for the sheer motivation of being the top of the class) (Bernardo & Ismail, 2010). It was inferred that, within the Philippine context, students were more likely to demonstrate mastery goals for themselves because of the belief that they will be generally viewed as friendly, likeable, and sociable individuals, hence develop meaningful friendships in their class or social groups (Bernardo & Ismail, 2010). On the other hand, within the Malaysian context, it was inferred that students hold a more positive social perception of their classmates who demonstrate performance goals, as this serves to motivate and inspire them to also strive for academic achievement (Bernardo & Ismail, 2010). That said, mastery goals, in theory, are independent of social goals (i.e., the desire to fit in or gain social approval) (Maehr & Braskamp, 1986). What is intriguing, though, is that in the minds of Filipino students, there exists a notable positive correlation between mastery goals and social goals (Bernardo & Ismail, 2010). This suggests either that the students are drawing on different sources of motivation to give meaning, purpose, and value for their decision to invest and commit to pursuing academic achievement or that Filipino students could be associating unique meanings and interpretations with Western-constructed categories of achievement goals. Essentially, it

appears that these imported theoretical ideas and categories may not fully capture other equally important constructs of knowledge that define and give meaning to Filipino students' 'achievement goals'.

Focusing on the sense of self construct of personal investment theory, King et al. (2019) also documents how processes related to the self play a role in shaping the achievement outcomes of Hong Kong Chinese and Filipino students. For example, in the case of Hong Kong Chinese students, having a negative self-concept (i.e., feeling incompetent, fearing failure) does not seem to significantly affect their motivation to invest in or commit to performance goals (e.g., outperform the class average on a test), although it does among Filipino students (King et al., 2019). The authors propose that a plausible explanation for this phenomenon is that the highly competitive educational system in Hong Kong normalises the pursuit of performance goals, leading Hong Kong Chinese students, regardless of how they view themselves, to strive for these goals (King et al., 2019). On the other hand, King et al. (2019) considered the Philippine educational system to be less competitive in comparison; therefore, Filipino students did not apply the same understanding. Though this may be true, there is also a need to consider and explore broader cultural constructions as potential explanations for these motivational meanings and understandings, in addition to fundamental differences between the educational systems in the two countries. For instance, Filipino students with negative self-concept may still be influenced by meritocratic measures of performing well in school. However, it leads them to prioritise avoiding failure, motivated by a desire to avoid shame out of fear of judgement. For Filipino students—as alluded to in the subsection discussing the Philippine educational context—this behaviour stems from the social construction or collective understanding that emphasises shared identity; in other words, when they fail, it affects not only themselves but also, most importantly, their family. And in many respects, this

understanding is fundamental to the interconnected and interdependent nature of being a Filipino student. The argument I offer here does not seek to simply advocate for the inclusion of an additional construct of personal investment theory to better psychometrically test, capture, and make sense of the Filipino student experience. Instead, what I wish to emphasise here is that there are plenty of other constructs of knowledge that define students' 'achievement goals' and their reasons for pursuing them, and these, too, deserve exploration.

At this point, when thinking about migration, education, and 'achievement goals' in the Filipino context, the literature demonstrates that Filipinos have a more collectivistic and culturally grounded understanding of how each phenomenon affects more than just their individual experiences. Nevertheless, this has yet to receive adequate attention in scholarly literature, leading me to consider the valuable insights that could fill this dearth. Bringing together the contexts outlined in this section, I will elucidate in the upcoming discussion that a comprehensive understanding of individuals or groups requires acknowledging the fundamental influence of culture on how they think, how they understand, and how they make sense of their individual and social experiences. This will enable a more nuanced and contextual understanding of Filipino migrant university students' stories of achievement as expressed in their everyday realities, which lie at the heart of my research. Thus, what follows is an examination of how *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* offers a cultural framework that can broaden our understanding of the worldviews, motivations, and value systems of Filipinos.

Sikolohiyang Pilipino: A psychology of, by, and for Filipinos

Given the Philippines' extensive history of being colonised and dominated by Euro-American ideologies and systems, *Sikolohiyang Pilipino,* invites us to recognise that progress in psychological knowledge can be achieved if we move towards ensuring that every individual and community throughout the world is seen through their own unique lens and in

light of the unique understanding they possess of themselves. *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* speaks to the psychology rooted thought processes, experiences, value system, and philosophy of life of Filipinos, articulated through the Filipino language and culture (Enriquez; 1992; Oropilla & Guadana, 2021; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). It is fundamentally underpinned by an analysis of historical and socio-cultural contexts that sheds light on the essence of Filipino attributes and realities and frames them as interpreted and recognised by the Filipino people (Enriquez; 1992). In essence, it ushered in a psychology that is resonant with, and meaningful to Filipinos (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). This section focuses on the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* concepts and values, including *kapwa*, *hiya*, *pakikisama*, *utang na loob*, *katatagang loob*, and *bahala na*.

Kapwa

The concept of *kapwa*, which I draw on in developing the analytic frame for this thesis, is considered by many to be the foundational premise of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Enriquez, 1992; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000; Reyes, 2015; Yacat, 2013). It embodies an understanding of the unity of self and others that, if translated to the English language, fails to fully convey the meaning inherent in the Filipino worldview (Enriquez, 1992; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000; Reyes, 2015). This is because its significance is diminished with the English term 'others', which typically suggests a separation between the self and the other—the antithesis of the very heart of *kapwa*. For this reason, I contextualise *kapwa* as the notion of self in relation to others, which invites us to acknowledge the shared identity and sense-making of Filipino selves, which are believed to be, at their core, interdependent and deeply socially embedded (Enriquez, 1992; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000; Reyes, 2015).

The notion of the cobweb Chinese self offer a similar to the interconnected and interdependent conceptualisation of *kapwa.* In his work attending to the Chinese conception of

the self, Yang (2006) proposes that the self is a cobweb. The web weaves together countless individuals, each with a unique strand of connections and stories that intertwine with one another. The decisions, behaviours, and actions of the cobweb self are not separate but rather consistently influenced by the people around them, the norms and expectations of their groups, their beliefs, values, and shared narratives, all of which are also webs (Yang, 2006). And consistent with the concept of *kapwa*, each person holds unique responsibilities that ripple through the lives of others. These responsibilities extend far beyond the self, influencing the people entwined to the web with them, shaping the dynamics of their shared existence (Yang, 2006). Viewed through this lens, many decisions, behaviours, and actions could lead to the reshaping of the web and all of its interconnected strands.

Similarly, in Aotearoa New Zealand, Henare (1988) explores the indigenous concept of *whanaungatanga*, which expands upon the narrative and knowledge of how the Māori self creates and gives meaning to their diverse identities through their relationships with others. This includes their whānau (family), hapū (sub-tribe), and iwi (tribe) (Henare, 1988). Yet there are others too—those who may not share the same whakapapa lineages (genealogy), yet the Māori self feels a sense of kinship with the relationships they share with others in their everyday lives (E Tu Whanau!, 2022). In this regard, much like the concept of *kapwa*, whanaungatanga can manifest among individuals across all levels of society, connecting them as fellow human beings. Everything is interconnected, where the self is not purely individual but deeply social; put another way, it is what makes meaningful connections with others possible.

Weaving all this together, *kapwa* is a useful concept for understanding the interconnected and interdependent nature of being a Filipino student. Filipino migrant university students navigate their everyday lives, making decisions and interacting with people

as they go. They feel the effects of their actions not only internally but also externally, impacting those nearest to them—their families. At the heart of this understanding lies the acknowledgment we are collective *and* individual, unique yet socially interconnected and interdependent beings, who come to understand the essence of one another through our shared experiences, narratives, interactions, and relationships. This unveils the fundamental threads of our interconnectedness and its complex, and sometimes contradictory influence on numerous facets of our lives, ranging from our everyday interactions, relationships, how we make sense of our experiences to our notion of self. It invites attention to stretch beyond the notion of the self within culture and society while also reflecting on the fundamental essence of culture and society within the self (Hodgetts et al., 2020).

Hiya

In Filipino culture, *hiya* emerges as a richly textured concept that eludes a clear or direct translation. For instance, habitually translated in English as 'shame' or 'embarrassment', these exogenous perspectives often strip *hiya* of its richness and multidimensional nature, reducing its meaning to an oversimplification or superficial interpretation (Lasquety-Reyes, 2016; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). As noted by Bonifacio (1976; as cited in Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000), *hiya* lends itself to many different meanings and interpretations—positive or negative—depending on its form through affixes (e.g., *napahiya* or 'felt embarrassed,' *mahiyain* or 'to be bashful,' *ikanihihiya* or 'to be ashamed of,' *kahihiyan* or 'a sense of propriety or embarrassment,' and so on). At its core, *hiya* represents an inherent sensitivity to societal norms and expectations that influence the daily experiences of Filipinos, guiding them to embody behaviours that uphold social harmony and honour the shared values of their families and communities (Lasquety-Reyes, 2016; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). Simply said, it implies an understanding of what is considered proper, appropriate, or

respectful within a particular setting or situation and then acting in line. For this reason, in keeping with Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino (2000), this thesis advances the idea that the essence and value of *hiya*, when translated into English, transcends the simplistic and exclusive notions of 'shame' or 'embarrassment.' Instead, it reveals itself more profoundly as a 'sense of propriety.'

Hiya takes shape in multiple ways within the ways of thinking, doing and being of Filipinos. For instance, Filipinos habitually go out of their way to make sure they do not offend anyone and that they steer clear of anything that might be seen as rude, inconsiderate, disrespectful, or insensitive to others (Lasquety-Reyes, 2016). This may involve using respectful language and honorifics such as *'po'* and *'opo'* when interacting with those who are older or hold positions of authority, being mindful to avoid offending anyone by flatly declining an invitation and thus opting for vague or indirect responses to avoid causing offence, or refraining from taking the last piece of the *ulam* (meat dish or viand) during a shared meal in consideration of others who may also want it. In these narratives, the understanding of *hiya* as a 'sense of propriety' comes into focus. Nonetheless, it strays from conventional notions of 'propriety' (Lasquety-Reyes, 2016); instead, it stresses the importance for Filipinos to be conscious of their *kapwa tao*, or fellow human beings, as the thoughts and feelings of 'the other' are inextricably interconnected in the actions and decisions of 'the self.'

Moreover, the value of *hiya* holds the capacity to influence decisions across different domains, such as those related to career choices and education. As an example, Filipino students may prioritise family expectations over their own personal interests when making career decisions (e.g., Tan, 2022), all because of a strong sense of propriety. This decision, however, is motivated not by a superficial obedience to societal expectations but by a deep desire to maintain social harmony and represent oneself, one's family, or one's

community in the most honourable light possible (Enriquez, 1992). In the context of education, facing academic setbacks and failures may trigger a Filipino student to experience *kahihiyan*, or shame, arising from the belief that they are disappointing their families (Tan, 2022). Failures weigh heavily on their shoulders, not merely as personal setbacks but as 'threats' to their family's reputation and standing within the community; this is often accompanied by a fear of rejection or anxiety stemming from the possible loss of parental approval. In this respect, *hiya*, both as a concept and a value, profoundly shapes the thoughts, actions, and behaviours of Filipinos, all in their pursuit of maintaining harmonious relationships with one another. It guides us to reflect on our behaviours and decisions and the impact they have on those around us.

In contrary, the expression *'walang hiya,'* or an absence of shame, is a way to deliver an insult or a curse within the Filipino language. As Hollnsteiner (1961) remind us, "to call a Filipino walang hiyâ, or "shameless," is to wound him seriously" (p. 75). It suggests that the person in question is lacking a quality that could have contributed to their moral character and made them a decent human being. In sum, in the cultural lifeworld of Filipinos, being *walang hiya* essentially means severing the shared human connection with one's *kapwa* by prioritising one's own thoughts, feelings, wants, and needs over anyone else. The profound gravity of this sentiment, however, is concerning because migrant students in the diaspora hold within them layers of identity, expectations, hardships, and struggles that are unique to their lived experiences. In moments when *hiya* becomes too much to bear, it may convince them to retreat in silence, hiding parts of themselves for fear of being judged, making it increasingly difficult to connect with others and with their own selves.

Pakikisama

In his exploration of Filipino values, Lynch (1961; as cited in Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000) translated *pakikisama* as maintaining smooth interpersonal relationships by aligning with and adhering to the majority decision within the group even if it contradicts one's own ideas. A few years down the line, Enriquez (1992; as cited in Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000) reconceptualised *pakikisama* as 'companionship.' Generally speaking, *pakikisama* is a Filipino cultural value that underscores the significance of cooperation and compromise as essential elements for nurturing interpersonal relationships that thrive on harmony and understanding. Its intrinsic benefit lies in promoting collaborative support, a sense of unity, and a shared sense of purpose among members of a group. *Pakikisama* stems from the Filipino root word *sama*, which translates to 'to go along with' (Lasquety-Reyes, 2016). However, as mentioned by Lasquety-Reyes (2016), 'going along with' does not indicate succumbing to 'peer pressure' or passively conforming to the majority, given that one can always maintain the capacity to hold opposing views and disagree. On the contrary, it expresses a preparedness to prioritise the interests of others above one's own in the name of 'teamwork', paving the way for common goals to be realised together as a group. Thus, drawing on the works of Enriquez (1992; as cited in Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000) and Lasquety-Reyes (2016), I have defined *pakikisama* in this thesis as companionship and the value of 'going along with others.'

As one might expect from people who find comfort and security in their close-knit communities, Filipinos tend to prioritise and emphasise the significance of belonging to groups (Espiritu, 2003; Lasquety-Reyes, 2016; Oropilla & Guadana, 2021; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000; San Juan, 2006). This gives them the opportunity to practice *pakikisama* with their *kapwa tao* in their daily interactions. For example, in a professional setting, one might

find themselves extending a helping hand to a colleague facing difficulties with a task, perhaps even extending their hours or staying late to ensure the work gets done. Conversely, during social events, one may find themselves participating in group activities, regardless of personal interest, to maintain camaraderie and show respect for fellow attendees. Furthermore, within the context of friendships, *pakikisama* may imply that sometimes it is better to set aside small irritations or disagreements between people, all in the name of prioritising peace and harmony in the bonds they share. In principle, *pakikisama* essentially promotes the idea that as part of the social collective, Filipinos should look after one another and cooperate wherever possible for the greater good of their social groups. In many respects, this cultural narrative comes as no surprise at all when one delves into the foundational aspects of *pakikisama* within its tribal context.

In the context of education, Filipino students are attuned to how their actions hold importance in shaping perceptions of themselves and their families. For this reason, they learn to adjust and accommodate their behaviours and decisions (i.e., achievement goals) to align with parental expectations (Bernardo, 2008; Tan, 2022), embodying the value of *pakikisama*, even when such adjustments may not entirely reflect their personal desires, needs, or identities. Bulatao (1964) explains that the underlying reasoning for this phenomenon is anchored in the idea that a Filipino's sense of security is not merely an independent construct but is intrinsically connected with the group to which they belong, thereby implying the importance of maintaining the group's acceptance and approval.

Accordingly, this raises the equally important yet negative association of *pakikisama*, which is often perceived as a catalyst for the suppression of individuality and the possible maintenance of unquestioned, damaging societal expectations. Here, I pay special attention to Lasquety-Reyes' (2016) argument that "a mature and responsible *pakikisama*

knows how to discern if something really is for the welfare of the group, and knows how to refuse if it leads to their disadvantage" (p. 74). For instance, in his exploration of Filipino university students' perceptions concerning the legitimacy of the authority of parents over academic behaviours, Bernardo (2010) found that certain facets of the students' educational experiences extend beyond simply fulfilling the goals and expectations of others. Instead, they are also motivated by working toward personally defined 'achievement goals' that reflect their need for autonomy and competence (Bernardo, 2010). Likewise, Tan (2022) found that Filipino perfectionist students may eventually reach a stage in their lives, such as during their time in university, where they can express autonomy while still considering their parents' guidance. This holds considerable importance, as the effort to negotiate individual standards and motivations, such as 'achievement goals', with those set by parents can be challenging for many Filipino students. This is particularly relevant given the cultural context in Filipino society, where, through values such as *pakikisama*, significant others and groups can play a significant role in shaping and defining standards, goals, the means of achieving these goals, and the acknowledgement of academic achievements. Taking all these into consideration, this thesis raises the importance of considering a more expansive and nuanced understanding of *pakikisama*, advocating against a restricted or simplistic view that is frequently equated with mere sheepish conformity to the majority. It is about taking the wisdom this value carries, making room for healthier expressions of companionship, while also allowing ourselves the space to grow as individuals.

Utang na loob

Utang na loob, as it translates word-for-word into English, means 'debt of the inner self'. Accordingly, I have defined *utang na loob* in this thesis as such. It represents a significant cultural value in the Philippines and considering that it dwells deeply in the hearts and minds

of many Filipinos, *utang na loob* has been established as a mainstay in scholarly narratives among numerous researchers studying the complexities of the Filipino worldview and the pattern of their interpersonal relations (e.g., Hollnsteiner, 1961; Kaut, 1961; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). For example, Kaut (1961) and Hollnsteiner (1961) concur that *utang na loob* is a Filipino cultural value, often characterised as a loosely structured form of reciprocal obligation. This obligation develops when a Filipino individual, during a moment of need, experiences 'a sense of indebtedness' and deep gratitude for the invaluable help and support they have received from their *kapwa*, whether they be their family, community, or anyone else (Hollnsteiner, 1961; Kaut, 1961). Out of gratitude, the 'debtor' (the one receiving help and the one shouldering the obligation) feels motivated to one day reach a point where they are able to repay or reciprocate the favour to the 'creditor' (the one who offered help and to whom the debtor owes gratitude to) when the latter is in a position of need (Hollnsteiner, 1961; Kaut, 1961). To introduce another layer of complexity, the *utang*, or 'debt', which represents the help or support received by the debtor, is often one whose value cannot be measured (Hollnsteiner, 1961). And even when the value of the *utang* can be measured (e.g., financial support) it typically holds internal and deeply personal significance. It is this internal depth within one's inner being, or *loob*, that sets apart *utang na loob* from the English concept of returning favours or repaying loans or debts. This is because it embodies both a subjective and an intangible sense of emotional gratitude for the help and support a Filipino receives from their *kapwa*. For this reason, it is not always easy to tell whether one's *utang na loob* has been completely settled, leading to a continuous sense of obligation (Hollnsteiner, 1961). However, looking closer at *utang na loob* from a Filipino cultural perspective, Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino (2000) clarify that it should not necessarily be perceived as a burden, contrary to the connotations the term 'debt' implies. After all, Filipinos inherently embody a culture of shared

responsibility in their interactions with others; as such, there is always an opportunity to reciprocate a favour and pass on the kindness received (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). Instead of being a burden, *utang na loob* transforms into a positive and enriching element of Filipino interpersonal relationships. It becomes an opportunity to take part in a shared human experience of empathy, respect, and care, where a person's generosity is honoured and 'gifted' to others rather than simply 'paid' in a transactional manner, where someone should have to keep score, especially in parent-child relationships (Kaut, 1961; Oropilla & Guadana, 2021).

In line with this sentiment, showing one's *utang na loob* by reciprocating a favour and kindness received is a day-to-day reality within Filipino society. Take the classic scenario of a host inviting a guest to their home for a home-cooked meal as an example. In gratitude for the host's hospitality, the guest might want to bring a gift along with them or extend an invitation for the host to visit their home, where they can also share a meal together. Another example could be being there for a friend in need as they navigate through a challenging chapter in their life, reminding them they are never truly alone. In a beautiful exchange, as a reflection of their friendship and gratitude, the friend stands ready and steps in to support them in times of struggle. Alternatively, during times of natural disasters, communities affected often have a sentiment of *utang na loob* towards the organisations and volunteers who stepped in to provide necessities such as medical attention, food, and shelter. So, to show their gratitude for those who supported them in their time of need, a community might come together to honour those who stood by them and celebrate the 'heroes', whose support made all the difference. *Utang na loob* is revealed through these stories and many others, intricately shaping the everyday realities of countless Filipinos and influencing their interactions and relationships in meaningful ways.

In the educational context, many Filipino students view achievements, obedience or financial help as a manifestation of their *utang na loob* for their family's support, as well as a way to recognise and honour the sacrifices their parents made to ensure a better life for them (Bernardo, 2008; Nagtalon-Ramos, 2020). For example, in their research, Retuya and colleagues (2017) employed questionnaires to delve into different perspectives on motivational factors that influence Filipino university students' academic performance. They observed that family obligation encourages higher academic performance. This observation can be attributed to the fact that family serves as a binding thread for many Filipinos, interweaving with every layer of their daily lives. That is to say, some Filipino students may see their academic achievement as a stepping stone to better employment opportunities, paving the way for a time when they can give back to their loved ones who have helped them along the way. In parallel, through a qualitative analysis of the impact of familial and cultural factors on the achievement of graduate degrees among Filipino American nurses, Nagtalon-Ramos (2020) writes that though the participants were from modest backgrounds in the Philippines, they were given the privilege to pursue a university education, become registered nurses, and establish careers in the United States. In line with the idea of placing the well-being of their *kapwa* over their own, the participants shared their experiences of how, with every hard-earned dollar, they allocate their income and share this piece of their success back with their families in the Philippines (Nagtalon-Ramos, 2020). This gesture serves as a meaningful expression of their gratitude and a means to honour the sacrifices made by their loved ones in support of their education and the realisation of their careers (Nagtalon-Ramos, 2020).

Having a sense of *utang na loob* is deeply embedded in Filipino cultural identity. To be without this sense as a Filipino is to cast doubt over one's character, calling into question the depth of their humanity and the values they uphold, because their inability to experience

and express gratitude betrays a lack of the most basic of the foundational aspects of human nature—appreciation, empathy, and respect. In addition to being viewed as shameless or *walang hiya*, those who overlook the value of *utang na loob* are thought to be fated to encounter difficulties in achieving their goals in life. It is within these contexts that the value of *utang na loob* becomes entangled with emotions of guilt and obligation, creating a sense of suffocation that leaves Filipinos feeling trapped and unbalanced, as if every act of love, care, support, or kindness carries an unspoken debt to be repaid. To change these narratives, we need to make room for the rediscovery of *utang na loob* so that it can be (re)storied in our everyday experiences in harmony with its true essence—a way to honour and celebrate relationships where gratitude flows, centred on mutual respect and shared humanity.

Katatagang loob

Another concept that has taken deep root in the Filipino psyche is *katatagang loob*. Tiangco (2006) explained that this phrase can be unpacked into two elements: *katatagan* and *loob*. In short, *katatagan* stems from the root word *tatag*, which can be interpreted as sturdiness, endurance, or stability. It appears to be an intrinsic characteristic or attribute, and in the context of a person, this characteristic resides deep within, such that another phrase, *loob*, or inner being, is often used alongside it to convey the depth of its meaning (Tiangco, 2006). Simply, in the Filipino worldview, *katatagang loob* reflects the Filipino people's intrinsic capacity to create meaning and discover strength and purpose within themselves, enabling them to remain resilient as they navigate through life's challenges. Mirroring this sentiment, this thesis defines *katatagang loob* as inner strength and resilience.

While it often remains unspoken, the spirit of *katatagang loob* finds its presence in the rhythms of everyday life for most Filipinos. Take, for example, a parent who has taken on the role of being an OFW, tirelessly labouring in a foreign land all to ensure that their family

back home is well taken care of. In this journey, every step carries a deep imprint of hard work and sacrifice, motivated by love and the simple reason that the undeniable burden of separation from their family is not without purpose, capturing the very essence of *katatagang loob*. Another example is the street vendors, farmers, and fishermen in the Philippines. Day after day, they work tirelessly beneath the blistering heat of the sun, all with the humble goal of putting food on the table for their families. Not to mention that the promise of steady income is never a certainty, as they can be swayed by a myriad of unpredictable factors, including health issues or injuries that can strike without warning, as well as natural disasters, revealing the vulnerability of their livelihoods. University students, too, often find themselves experiencing exercising *katatagang loob*, particularly as mid-semester and end-of-semester deadlines loom, resembling an impending storm that unleashes an outpouring flood of reports, essays, and assignments, testing their resilience as they navigate the turbulent waters of academic life. We should also keep in mind that every student navigates these responsibilities while also bearing the weight of their own challenges, stresses, and pressures in their personal lives. Still, they muster the strength to carry on and see their studies through to the end. Regrettably, there is a dearth of scholarly works that open a channel for the sharing of these inspiring stories of inner strength and resilience. This thesis contends that there is a wealth of meaning-making beneath these stories that awaits exploration, shedding light on the far-reaching impact of what the Filipino people have been taught throughout history.

Colonisation taught and instilled in Filipinos the habit of wearing resilience as though it were a suit of armour, fearing that exposing our vulnerabilities might strip us of our dignity. The Philippines stands as a testament to the intertwined legacies of three dominating empires that made landfall upon its lands: the Spanish, the Americans, and the Japanese. This history, in many respects, transforms the *katatagang loob* of the Filipino people into a meaningful relic

of imperial significance. And in the same way that it holds true for other nations on the global stage, there exists a fundamental reality: former colonies with a history of repeated subjugation find themselves moulded by the ever-changing tides of power that have sought to dominate them as part of the colonists' imperial project. These changes have encompassed not only the fall of colonial governments but also ignited social revolutions.

Briefly, the Philippine Revolution of 1896 cannot truly be understood without acknowledging the profound impact of Spanish conquest and conversion that took root in 1565 (CuUnjieng Aboitiz & JSTOR (Organization), 2020). In an era of great turmoil, the Spanish empire's hold over the Philippines was felt through oppression, exploitation, and the radical reshaping of indigenous cultural beliefs and norms (Nadeau, 2008). It was within this tumultuous backdrop that Dr. José Rizal emerged as a heroic figure (Nadeau, 2008). He stood firm in his belief that change could be achieved through peaceful means rather than through the chaos of violence. His compelling novels, *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, unveiled the grim realities of injustice, corruption, and the abuse of power by the Spanish authorities and the Catholic Church in the Philippines (Claudio, 2019). These narratives served as a rallying cry for countless Filipinos, igniting an eruption of hope and an intense desire for reform that echoed throughout the nation. His unshakeable beliefs and dedication to truth and justice, however, portrayed him as a destabilising influence against the ruling powers, leading to his capture and eventual execution in 1896 at the hands of Spanish authorities (Claudio, 2019; Nadeau, 2008). This came after the Spanish government levelled unfounded accusations against the novelist, linking him to the rebellion of the *Katipunan*, an underground revolutionary group founded by Andrés Bonifacio and fellow Filipino nationalists (Kennon, 1901; Nadeau, 2008). Motivated by a single goal—achieving freedom and equality from the Spanish Empire—the *Katipunan* used José Rizal as a martyr, unveiling a stark truth: the

aspiration for peaceful reforms seemed a far-off wish under Spanish rule (Karnow, 1989; Nadeau, 2008). This understanding subsequently set the stage for an uncompromising declaration—the immediate demand for armed revolution (Nadeau, 2008). It should be emphasised, however, that, upon the announcement of the long-anticipated victory over the Spanish, what seemed like a moment of freedom was, in reality, fleeting and illusory. With the signing of the 1889 Treaty of Paris, Filipinos found themselves subjugated under a new imperial rule, following Spain's relinquishment of authority to the United States of America (Nadeau, 2008).

In a time of great change, the American colonisation of the Philippines was conceptualised as a non-restrictive tutelary relationship, wherein white Americans cast themselves as both superior and benevolent, taking on the roles of protectors and patrons of the perceived primitive brown Filipinos, who were deemed in need of education and civilisation (Nadeau, 2008). Needless to say, there was a deep-seated intention of control, as the Americans endeavoured to teach the Filipinos their role and standing within the newly established colonial hierarchy. Filipinos, naturally, had an entirely different perspective on the matter. Having successfully broken free from the shackles of one colonial power, they were determined in their refusal to submit to the airs and graces of another. The subsequent Philippine-American War of 1898 endured for three long years, concluding in the death toll of more than twenty thousand Filipino fighters, alongside over four thousand American soldiers (Nadeau, 2008). And Filipino civilians lost their lives from the clutches of the violent conflict, famine, and disease (Nadeau, 2008). The atrocities of war unequivocally eclipsed the 'benevolent' portrayal of American rule. In a bid to ease tensions and shift attention from political discord and military presence, the colonial government established by the United States in the Philippines set forth a pacification campaign termed as the 'policy of attraction'

(Burns, 2011). This included the establishment of schools, economic development initiatives, and a semblance of Filipino self-governance, among other tactical objectives (Burns, 2011). And as many scholars have contended, the actions implemented had a two-fold objective: to weaken the support of the locals for the revolutionary movement that stood in opposition to American rule and to capture the hearts, loyalty, and gratitude of the Filipino people, thereby establishing a connection that would bind them to their colonisers (May, 1980; Nadeau, 2008; Paul A. Kramer, 2006). Nevertheless, the forty-eight-year American rule came to an abrupt conclusion following the Japanese invasion of the Philippines in 1941 (Nadeau, 2008).

The Japanese encountered a similar struggle as their Euro-American predecessors: having to secure the obedience of the Filipino people while eradicating any demonstrations of resistance and rebellion. During this time, they coerced everyday citizens to supply them with food and services against their will (Nadeau, 2008). And tragically, in the shadows of their occupation, young girls and women were frequently abducted and forced into roles as 'comfort women' for their military personnel (Nadeau, 2008). To defy the Japanese soldiers was to invite a merciless reprimand, a consequence that resonated with deep shame and loss of dignity for Filipinos, often concluding with cold-blooded and indiscriminate executions. In light of the immense hardships and suffering endured under the Japanese rule, it was inevitable that guerilla resistance would take root and echo throughout the Philippines. Nonetheless, the Japanese occupation can be regarded as fundamentally different from the Spanish conquest and the American assimilation, not merely due to the level of brutality involved, as every imperial power tends to resort to such measures to uphold their dominance and control. Instead, it was the length of their rule that spanned three years (Nadeau, 2008).

Evidently, in the heart of Filipino culture lies a rich sense of pride and appreciation for resilience that is woven into our long and winding history, marked by colonisation,

migration, and our commitment to family. In these contexts, survival often hinges on endurance and the practice of self-denial. However, as a result, we may have overlooked the remarkable truth that acknowledging our vulnerability and sharing our struggles, rather than suppressing them, can also stand as a compelling testament to our inner strength and resilience. Leaning on *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*, this thesis seeks to narrate *katatagang loob* as a concept that not only helps us Filipina migrant university students to create meaning and uncover strength and purpose within ourselves to maintain resilience as we navigate through life's challenges but also as a way of being that can be nourished and supported within our interconnectedness.

Bahala na

Finally, the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* value and expression of *bahala na* presents a unique challenge when attempting to convey its essence in English, as its nuances are often lost in translation. *Bahala na* is derived from the indigenous expression, *'si Bathala na'*, signifying a sense of surrender or leaving matters to the divine will of *Bathala* (Joaquin, 2023). The phrase *'Bathala'* speaks of an omnipotent being responsible for the creation and rule of the cosmos, deserving of prayer and worship, and possessing the knowledge, presence, and unlimited power (Joaquin, 2023) historically associated with the Catholic understanding of God imparted by the Spanish to the Filipinos. Mirroring the heart of indigenous Filipino spirituality, where lies a deep belief entrusting the outcome of something *outside* the self, this thesis encapsulates the definition of *bahala na* with the concept of 'leaving it up to God'.

Bahala na is an expression that can be heard in the everyday conversations among Filipinos. When deciding to look for employment opportunities outside of their professional field, for instance, one might say '*bahala na*' to let go of control and uncertainty, which can be mentally and emotionally alleviating when making big decisions like starting a new career. In situations such as this, *bahala na* reflects a Filipino's resolve and readiness to confront

challenges ahead to make their goals and dreams a reality (Dy, 1994; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000), adopting an attitude of 'I will do what I can, and whatever will be, will be.'

That said, we must also consider the two general interpretations of *bahala na*. The first suggests a fatalistic narrative that may be interpreted as embodying an attitude of yielding to the whims of fate or to the will of an all-powerful and all-knowing God (Joaquin, 2023). Indeed, there is a notable contention surrounding the phrase, as it embodies a sense of surrender, suggesting a withdrawal from engagement or confronting difficult situations, thereby revealing a reluctance to take responsibility for one's actions. However, the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* perspective offers an alternative interpretation of *bahala na*. As Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino (2000) elaborates, *bahala na* implies an attitude of acceptance, inviting the self to navigate the unknown paths that lie ahead with a sense of openness and possibility. Simply put, in place of a fatalistic perspective, an individual who expresses *'bahala na'* recognises the interplay between their decisions and the ambiguous outcomes that follow. They acknowledge that their present circumstances are beyond their control, welcoming uncertainty with an adaptable stance and accepting things as they come, regardless of what lies ahead. Borrowing from Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino (2000), I lean onto the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* interpretation of *bahala na* to explore how the women in this study give meaning to their academic journeys by posturing themselves in faith and confidence both *outside* and *within* themselves.

In this thesis, I acknowledge that the daily reality and lived experiences of migrant university students are dynamic, complex, and relational phenomena. There is no one contextual premise that can fully encapsulate its complexities and subtleties. As such, my research draws on literature that offers multifaceted and contextual understanding of migration, education, achievement goals, cultural identity, and notion of self. Adopting this eclectic

approach will allow me to unravel and explore how Filipina migrant university students in Aotearoa New Zealand make sense of themselves and their achievement goals that is resonant and meaningful to them. In the next chapter, I will discuss my methodology.

Chapter Two: Methods

Introduction

In the unfolding narrative of this research project, I have pursued an in-depth analysis to unravel and delve into the significance of migration, education, achievement goals, cultural identity, and notion of the self in relation to the achievement goals of Filipina migrant university students. I employed a social constructionist epistemological perspective to support this endeavour.

This chapter consists of two separate parts. Part One provides an overview and rationale for the combined theoretical framework I use in this research. I begin with a summary glimpse of social constructionist thinking and the considerations underpinning my decision to select it as the epistemological stance for this research project. I then discuss narrative psychology and the nature of stories to direct my exploration of the everyday lives of Filipina migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand, with a particular focus on how these women's achievement goals as university students texture these experiences. Following this, I discuss *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* research methods as a means of creating a welcoming space for Filipino people to candidly share their life narratives. Against a backdrop of mutual respect and trust, drawing on these theoretical perspectives will allow for the richness and complexity of their stories to truly stand out. In *Part Two*, I discuss my engagements with participants, weaving in the ethical considerations addressed in the project, the threads of which I reflect on and follow through in the exploration of my analytical process.

Part One: Combined Theoretical Framework

In light of the preceding literature review, it became abundantly clear that the Filipino worldview and their perspectives on migration, education, achievement goals, cultural identity, and notion of self are incredibly complex. Given the Filipino cultural perspective that sees relationships, education, and achievements as interconnected and impactful on one another (Park et al., 2006; Tan, 2022; Tan, 2008), I anticipated that the women would share their stories referencing each of these elements. Thus, in order to truly capture the experiences of Filipina migrant university students and their journey towards achieving their goals, I present a theoretical framework that combines elements of social constructionism, narrative approach, and *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*. Social constructionism is instrumental in examining the construction and negotiation of the everyday realities, lived experiences, and meaning-making of the women in this study within specific social, cultural, and historical contexts. As a researcher, the use of a narrative approach, allowed me to comprehensively explore my *kuwentuhan*, or informal conversations, with women and the stories they generously share with me. Although telling our stories may, at times, feel messy, it is precisely this element that allows us to genuinely, openly, and naturally articulate the crux of our lived realities. Similarly, it reminded me of the importance of treating the women's narratives with the equal measure of care and respect that I would hope to receive for sharing my own story. Finally, thinking about the nuances of storytelling across different cultures, I lean on *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* research principles and methods. This is because I hold that it is necessary to honour and incorporate our own indigenous epistemologies into this work. By doing so, I can ensure that, first and foremost, this research is relevant to the participants it features and to our peoples, and second, that the women's stories, as experienced by them, are handled with the utmost care, respect, and cultural sensitivity throughout the entirety of this research endeavour.

Social Constructionism

A social constructionist position creates avenues for researchers to intricately capture the plurality of people's lived realities by means of documenting personal experiences, thoughts, emotions, and the compelling journey of meaning-making (Camic et al., 2003). What is more, a social constructionist epistemology is tailored for research analyses that seek to shed light, interpret, and explain phenomena that are intrinsically complex and multifaceted (Burr, 1995; Hibberd, 2005; Luyn, 2016). In the constructionist view, emphasis is placed on the notion that all meaningful reality is constructed through the active participation of people within their world, created and communicated within a social context (Elder-Vass, 2012).

As a theoretical framework, social constructionism calls into question the traditional ways of knowing. It presents a critique of the widely held belief that knowledge is acquired solely through the process of testing hypotheses and making observations (Burr, 2015; Gergen, 1985; Hibberd, 2005). In an ideal scenario, it introduces a theoretical approach to understanding the world that is cognisant of the continually evolving tapestry of social, cultural, and historical influences. In greater detail, the conceptual underpinnings of social constructionism direct attention to how we, as individuals, "interpret or construct the social and psychological world in specific linguistic, social, and historical contexts" (Schwandt, 1997, p. 19). As a consequence, social constructionism draws attention to the importance of social phenomena and interaction—the manner in which we collectively understand and make sense of the world around us (Knoblauch, 2019). Therefore, from a constructionist lens, every form of understanding, and thus every meaningful aspect of reality, is constructed through our everyday interactions with our social, cultural, and historical environments. To articulate it in terms consistent with the tone and focus of this thesis, we attribute meanings to things in the world

based on how we perceive them in relation to the people around us—a collaborative social process.

Social constructionism puts forward the idea that we should resist the compulsion to determine absolute truths about an assumed 'objective' reality. Rather, it encourages us to reflect on and question our preconceived beliefs about the world, nurturing a disposition that values and appreciates the plurality of interpretations and explanations (Haslanger, 2013; Holstein & Gubrium, 2007). Fundamentally, this implies that, within the mosaic of human understanding, no singular interpretation or explanation holds intrinsic superiority over another. This is because the complexities and subtleties of phenomena cannot be wholly perceived through a single lens. As alluded to by Elder-Vass (2012), this stems from the notion that our knowledge and interpretations are grounded in our individual experiences and the collective understandings shaped by our social environments, which can evolve over time, affecting how we perceive ourselves and the world. In other words, we nurture new understandings through our social interactions with others and the unfolding shifts in our social and cultural environments. This can be attributed to the fact that our immediate social interactions and the unique contexts we find ourselves in have a considerable influence on our ways of understanding, knowing, relating, and being in the world. To elaborate, I am stressing that, along with historical and cultural contexts, it is of equal importance to consider matters that are particular to the unique experiences of each person. Although I will not be delving into specifics about these matters at this moment, I deem it important to recognise the complex interplay between the people in our lives, especially our closest relationships, and the many aspects of our day-to-day lives that shape our perceptions of the world and the meanings of who we are. Below, I detail how through this research the participants and I engaged in meaning-making practices through the telling of and listening to narratives.

Narrative Psychology and the Nature of Stories

As Andrews (2004) reminds us, "human beings are inherently storytellers and it is through the activity of narration that we create meaning in our lives" (p. 77). We all exist within and through narratives that we share to communicate our thoughts and emotions, nurture social relationships with others, and make meaning of who we are (Garvis, 2015). And as pointed out by Hodgetts et al. (2020), every story is indeed constructed. We make decisions about what to say, to whom, where, and when, often leaning on our personal narratives as well as the cultural narratives within the web of social groups we are a part of (Brekhus, 2015; Hodgetts et al., 2020). This inclination to tell stories about ourselves and our experiences is, in many ways, what renders a narrative approach especially important for this project. It allows for a nuanced exploration of the ways we acknowledge, challenge, construct, and re-construct our understanding of the world within specific personal, social, cultural, and historical contexts in which we are embedded (Brekhus, 2015; Garvis, 2015).

Narrative theory is a varied and interdisciplinary field that has been greatly enriched by the valuable insights of philosophers and academics from various branches of knowledge. For the purposes of this study, I will continue to use the terms 'story' and 'narrative' indistinctly because I consider them to be too intertwined to separate. For instance, we use storytelling to communicate various aspects of our lives; we rely on personal and cultural narratives to narrate our lived experiences; and we use stories to educate and pass on tradition and values to others, preserving them across generations.

That said, narrative psychology, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is based on the idea that stories capture the essence of the human experience. And given that in psychology, the narrative approach rests upon the notion that individuals' behaviours and experiences hold

inherent meaning, to truly comprehend the nature of ourselves and others, it is necessary for us to delve into the fabric of meaning that defines and shapes our realities (Nunan & Choi, 2010; Polkinghorne, 2005). Through the act of storytelling, we, as human beings, are constantly involved in the ongoing endeavour of delving into our innermost selves to uncover, question, and broaden the meaning of who we are and the world we live in. In continuation of this idea, **Andrews (2004)** communicated that narratives form the foundation of human psychology, implying that we ground our thoughts, decisions, and interactions on narrative structures. Again, to illustrate this point, consider how our cultural narratives, which influence our perspectives, values, traditions, and customs, are dependent on the social groups we belong to. These stories, selectively chosen and intentionally communicated through the prism of our own cultural reference points, influence how we perceive and interpret our experiences, how we relate to each other, and beyond (Cassim, et al., 2015). This can additionally allow researchers to grasp various and occasionally opposing nuances of meaning, enabling them to blend and analyse these insights for a deeper understanding of individual and collective phenomena (Nesbitt-Larking, 2017).

Moreover, stories have the ability to encapsulate both ordinary and extraordinary aspects of the human experience, serving as an important channel to draw upon the nuanced and intricate frameworks of human understanding when making sense of the routines of our daily existence. In line with this idea, László (2008) observes that the narrative approach naturalises some aspects of the research process because it is akin to how people question and reflect on their own experiences and give coherence to their lives, often in dialogue. For instance, more often than not, a lot of people grapple to understand and describe the reasons behind their actions, leading to unclear or hesitant communication of their thoughts, emotions, and/or circumstances. According to Lee (1994), narratives provide people with a means to story

themselves and their experiences, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how they create and negotiate meaning in their lives. Through the act of storytelling and engaging in dialogue, we have the ability to convey the intricate details of our understanding of ourselves, our relationships with others, and the events that shape our lives—details that a simple factual recounting might otherwise overlook.

Further exploring this thought, narrative psychology has the capacity to shed a comprehensive light on our ways of knowing, understanding, valuing, relating, and being. After all, we actively create and recreate how we do 'being' ourselves in the world through the process of telling and retelling the stories of our everyday realities (Hodgetts et al., 2020; Luyn, 2016), which often include a communal blend of our personal experiences, passions, and goals, as well as our interactions with others and the social roles and expectations we feel obligated to fulfil. Lászlo (2008) himself noted this, emphasising that our narratives bring meaning to our lives by providing, to some degree, context for our sense of identity and how we maintain our social relationships. They enable us to reconcile and harmonise our personal understanding of ourselves with the shared understanding we have with others, such as our family and cultural communities (Mankowski & Thomas, 2000). And just as a compelling story continuously evolves and unravels, so too does our understanding of ourselves. This is because, much like the well-read pages of a story, our sense of self is continuously changing and unfolding, shaped not only by our individual stories but also by the collective narratives that weave through our lives (Hodgetts et al., 2020; Nunan & Choi, 2010). These narratives, both personal and shared, become the threads that weave us into an interconnected web, encompassing an intricate tapestry of stories and realities that enrich how we navigate, negotiate, and form our understandings of who we are in relation to others.

Overall, the narrative approach serves as a tool for creating meaning and gaining insight into how we, as inherent storytellers, construct our thoughts and emotions, form connections with others, and convey tailored perspectives of ourselves and those around us. The meaningfulness of our experiences is captured, which helps in the process of expressing and reflecting on the reasons that underpin our ways of knowing and making sense of the world around us. By delving into the temporal dimension of narratives, I am able to gain understandings of the women's past, present, and perhaps even glimpses of what lies ahead for them. This is because storytelling arguably possesses an unparalleled ability to capture how we make meaning across time and space, sustaining a thread that connects the past, present, and future in a continuous narrative (László, 2008; Rappaport & Mankowski, 2000). On this basis, and considering the wide array of academic experiences that women have spanned from elementary school to tertiary education, I anticipate that their perspectives and attitudes towards education will differ across these distinct stages, especially as students somewhere new.

Sikolohiyang Pilipino

Sikolohiyang Pilipino encompasses a range of research principles and methods that are grounded in Filipino culture, values, and perspectives. These methods seek to address social issues relevant to Filipino communities and encourage cultural respect and sensitivity in psychological research and practice (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000; Reyes, 2015). Focusing on my commitment to promoting Filipina ways of knowing, understanding, valuing, relating, and being within psychology, I will now elaborate on how I have embraced the guiding principles of *pakikipagkuwentuhan* (storytelling or informal conversations), *pagtatanong-tanong* (asking questions), and *pakikiramdam* (feeling for another) and their relevance to my research project.

This study employed *pakikipagkuwentuhan, an indigenous Filipino method for collecting qualitative knowledge through dialogue with participants* (Orteza, 1997). *Pakikipagkuwentuhan* bears semblance to an in-person semi-structured interview, along with other narrative methods often used in qualitative investigations that focus on the subjective experiences and meaning-making of people rather than objective facts (Hayes, 2013). The principle centres on people engaging in storytelling, where participants are ensured the freedom and opportunity to share their personal narratives in their own way and at their own pace (Orteza, 1997). Filipino psychologists developed *pakikipagkuwentuhan* as a method to provide them with an inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to research, as the rapport that develops between the researcher and participant is fundamental to determining the quality and integrity of the data or knowledge collected (Orteza, 1997; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000; Pe-Pua, 2006). Thus, it prioritises conversation and reciprocity, shifting away from the traditional hierarchical dynamics of academic research. This creates a space for participants to voice their perspectives without fear of judgement or coercion, fostering a sense of equality and partnership in the research relationship and process wherein the researcher and participant engage in a mutual exchange of stories, experiences, and understandings (Orteza, 1997). Therefore, building on the works of Herda (1999), I have settled on the term 'research conversation' and use it interchangeably with *'kuwentuhan'* instead of 'interview' in the context of this study.

The *pakikipagkuwentuhan* for this study, which took place with six participants, gathered narratives from Filipina migrant university students about their experiences of migrating to Aotearoa New Zealand with their families. These research conversations were primarily centred around Filipino cultural beliefs and values, exploring their influence on their achievement goals and perceived parental expectations. My *pakikipagkuwentuhan* with these

women also touched on their childhood experiences, tendencies towards perfectionism, emotional wellbeing, familial roles and responsibilities, and the various challenges they have faced and overcome.

Through incorporating *pakikipagkuwentuhan* in my research, I ensured an environment that was welcoming and open, enabling the women to freely share their invaluable thoughts and emotions. These encompass the sharing of unexpected stories, including those that may not directly pertain to the research topic at hand, as well as developments in our meetings that I had not anticipated. This fostered a shared understanding, reciprocal exchange of ideas, and naturalness within our research conversation, which stands in stark contrast to the more rigid mechanical procedures of structured interviews, surveys, or questionnaires (Cassim et al., 2015; Pe-Pua, 2006). For instance, after the research conversation I had with my participant Violet, we both decided to continue our *kuwentuhan* at the university campus bar (see Figure 1). Over drinks, we told stories about our shared journey as Filipina migrant university students, delving into topics that we may not have had the opportunity to bring up during our previous meeting. In many respects, this provides evidence for Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino's (2000) notion that "many a time, the relationship between the researcher and the research participants continues long after the research is over" (p. 59). Therein, through this research encounter, we forged a relationship that went beyond a mere researcher-participant dynamic, to one that was akin to a friendship.

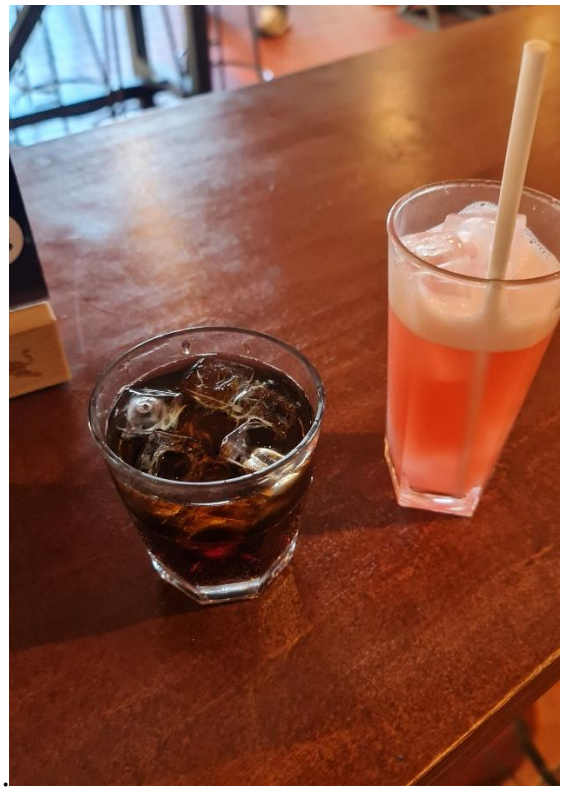

Figure 1. Drinks at the campus bar with Violet

To listen to the women's stories responsibly, I relied on the method of *pagtatanong-tanong* (Pe-Pua, 1989). Thinking with Pe-Pua (1989), I believe that by actively listening to the women's responses and engaging in open dialogue, we can build meaningful relationships and create safe spaces where stories can be exchanged with empathy, consideration, and respect. During *pagtanong-tanong*, the women had the freedom to ask me as many questions as they pleased, essentially taking on the position of a 'researcher' themselves. The importance here is that I give these questions the respect they deserve and do not avoid them, as I must acknowledge and take responsibility for my role as an active participant in our storytelling relationship. In many respects, *pagtanong-tanong* prompted me to engage in a critical reflection of my preconceived notions, biases, and assumptions, which had the potential to influence both the research process and my interpretation of the women's narratives. This also

highlighted a reality of many qualitative and community-oriented research engagements where researcher and participant actively co-construct knowledge, rather than it being simply a one-sided endeavour (Cassim et al., 2020; Hodgetts et al., 2022; Luyn, 2016).

Further, storytelling and sharing experiences are an integral part of Filipino culture, intricately intertwined with the very essence of our social fabric (Gutierrez et al., 2023). Through the process of *pagtanong-tanong*, I set out on a compelling exploration into the women's stories, fully immersing myself in their lived realities and worldviews. During these instances, I was especially mindful of the potential repercussions of my questions for the women. This is because, while asking follow-up questions to improve clarity and provide a thorough comprehension of the women's stories, it was imperative for me to create a space of respect and consideration. Here, I aimed to avoid asking intrusive questions or overstepping any boundaries in order to handle our conversation responsibly, with sensitivity, and with care.

Having been raised in a family that placed a high value on fostering meaningful relationships with others, I also enthusiastically embraced the notion of *pakikiramdam*, a concept that embodies the core of Filipino hospitality. Specifically, it underscores the importance of fostering connections with others founded on qualities such as warmth, respect, and mutual understanding. To bring the matter home, Mataragnon (1987; as cited in Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000) argues that a thorough understanding of *pakikiramdam* requires careful consideration and thoughtful decision-making, as opposed to impulsive actions or a lack of feeling for others. In *Part Two* of this chapter, I will elaborate on this further by discussing how I embodied *pakikiramdam*.

Reflexivity

At this point, a discussion of reflexivity and my role as a researcher becomes vital to this work for two fundamental reasons. First, to critically examine the complex dynamics of

being an ‘insider’ researcher by drawing on research methods as well as guiding principles that are indigenous to Filipino knowledge and experience. Second, to bear in mind that this role encompasses much more than just mechanically doing research, as it involves navigating the multidimensional realities that shape the life stories and worldviews of the women in this study. Through this transparency, the participants involved in this thesis and the readers it touches will recognise how my subjective position, anchored in a *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* perspective of the self and others, has influenced the conclusions drawn from my conversations with the women and the process of creating meaning.

In qualitative community-oriented research like this project, the researcher assumes a role beyond that of a passive observer (Luyn, 2016). Within this study, I was an active collaborator and was deeply immersed in the unfolding narrative of the research, imbuing my interpretations with previous experiences, personal beliefs and values, and theoretical assumptions. Thus, it is necessary for me to acknowledge and reflect on how these dimensions may contribute to the research process.

That being said, throughout this project, I felt it was important to acknowledge my position as a researcher, the multiple roles I assume in my life, and a glimpse into my background as narrated in the introductory chapter. Likewise, in the analysis or sense-making part of this research, I lay bare the shifts in my understanding that I navigated through during the course of the research project into a personal journal (Gemignani et al., 2023). These shifts in understanding stemmed from events that unfolded alongside the study, including facing academic burnout and other comparable circumstances. Conversely, they might have emerged from the self-reflective process I engaged in as I analysed and immersed myself in the women’s stories. Over the course of the research enquiry, I have maintained the conscious effort of documenting my thoughts, reflections, and experiences as they surface (Mann, 2016; Whitaker

& Atkinson, 2021), with an eye to how they intertwine, influence, and perhaps add depth and texture to the layers of this project.

In sum, it is worth noting that my role as researcher is not an independent thread, so to speak. Throughout this research, I deliberately stitched in threads of my cultural knowledge and experiences as a Filipina migrant university student, along with my personal understanding of the emotional pressures stemming from perceived parental expectations, as these factors intertwine with my personal and academic lives. Through various means, these factors have truly enriched my understanding, fostering a deeper appreciation and immeasurable gratitude for the women who graciously shared their stories with me during this project. In the upcoming sections of this chapter, I will detail the methods I used for data collection and analysis.

Part Two: My Method for the *Kuwentuhan* (Storytelling or Informal Conversations) with Filipina Migrant University Students

Mapping Out My Strategy

For the purposes of this research project, I engaged in in-depth research conversations with six Filipina migrant university students. I invited Filipina university students within Tāmaki Makaurau to participate in my study, given that this is where I reside. I actively sought out face-to-face research conversations, which allow for more relaxed, natural, and informal conversations that are unique to that setting. This brought to mind what Johnson et al. (2021) had mentioned, namely that face-to-face meetings allow for more natural conversations and may encourage greater openness about one's emotions and experiences. Moreover, in the context of *pakikiramdam*, it is important to highlight that face-to-face meetings also contribute to nurturing a sense of genuine warmth and care, a typical display of hospitality among

Filipinos. This, in turn, establishes spaces conducive to trust and familiarity, which subsequently yielded rich and detailed storytelling.

Invitation to Participate

The study's inclusion criteria were that the Filipino women had moved to Aotearoa New Zealand either temporarily or permanently and were enrolled in a university within Tāmaki Makaurau. There were two main reasons behind these stipulations. Firstly, I needed to know if the woman I was having a research conversation with had grown up in an environment or household that centralised Filipino cultural values. Secondly, I wanted to ensure that she had an understanding of the challenges faced by migrant university students in reconciling their cultural beliefs and values with their academic goals, both before and after moving to Aotearoa New Zealand.

I reached out to some acquaintances in the Filipina community within my social circles to have a casual conversation about the study details. I also went to various social events and gatherings organised for and by Filipino students in key tertiary institutions in Tāmaki Makaurau, as well as social gatherings organised by local Filipino church communities and introduced my research. By doing so, I hoped word-of-mouth about the project would spread among Filipino students.

It was important here that I made sure to approach people in a subtle manner. This is because doing so fosters an atmosphere conducive to genuine conversation, where people can freely express their thoughts and decisions without feeling pressured or judged. Thus, instead of directly and abruptly asking women if they would be interested in participating in my study, I opted to approach them in a friendly and inviting manner, just like I would with someone I had just met. Indeed, when asked about my academic background or any university-related topics, I seamlessly integrated my research project into the conversation, providing a general

overview of the study to help them understand the nature of their potential participation. And if a woman demonstrated signs of interest, I asked her if she would like me to send her a copy of the invitation to participate (see Appendix A) via email after the social event to provide her with a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of my research.

Among the ten women who had conversations with me expressing interest in my study, six of them eagerly agreed to participate in my research. At this stage, I underscored that each of them was not obligated to pursue their decision and had the option to change their mind if they wished. On receipt of their replies, I informed each woman that their engagements would take place in two stages. This will be discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs. There were no instances of women withdrawing from the study at any time.

Engaging with Filipina Students

My engagement with participants occurred in two stages. Stage 1 involved photovoice, where I reached out to each of the six women via the Zoom video conferencing platform. Since this was our first interaction, I spent some time getting to know each woman and outlining the research process, should she still choose to participate in my research. And in these moments, the subtle sense of emotional distance stemming from our unfamiliarity dissolved, making room for genuine conversation to take root. This is because, despite the remote nature of our conversation, our meeting via Zoom enabled us to witness and feel—to an extent—the nuanced changes in each other's facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice. Each of these subtleties contributes to an atmosphere rich with empathy and emotional connection, which is crucial for nurturing deep and meaningful relationships between the researcher and the participant and even beyond.

Following that, I proceeded to outline further details of the project and provided an opportunity for each woman to ask questions. Upon their confirmation to participate, I promptly

provided them with a consent form to be signed and returned to me via email (see Appendix B). After gaining consent, I requested each woman to take or choose up to four photographs of what they considered best captured their experience as a migrant university student in Aotearoa New Zealand and email them to me. We carried out this task in anticipation of our next scheduled meeting. I explained that they had two weeks to complete this and reiterated the study's confidentiality, the use of pseudonyms, and their right to withdraw at any time. After I received the images they selected, we set a time to meet in-person for our research conversation. This was confirmed through email. Prior to Stage 2, I carefully and thoroughly anonymised the photographs selected by the women. I sent the revised versions of these documents to each of them via email for their review. The documents included a consent form (see Appendix C) for the use of photographs, which sought their approval regarding the level of anonymity provided. Additionally, I requested their consent for the potential use of these photographs in this thesis, as well as any future publications and presentations that stemmed from this research. Stage 2 proceeded upon obtaining their consent.

In the lead-up to Stage 2, my conversations with the women, I took great care in crafting the research encounter and conversation to foster a relaxed and informal atmosphere, resembling the casual tone I usually adopt when I strike up a conversation with the people in my day-to-day life. This approach returns me to my aforementioned point of discussion concerning the adoption of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* research methodologies, such as the concepts of *pakikipagkuwentuhan* and *pakikiramdam*. So, in meetings with each woman, I introduced myself with a cheerful expression, weaving in a touch of light-hearted banter. On top of this, I took great care to prioritise the comfort of the women by accommodating their requests to schedule their interviews after their university classes on a day that was most convenient for them. As a result, I suggested meeting at a coffee shop near their university campus before

heading off together to a private room in a nearby library for our subsequent *kuwentuhan*. The reason behind this decision was my belief that the women would experience greater comfort and would feel more at ease if we met in person first, in a space that was less formal and intimidating.

At the coffee shop, I offered each woman food and beverage of their choosing to enjoy during our conversations, with the expenses covered by the stipend I got from the university. The underlying practice of sharing food is an enduring thread in the fabric of our daily social interactions as Filipinos, whether it is an intimate get-together or a grand reunion. For instance, in the Philippines, the act of sharing food and eating together is a deeply communal and sentimental practice regarded as a heart-warming gesture, symbolising a sense of belonging and collective identity with our fellow human beings, our *kapwa tao*. Food sharing among Filipinos can also serve as a method of building rapport between study participants and researchers in a meaningful way through hospitality during the research process (Pe-Pua, 2006). Sharing food with participants and paying for it (rather than offering them food or drink as a 'treat' or gift) was also my way of acknowledging the fact that these women were so generous in sharing what little free time they had with me, despite their busy schedules as university students and other work obligations. To clarify, what I mean is that sharing, such as eating or drinking with my participants, is meaningful and symbolises the equal power dynamic I sought to establish in my research encounter—an experience we engaged in *together*. And instead of presenting it as a 'gift', which would establish a one-sided dynamic and an expectation for something in return, the simple act of coming together to share food in each other's company emphasised that our research conversation went beyond the academic nature of our meeting. It symbolised a sense of community and collaboration, as well as the depth of the relationship and collective experience we share as Filipina migrant university students.

As part of my commitment to maintaining a relaxed and informal atmosphere during my research conversations with the women, I consistently initiated *kuwentuhan* about our personal lives, families, and the happenings in our everyday realities. After all, it is precisely through these *kuwentuhan*, which are communal and collective in character, that we navigate our shared human experience and build meaningful relationships. This aspect is integral to *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Enriquez, 1992; Orteza, 1997; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000), as well as a broader humanistic approach to engaging with people within a relational context, as acknowledged by numerous Indigenous and Migrant scholars, as well as other scholars within the field of psychology (Cassim et al., 2020; Hodgetts et al., 2020; Li et al., 2018; Luyn, 2016). Each research conversation lasted anywhere from an hour to an hour and a half.

In Stage 2, the research conversations possessed a distinct storytelling quality. I aimed to encourage *kuwentuhan*, or informal conversation, and establish an atmosphere where women felt at ease expressing their unique and compelling narratives. Consequently, our *kuwentuhan* mostly revolved around the photographs that each of them had shared. I asked them to tell me a story about the meaning behind the images, the individuals and/or objects depicted within them (if applicable), and the reasoning behind their choosing these photographs. As our research conversations unfolded, I found myself right there alongside them, providing them a shoulder to lean on with empathetic words and encouragement if and as needed. Due to this, we instantly felt a connection owing to our shared experiences. We expressed our emotional understanding by saying things like, “I completely understand what you’re going through.” Reflecting on this brings to mind the profound impact of truly listening to someone’s stories as a way to empathetically step into their world. Echoing this sentiment, Moloney (1995) points out that “storytelling can be thought of as a way of caring: caring for the individual who is telling the story providing her with a vehicle for looking over her life, and caring for the listener

who gains from the wisdom of the storyteller's experiences" (p. 108). This provides an alternative approach to conducting research, where data collection adheres to a more consecutive, single-direction, and circumscribed process. Throughout our interactions, there was a natural and meaningful sharing of experiences that helped to foster a bond between myself and the women. Once the research conversation concluded, a few moments were dedicated to wrapping up our *kuwentuhan*. During these moments, I discovered that the women enjoyed engaging in casual conversation about a range of subjects, even if they were not directly connected to the focus of our interview. Overall, it was a respectful, delightful, and ultimately real way to wrap up our time together.

Although my intention was to carry out the research conversations in a relaxed and conversational manner, allowing, where possible, to let the woman share her story, I did have specific topics or questions in mind for each woman. It was during those moments that I relied on my conversation guide (see Appendix E), which consisted of broad topics and prompts that I could use to direct our *kuwentuhan* if necessary. Nevertheless, I only raised these questions in the event that she may have glossed over any pertinent details from her story.

For their time, the women received a koha (or gift of thanks) of a $40 supermarket voucher. This was gifted before the interview began to ensure that they did not feel that receiving the voucher was dependent upon their responses or having to complete the full interview if they did not wish to.

The conversations were all digitally audio recorded and transcribed. They also had the option to not have the audio of the research conversation recorded at all and were able to have the recording turned off at any point. In practice, all of the women consented to being digitally recorded. Every research conversation was carefully recorded, complete with meticulous notes and a comprehensive summary of our *kuwentuhan*.

Following the transcription process, the women were emailed a transcript release consent form (see Appendix D) along with a copy of their transcript and given a month to review, withdraw, or approve it. They were able to make any changes they wished, including the deletion of information without the need for explanation, but it was requested that they identify clearly where these changes had been made so that they were not missed or overlooked. Barring the occasional typographical correction, all of the women gave their final approval to their transcripts without making any changes or withdrawing their consent (either partially or in full). Here, I stress the importance of the relationship between the researcher and the participant being founded on respect for each other's knowledge of what is being researched (Gemignani et al., 2023; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000b; Whitaker & Atkinson, 2021). Such a foundation enables the collaborative creation of a narrative that embraces diverse perspectives and various ways of knowing (Lee, 1994). So, as much as my status as an 'insider' researcher exists in relation to my relationship with the women at present (Pe-Pua, 2006), I also recognise that the women in my study are also the experts at making sense of their own realities.

My personal experience as a Filipina migrant university student, as well as my subjective understanding of Filipino cultural beliefs and values, have been essential in my journey to completing this research. They have enabled me to genuinely understand, establish a connection with, and make meaningful contributions to the stories of the women involved in this study. By engaging in conversational turn-taking and sharing of university experiences, we as a group enhanced our understanding of our individual and shared narratives within the research context.

Ethical Considerations

This project was deemed 'low risk' by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee and therefore ethical considerations were assessed via peer review. (Low Risk

Notification: 4000027044). I was guided by the Code of Ethics of the New Zealand Psychological Society (2002) for this project, alongside cultural dictates of respectfully engaging with communities as underpinned by *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Orteza, 1997; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000; Pe-Pua, 2006).

A key point of consideration in relation to ethics for this project was safeguarding participant identities, the inclusion of photographs provided by the women to help their storytelling, and the detailed discussions about the women's lives and the people who were a part of their stories. I handled this information with the utmost confidentiality, and only I, the researcher, knew the identities of the participants. Pseudonyms were also used to ensure that women's anonymity was maintained. Participants in this study had the liberty to choose and use a pseudonym of their preference. I placed considerable importance on this aspect to uphold relational ethics (Clandinin, 2013; Hodgetts et al., 2022) throughout my research endeavour. Principles of relational ethics closely align with the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* values that underpinned this project. This is because it not only empowered women to take control of their own stories and experiences, but it also increased their confidence and willingness to actively participate in the research process (beyond the interviews or conversations), thereby encouraging a more candid and transparent approach to our *kuwentuhan*.

Furthermore, any personal or identifying details that arose during our *kuwentuhan*, such as the names of family members, areas that they lived in, or their occupation or place of work, were anonymised or were omitted entirely. Additionally, faces were intentionally obscured in the photographs to protect the anonymity of the people featured in them.

Finally, it was important to ensure that participants were able to make an informed decision to participate in this research and provide consent without any pressure or coercion. I utilised the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* perspective of *pakikiramdam*, or 'feeling for another'.

Through the lens of *pakikiramdam*, I was able to navigate ethical complexities relating to integrity, assuring the women that my relationship with them would not be transactional, as is common for most interactions between researcher and participant (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000; Pe-Pua, 2006). Rather, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, my goal was to truly embody the spirit of Filipino hospitality. By this, I mean that I considered the women as highly regarded guests in my research endeavour, ensuring that their decisions and involvement before, during, and after the interview process were respected and that their preferences were given the utmost priority and consideration. This is especially valuable in this research, given that many Filipinos struggle to decline when directly asked to participate in an interview or a survey (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). In the following section, I provide a brief introduction to each of the women who participated in this research through a series of vignettes.

The Participants

All six women were between 19 and 24 years of age and had arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand, between 2004 and 2013. All of them were current university students in various tertiary institutions across Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, working towards completing their undergraduate and postgraduate degrees.

Bell

Bell expressed herself as a warm, caring, and intelligent woman who was very accommodating when talking to me about her experiences. Bell was 24 years old at the time of our *kuwentuhan* and lived with her family. The youngest of two siblings, Bell attended school in the Philippines until Grade 1 (Year 2) before migrating to Aotearoa New Zealand with her family in 2004.

Having finished her bachelor's degree in psychology, Bell decided to follow her passions and enrolled in an undergraduate law degree programme. She worked part-time at the time of our research conversation, typically putting in two to three days each week. In the midst of juggling her work and educational commitments, she shared with me that her greatest source of pride was completing her first degree and now embarking on a second, all while maintaining a vibrant social life.

Violet

Violet immediately struck me as a self-assured and confident woman who radiated a deep and obvious passion for her field of study. Violet was 24 years old and lived with her family. The oldest of three siblings, Violet moved to Aotearoa New Zealand in 2010, alongside her family in fifth grade (Year 6).

Violet described her final semester of her undergraduate degree as a period of dwindling motivation. And so, she decided to take a break from her studies before pursuing her postgraduate degree to relax and recharge from the pressures of university. Throughout this period, she was employed on a full-time basis. As she looked back on her journey, Violet highlighted that her greatest sense of fulfilment came from her unwavering commitment to completing her university education.

Luna

I was instantly captivated by Luna's warmth and friendliness. Luna was 21 years old and lived with her family at the time of our research conversation. Luna, the middle child of her family, was a compassionate and bright woman. Although she recognised her tendency to be highly self-critical, she found comfort in her religious beliefs, reminding her of her inherent strength. Luna and her family migrated to Aotearoa New Zealand in 2002 when she was 2 years old.

In discussing her choice to pursue her field of study, Luna expressed her satisfaction in how it allows her to gain a deeper understanding of herself and subsequently share the enriching experience that comes from honouring oneself, thereby assisting others in their own journey towards self-reconnection. Luna worked part-time at the time of our research conversation. In sharing her story, Luna acknowledged that her proudest achievement was her persistence in keeping on moving forward in her studies without giving up.

Sky

It was clear right from the beginning of our *kuwentuhan* that Sky stood firmly in her belief in herself. Sky was 24 years old and lived with her family. As the eldest of three children, Sky attended school in the Philippines before migrating to Aotearoa New Zealand in 2007 with her family. She continued her studies here as a Year 6 student.

Fuelled by her childhood dream to follow her father's path, Sky is currently working towards her postgraduate degree. She was engaged in part-time employment at the time of our research conversation. Sky's narrative of her academic journey and her relationship with her parents is what she credits for her proudest achievement. She holds a strong belief that, with unwavering determination and laser-like focus, the realm of possibilities becomes boundless.

Cindy

Sharing stories with Cindy, I could not help but be struck by the overwhelming sense of her kindness, thoughtfulness, and selflessness when it came to the people she held dear. Cindy was 24 years old and lived with her family. The eldest of two children, Cindy and her mother moved to Aotearoa New Zealand in 2008 as a Year 5 student, joining her father.

Having done her bachelor's degree *for* her parents, Cindy is currently pursuing a postgraduate degree *for herself*. Cindy was employed on a part-time basis during our research conversation. She described the complexities of her educational path, with each stage intricately

connected to the bonds of familial love. In talking about her proudest achievement, she shared with me that it was her decision to take a leap of faith and pursue something that pushed her beyond her usual boundaries, fuelled by her belief in her own potential.

Blue

Blue expressed herself as a daughter with deep gratitude for her parents' unwavering support. Among the women in this study, Blue, who was 22 at the time of our research conversation, stood out as the only woman who lived independently from her family while pursuing her tertiary education. One of four children, Blue migrated with her mother and siblings in 2013 when she was 12 years old as a Year 7 student.

Throughout our *kuwentuhan*, Blue shared her thoughts on the difficulties of being independent while studying far from her family, crediting her parents' love and support for helping her persevere. During our research conversation, Blue was employed on a part-time basis. Speaking about the pinnacle of her university experience, Blue highlighted that despite the challenges posed by life circumstances, she was able to finish her studies with flying colours and without any delays.

Making sense of our kuwentuhan

The analysis process, or sense-making part of this project, involved an iterative and interpretive process that began during my in-depth *kuwentuhan* with the participants and continued as I listened to their narratives captured on the audio recordings. Here, I delved into the women's stories of being Filipina migrant university students in relation to cultural, societal, and personal narratives surrounding migration, education, achievement goals, cultural identity, and notion of self, as well as existing academic understanding and knowledge relating to these interrelated narratives. Furthermore, I meticulously penned down my thoughts and reflections in my personal journal along with each transcript as I read and re-read them. In

doing so, I combed through anything that sparked my attention or seemed out of the ordinary and then sorted them according to meaningful components in relation to their significance to the objectives of this research. Throughout this 'rinse and repeat' process of reading and finding themes, followed by re-reading and re-identifying themes, I reached out to the participating women to review, make revisions, and provide feedback on my initial interpretations of their narratives. As Herda (1999) points out: "Research is a reflective and communal act" (p. 5). Hence, my primary objective was to create a narrative together with the women, one that, although it can never be fully complete, transforms into a story that opens up new ways of thinking, doing, and being reflective of our shared sense-making as Filipina migrant university students.

Further, every aspect of our everyday lives, including what we perceive, how we act, and how we think, continually moulds the horizon of our understanding (Gadamer, 1975). So, I immersed myself in my *kuwentuhan* with the women, delving deep into their stories until I felt content that I had fully and critically grasped each narrative, both on its own and as a collective whole. For example, initially convinced that the women's stories could be neatly 'boxed' and systematically categorised into distinct themes, I made the decision to classify them using a table (see Appendix F). Unbeknownst to me, this would soon prove to be one of my earliest misunderstandings, or what Gadamer (1975) refers to as a limitation on one's 'horizon'. At this point in the analysis, I admit that I neglected to acknowledge the inherent messiness of storytelling and the fact that the women's narratives were too intricate and multifaceted to easily summarise and fit into a simple 'neat' table. Once I grasped this limit of my understanding, I began to truly appreciate the possibilities within each woman's story, even when they appeared to be contradictory. Specifically, I made the conscious decision to embrace the messiness and begin the sense-making process anew, meticulously mapping and sketching out the connections

and patterns I found within the women's individual and collective narratives (see Appendix G). These latter analyses were hand-drawn representations, which were enriched with visual elements such as highlights, colours, and the inclusion of the photographs the women shared with me. In retrospect, these additions helped me see how their stories intersect, diverge, or even contradict each other. Finally, the themes and sub-themes that emerged through the iterative nature of this analytical process were mapped in a way that reflected the intricate and unpredictable nature of narrative storytelling. The resulting map captured the non-linear progression of plotlines, with branches, loops, and surprising twists (see Appendix G).

Here, I elaborate that my analytical process moves beyond a top-down approach that draws insights from literature in an abductive manner. Instead, I engaged with the women's narratives with a bottom-up approach. By this, I mean that I took insights directly from the excerpts and the women themselves to explore and uncover the significant meanings of their narratives. I subsequently engaged in further research, locating relevant literature to develop a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of the complexities that women navigate through as students somewhere new. In doing so, I revisit the idea of how meaning, under conscious consideration, is a social process that is shaped and re-shaped through interaction (Hodgetts et al., 2020). Herda (1999) reinforces this concept when she says, "the revelation of meaning does not occur as a result of abstract reasoning or formulations" (p. 31).

The sense-making process was also guided and shaped by research methods that are indigenous to Filipino experience and Filipino cultural concepts and values. In essence, by placing emphasis on Filipino perspectives and ways of being, it better positions this thesis to address the breadth and complexity of Filipino experiences (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000) and to better understand the interconnected social world of Filipina migrant university students within the wider psychological and sociological discourses. In this way, I can potentially invite

others, including you, the reader, to immerse yourselves in the stories of achievement of these women, offering a glimpse into life from their perspective. The findings of the present study will be discussed in the subsequent analysis chapters of this thesis.

Chapter Three: Education as a Group Project

Throughout the course of our time in university, students will inevitably be involved in collaborative endeavours, such as group projects. From negotiating the successful completion of small-scale reports to delivering final-year presentations, fostering cooperative and meaningful relationships with others to achieve a shared goal is an integral and ongoing process that is woven into the fabric of our academic experience. Group projects create space for peer support and collaboration, cultivate leadership abilities, and, in some situations, even nurture a sense of social or group identity. There are groups that operate seamlessly, where members feel comfortable sharing their diverse perspectives, voicing concerns, and engaging in constructive conversations. However, circumstances where members prefer to prioritise the opinion of the majority are also a reality of group projects, which may lead to an erosion of individual autonomy and independent judgement.

The *kuwentuhan* (storytelling or informal conversations) I had with the participants of the present study revealed that these group dynamics were not only limited to their university experiences and relationships with their peers, but also extended to their family lives. Much like the dynamics of a group project, women found themselves simultaneously navigating their achievement goals alongside the opinions and expectations of their parents, broader familial groups, and the wider societies of both host and home countries. In the broadest sense, this analogy of education as being a 'group project' seems fitting as it aligns with the significant role of education within Filipino culture, which is perceived as a shared endeavour that can improve not only our own social status but also those of our families and fellow members of our community, our *kapwa*.

The present chapter delves into the influence of familial expectations on the narratives of achievement goals in this study. To set the scene, the chapter begins with an analysis of the women's childhood recollections of their academic experiences while growing up in the Philippines, encompassing both familial and educational contexts. Drawing insights from participant photographs and research conversations, this chapter then flows on to unravel Cindy, Luna, and Violet's stories of navigating, negotiating, and/or resisting their parents' expectations with their own achievement goals. I unpack these ideas by delving into the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* concepts and values of *hiya* and *pakikisama*. The remainder of this chapter analyses the concept of perfectionism in relation to women's struggles with positioning their notion of self within the boundaries of familial expectations in relation to academic achievements. Finally, this chapter concludes by discussing how *hiya* and *pakikisama* can serve as a double-edged sword—one that can stifle honest expression and also bring about harmony.

Schooling in the home country

The childhood recollections of my participants' academic experiences in the Philippines offer a valuable foundation and backdrop for the present relationship these women have with their achievement goals and their identities as Filipina migrant university students. I consider the ways in which both informal and institutional, implicit and explicit experiences during childhood have played a pivotal role in moulding women's perspectives regarding the importance of education, as well as what is understood as the norm and/or socially unacceptable within this setting. The notion of 'being educated', which is widely considered a means to achieve a 'successful' life, left an enduring impression on the women and, consequently, reveals the depth of their immersion in the rhetoric surrounding academic achievement. This was evident, for instance, in the brief vignettes of Blue and Cindy's

childhood experiences in the Philippines. They reflected on a salient moment during their childhood when their parents imparted a *babala*, or a word of caution, saying, *"Ayusin at ipagpatuloy mo pag aaral mo kung ayaw mo maging basurera o fast-food worker ka."* [Take care of and continue your studies if you don't want to end up as a garbage collector or a fast-food worker]:

> I remember being told before, "You have to study hard or else you'll end up like a *basurero* [garbage collector] or something like that." [laughs]
>
> *- Blue*

> When I was in grade school, my dad would *hatid* me [drop me off] to school, and he said, *"Kailangan mo magaral ng mabuti."* [You need to study well.] And that stuck with me […] or they would say, *"Di ka g-graduate? Sa McDonald's ka lang magtratrabaho."* [You're not going to graduate? You'll just end up working at McDonald's.]
>
> *- Cindy*

The prevalence of hegemonic narratives surrounding education and academic achievement within Filipino culture is unmistakable in these excerpts. As suggested by the *babala*, parents often illustrate the prospect of becoming a *'basurero'* and/or a 'fast-food worker' to instil a sense of motivation in their children, underscoring the importance of striving for academic achievement. In this context, the terms *'basurero'* and 'fast-food worker' serve as metaphors denoting occupations that are subject to being socially undervalued, characterised by strenuous physical labour, and burdened with economic disadvantages. Therefore, without adequate education and diligent effort in their studies, students may ultimately find themselves in less desirable socioeconomic positions and employment. While this commonly used phrase may not necessarily hold absolute truth in contemporary society (particularly in a New Zealand context), the underlying message here is that acquiring quality education can result in increased employment and financial stability, enhanced social standing, and an improved standard of

living (Alampay & Garcia, 2019; Peddie & Liu, 2021). Likewise, these experiences taught Blue and Cindy that any shortcomings in their academic achievements were not only socially unacceptable but also should elicit a sense of fear and shame to motivate them to strive for improvement.

The idea that 'learning begins at home' becomes relevant here. This notion, as described by Oropilla and Guadana (2021), conveys that it is within the home that Filipino children first learn the complexities of the world around them. By employing this concept, we can recognise that our initial understanding of the social dynamics that exist within our own families, as well as those outside of them, is learned and acquired through the intergenerational stories told by our elderly relatives, such as our parents (Espiritu, 2003; Oropilla & Guadana, 2021). As our first teachers of our cultural norms, beliefs, and values, we learn from them that education is a *'kayamanan'* (treasure), what contributes to our social status, and how to make normative decisions within the context of our social and cultural surroundings. Without a doubt, the involvement of significant others (or 'group members'), such as our parents, plays a foundational role in shaping the standards and expectations relating to our academic achievements.

Alongside the parents of my participants, this lens on education was reinforced and incentivised at educational institutions through the high standards and expectations placed on students, even those at a young age. In our conversation concerning the significance of education in the Philippines, Bell reflected on the presence of ranking systems within classrooms that function as measures of students' intellect or academic achievements:

> You went to school in the Philippines right? Did you have that Top 10 ranking thing at your school where they'd rank you from top 1 to top 10? … They even ranked how smart you are or how good of a student you are at kindergarten [laughs]. I went to a private school as well, so it's more messed up because if you were in honours, your

> tuition fees basically get discounted or you don't have to pay at all. And public schools don't have a good education, so if you wanted a *great* education, a private school was the way to go. So, there's the pressure to *be* the best and *only* the best.
>
> *- Bell*

The 'top 10 rankings' within Philippine classrooms instilled in Bell the prevailing notion that achieving exceptional academic performance is rewarded by prestige, recognition, and potentially a free education. This rhetoric implies that the notion of being a 'good' student is primarily based on academic grades and performance, thereby fostering an understanding that associates achievement goals and success with external validation, even in early stages of education such as kindergarten. Moreover, the implementation of free education is designed to incentivise parents to view their children's academic achievements as a group endeavour, potentially leading to financial relief or rewards for the family as a whole. Indeed, this further reinforces the age-old belief that Filipino parents have passed down to their children: education is a *kayamanan* that, with time, brings about valuable opportunities that can benefit the entire family.

Sky shared a similar story concerning her educational experience in the Philippines, where she detailed her thoughts of being in the top 10 ranks of her class throughout her schooling years. In reference to this, she said:

> I felt like I was just trying to keep up with the smart kids in my class, but I suppose it feels good to have that competitive edge. And being in the top 10 really boosted my self-esteem, you know? It made me feel worthy for some reason.
>
> *- Sky*

Sky's use of the word 'worthy' to describe herself in the excerpt above illustrates the prevalent, albeit sometimes unspoken, struggle in constructing one's notion of self while grappling with feelings of shame or inadequacy in comparison to social norms and expectations. Additionally, this existence of hierarchal systems within everyday Filipino

classrooms serves as a direct manifestation of the country's colonial past. As discussed in the Literature Review in *Chapter One*, the enduring influence of American colonialism on the Philippines' education system (e.g., Coloma, 2013; Eder, 2016; Rafael, 2015) can be seen through the country's highly competitive academic environment, which is a consequence of the adoption of a merit-based system introduced at the time. These dynamics demonstrate that the relationship between achievement goals (as in the case of my participants) and external validation is influenced by broader sociocultural discourses.

After engaging in these conversations, I took the opportunity to reflect on my own history pertaining to meeting the academic standards and expectations set by others in my research diary. Immersing myself in this practice of self-reflection led me to a deeper, more personal realisation of the underlying reasons why my research objectives are centred on academic experiences and achievement goals within conversations about sociocultural values and expectations, as well as notions of self. As indicated in the following excerpt from my research diary:

> *One of my earliest memories from my childhood is my Filipino mother's constant warning about the potential consequences of neglecting my schoolwork, specifically not having a successful future. From Preparatory Class (Year 1) to Grade 2 (Year 3), I had this strong desire to consistently be among the top 10 students in our classroom because being recognised and acknowledged by my teachers for my achievements was incredibly rewarding to me. When I was sixteen, I would eagerly update my parents on how well I was doing in school, even if they didn't ask, by telling them the remaining credits I needed left in order to achieve an Excellence endorsement. By the time I was twenty-two, I had allowed my GPA to define my identity. This was the age when I was at war with myself. I possessed an all-or-nothing mindset and placed significant importance on my academic achievements as the sole measure of my self-worth, which, at the time, was not much at all.*
>
> *- Research Diary entry [05.05.2023]*

In the course of examining my personal experiences and those of my participants, I am truly taken aback at how early we took on this lens. Similar to Blue and Cindy, my mother's *babala* stories played a role in some of my earliest memories of academic expectations. Similar to Bell and Sky, I found myself in the same pattern of associating my identity and how I understood myself to my academic achievements, which could be a cause for concern, as reflected in the language I used in the excerpt above ('I was at war with myself'). The excerpts shared above communicate to us how the broader social narratives surrounding education in Filipino society can force these women onto a path of striving for academic success, which can be a double-edged sword. In light of this, the following section explores the ways in which familial relationships between my participants and their parents unfold, specifically in relation to the expectations placed on academic achievements.

Education is a family affair

To better explain the conceptual relations between familial expectations and the narratives surrounding academic achievement, I will focus on the underlying cultural concepts that shape my participants' relationships with their education as migrant university students and with their role in the family as Filipina daughters. In doing so, I hope to shed light on how their inclination towards adopting socially motivated achievement goals is patterned through sociocultural notions about being a 'good' Filipino daughter and a 'good' student. Beginning with Cindy and Luna's stories, I will consider the intersections between the influence of social and cultural factors in our everyday lives and our personal understandings of co-authoring our beliefs and attitudes in academic contexts.

"It was really for them that I did the Bachelor's."

In talking about her university experience, Cindy shared her feelings of unease that she felt while pursuing her Bachelor's degree. She framed this discomfort as something she had to accept and demonstrate courage in bearing:

> When I decided to move universities and I told my mum, my mum was like, *"Paano yung ginawa mo dun sa kabilang university. Parang sayang."* [What will happen to the things you've done in the other university? It's kind of a waste.] And I was just like, "No mum…" I couldn't bring myself to say that I didn't pass the exams.
>
> - *Cindy*

Referring to a time when she was grappling with uncertainties about her academic progress, Cindy describes navigating the struggles of concealing her decision to transfer to a different university from her mother. As she reflected on the encounter, she expressed a sense of self-reproach and proceeded to explain the experience:

> If you ever failed a paper, you wouldn't want to tell your parents about it right? They don't need to know [laughs] [sniffles] Just save them the worry I guess from thinking, *"Anong gagawin ko sa anak ko? Hindi pumapasa sa mga klase."* [What am I going to do with my child? She's not passing her classes.]
>
> - *Cindy*

Cindy's story speaks to the presence of *hiya*, (shame or embarrassment) (Bulatao, 1964; Lasquety-Reyes, 2016), in relation to academic underperformance and failure. From all outward appearances, Cindy exhibits a deep resolve to conceal her academic challenges to maintain the façade that everything was perfectly fine. Rather than being perceived as a lie to 'save face' with her parents, this act is motivated by her deep sense of consideration and sensibility towards her parents, ensuring that they would not have to bear any unnecessary weight of stress or unease. In this sense, *hiya* is characterised by her genuine concern and sensitivity towards her parents' possible reaction if they were to learn that their daughter was

not doing well in her classes. In light of this, Cindy's act of 'saving her parents the worry' extends beyond the mere decision of concealing a circumstance that could potentially lead to feelings of internalised shame or embarrassment towards her parents. Instead, it speaks to a degree of propriety that guided her to prioritise her parents' feelings over her own struggles. The essence of this narrative is well pronounced and captured through the lens of two photographs: Cindy's graduation day (see Figure 2) and a selfie of her crying after receiving her graduation invitation (see Figure 3).

Below, Cindy's account offers us a glimpse into her pursuit of her achievement, a goal that is deeply intertwined with her social relationships, especially with her family:

> My family just seemed so happy—aww, I'm gonna cry. But yeah, it was really for them that I did the Bachelor's [voice breaks] I just remember going through that ceremony and I was like… I don't know like… kind of detached? It was a celebration for me, but I don't know. I just didn't feel a sense of [voice breaks] fulfilment. And the thing is, they played Moana's *'How Far I Will Go'*. I was fighting my tears, like oh my gosh… And the thing is, I've never seen my dad's smile so big in this photo (see Figure 1).
>
> *- Cindy*

Figure 2. Cindy and her family celebrating her graduation day

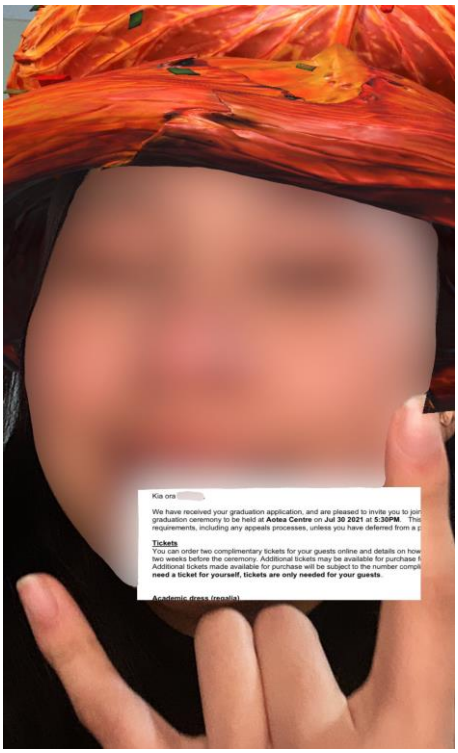

Figure 3. Cindy's crying selfie after receiving her graduation invitation

A graduation ceremony usually entails a palpable sense of happiness, excitement, and a sense of achievement as our loved ones cheer us on and celebrate us. For Cindy, however, it brought about undecipherable sounds of hollowness, where she struggled to process and make

sense of the achievement as being hers, as if the mentally and emotionally taxing façade that she maintained throughout her academic journey still lingered. Perhaps this is because, to some extent, she has unknowingly internalised a deep sense of *hiya*. Cindy's selfie captures this (see Figure 3), unveiling a raw and vulnerable display of emotions, stemming from the news that she passed all of her exams and will be graduating. In our conversation, she spoke of how a wave of relief washed over her upon receiving her graduation letter. After all, she had already assured everyone, including her parents, that she would soon be walking across the stage to receive her diploma; retaking any papers was completely out of the question. In this context, her graduation transcends being a mere reflection of her academic achievements. It defines who she is as her parents' daughter who has persevered through setbacks and challenges because choosing not to do so would mean to abandon who she is—a 'good' Filipino daughter who prioritises her family's welfare above her own. For Cindy, her graduation and degree were something she did for her family and not necessarily for herself.

Cindy's reference to her pursuit of completing her Bachelor's degree for the sake of her family also links to the concept of *pakikisama*, (companionship or 'going along with others') (Lasquety-Reyes, 2016; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). And in tracing how Cindy navigated her experience of starting anew at a different university, I could not help but feel the immense weight of her journey:

> I was doing five papers in the last semester of my Bachelor's degree because I wanted to graduate as soon as possible. I've already taken too long. So when I saw the graduation email (see Figure 3) saying, *"We are pleased to invite you…"*, oh my God [voice breaks] It was just that sense of relief, like, *"Oh my God. I did it. I passed everything"* […] It wasn't an easy feat. I had to ask for multiple extensions for I think at least 3 or 4 papers. It was just a lot [voice breaks] Like… yeah, it was just mentally draining. It was more like a pressure that I put on myself… to… to achieve everything. It was hell. It was actual hell.

- Cindy

In using phrases such as "I've already taken too long", Cindy gives us a glimpse into the societal assumption that the value of our achievements is somehow diminished if we have taken a longer path to reach them. As has been explored in this chapter, implicit and explicit expectations from our families play a foundational role in informing the prescribed path that we feel compelled to follow in pursuit of our achievement goals (Park et al., 2006; Tan, 2008). By this, I mean the courses we choose to take at university, earning a degree and graduating, or, in relation to the previous and following statements, the ideal timing to begin university and how long we take to complete our studies.

Consider the way Cindy recounts a conversation she had with her mother regarding her desire to take a gap year after high school before pursuing a Bachelor's degree:

> I wanted to take a break [laughs]. I wanted to take a gap year, um, but my mum was like, *"No. Hindi pwede, hindi pwede."* [No. You're not allowed, you're not allowed.] Cos it was just like, I don't know… it's like… you *must* go to university right away. If you take a break, they kind of see it as a sense of failure I guess—*parang walang direction sa buhay* [It's going to seem as though you lack a sense of direction in life.]
>
> […] Yeah, so I was like, OK, I'll go to university even though I have no clue what I wanna do... what I'm doing. That's what put me into law, cause ever since high school, *"Anong gagawin mo? Anong gusto mong gawin sa university?"* [What are you going to do? What do you want to do in university?] And I told them, law, cause, I was—at first I was interested in it, but then, um, I don't know... It just didn't work out. And my parents would say, every time they video chatted with my *lolo* and *lola* [grandfather and grandmother], like my dad's family and my mum's family, *"O magiging lawyer yan. Magiging lawyer yan."* [Oh, she's going to become a lawyer. She's going to be a lawyer.] The pressure… But it was just like... it was kind of... just—I put that pressure on myself, I guess. I put myself in that situation.
>
> *- Cindy*

While Cindy's decision to attend university was ultimately her own, it is intricately embedded in her familial relationships. By means of her relationship with her mother, Cindy understands that pursuing higher education is not just an option, but rather a normative expectation that she *should* fulfil, for the family. In Filipino culture, there exists a deeply ingrained practice of honouring and valuing the wishes of our parents—inferring a hierarchy within relationships. Cindy, likewise, held the expectation of upholding this virtue for herself as a way to show respect through obedience to her mother as a 'good' Filipino daughter. Though this concession is often linked with the negative notion of succumbing to 'blind obedience', 'peer pressure', or sheepishly going along with the majority (Lasquety-Reyes, 2016; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000), for Filipino daughters like Cindy, there exists a more selfless manifestation of *pakikisama*. Despite feeling overwhelmed about starting university, she carries herself with an air of strength for the sake of her family's fulfilment and pride; albeit beneath her composed exterior, she is plagued by uncertainty, unsure of her own capabilities to navigate this new chapter of her life, and questioning which path she should even take.

In discussing the embodiment of *pakikisama* in Cindy's stories, a concept that signifies the strong emphasis of collectivism within Filipino society, it is worth noting that another aspect stemming from this cultural concept offers valuable insight into Cindy's motivation to fulfil her mother's expectations. That is, the manner in which Filipinos construct their notions of self in relation to collective units, such as their families and communities (Espiritu, 2003), and thus believe that their personal achievements and failures have a ripple effect, reflecting not only on themselves but also on the larger groups to which they belong (Tan, 2022). In this regard, perhaps Cindy may have feared that any further mentions of her

reluctance to pursue higher education would be seen as a personal weakness, which would not only reflect poorly on herself but also bring shame and dishonour to her family.

The echoes of perfectionism become equally apparent here. Cindy raises this point in the excerpt above when she says, "If you take a break, they kind of see it as a sense of failure." Indeed, harbouring such all-or-nothing thinking could compel university students to retreat behind a façade of perfection and become excessively preoccupied with avoiding even the slightest mistake for fear of potentially disappointing their families. And, in a culture that highly values achievements and recognitions, it is not surprising that Cindy's experiences bear resemblance to the ideas expressed by Flett and Hewitt (2022). Here I am referring to the concept of 'socially prescribed perfectionism', which suggests that the presence of sociocultural norms, together with expectations from significant others, may lead one to develop thoughts, feelings, and behaviours associated with perfectionism to avoid being seen as 'a failure' by others (Campbell & Paula, 2002; Flett & Hewitt, 2022; Molnar et al., 2023). Perhaps then, for Cindy, placing an exhausting amount of pressure on herself to don the guise of perfection is a defence mechanism. A defence mechanism that has allowed her to adopt and maintain her self-protective, albeit damaging, process of understanding. That is, if she prioritises completing her degree and graduating, she will be able to evade or lessen the debilitating waves of shame and judgement that come from falling short to the expectations placed upon her by her parents and herself.

"… It's like so much pressure. … to pursue something [university education] that everyone keeps giving up on, it's just a lot."

During a separate conversation, Luna also delved into the topic of how her parents place considerable importance on academic achievement. In the following excerpts, Luna expresses her personal longing to be recognised by her parents as a capable and responsible

young woman, someone who can contribute to her family's accomplishments and bring them a sense of pride and a favourable reputation:

> I don't think anyone could ever understand the pressure of someone in their family, where no one in the family [referring to her older brothers] has properly graduated with like a 'degree degree' to continue. And it's… it's… it's hard, but I'm just… I just wanna be more… I wanna do great. I wanna prove so much more.
>
> […] So like, I feel like I have to… have good grades… for people to validate me and for me to validate myself… Oh my gosh… in high-school, *kuya* [older brother] did so great. Dux [title awarded to the student with the highest academic achievement for the school year] and everything… [sighs]. It was just like living up to that. It was just like, you know, being in his shadow and all that. I was literally depressed because of the whole thing. […] My parents never… they never knew how I felt about it… They said a lot of things like, *"Oh, wag mo anuhin yung* [surname] *name…"* [Oh, don't put shame on the family name.] And it was like crazy because I was entering NCEA at the time. I was just a junior as well and I was like, *"Oh gosh… I have to be good or else… I'm not gonna be enough for them"* you know? It took a big… *big* toll. And I never seek help, like I never do.
>
> *- Luna*

In the world of academia, the measurement of being a 'good' student is often assessed by a set of criteria that focus on the student's ability to fulfil certain expectations and adhere to prescribed educational trajectories, in conjunction with achieving favourable marks and/or a high grade point average (GPA) (Carless, 2015). In the context of familial relationships—although I acknowledge that this may not hold true for everyone—students often see parental praise and validation as meaningful indicators of their academic achievement and of being a 'good' student (Park et al., 2006; Tan, 2022; Tan, 2008). This, in turn, has a notable impact on our mental wellbeing, influencing our thinking, achievement goals, and ultimately, our notion of self. Luna captures this notion quite strikingly when she shares with me how she became

her "biggest critic," caught between her own ideals and the expectations of her loved ones, which she felt a deep sense of obligation to embody:

> […] It's been a whole big struggle and it's my own personal battle with myself because I am also like my biggest critic as well with everything. […] I was very burned out because of uni [laughs], and… although you know, you're taught to be strong, um… I wasn't really taught to be weak either. Yeah, *ayun nga, parang* [that's it, it's like] you weren't taught to feel what you had to feel. And, I guess maybe it's different for all families. But yeah, with my family, *dapat malakas ka* [you need to be strong], like all the time…
>
> *- Luna*

Considering the emphasis on interpersonal relationships within Filipino culture, it comes as no surprise that Luna's story unveils an inner battle fought in silence, as she grapples with the desire to maintain an unwavering façade of strength before her parents, even as burnout gradually takes its toll on her. And like Cindy, Luna is pursuing higher education since it holds considerable value in the eyes of her parents. For this reason, it has become a necessary endeavour that she cannot afford to abandon, as it would not only disappoint her parents but also bring "shame on the family name." In this construction, a sense of *hiya, pakikisama,* and perfectionism begins to emerge as a result of a deep emotional need among Filipinos to act appropriately so as to be socially accepted by their social groups (Oropilla & Guadana, 2021). As a result, Luna puts up a strong front in an effort to gain validation and establish a sense of belonging within her familial relationships. She came to believe that to be 'strong', she needed to adopt a 'grit your teeth and carry on' mentality, because acknowledging her personal struggles is considered 'unacceptable' or a 'weakness'. Of particular importance here is how this reveals the cultural perception around mental wellbeing in Filipino society.

To tease this apart further, Tanaka et al. (2018) noted that Filipinos commonly relate poor mental wellbeing to an individual's personal attributes, such as weakness, among others.

Moreover, because we Filipinos generally acknowledge our strength through our 'hardiness', these statements highlight the significance placed on our ability to endure and cope with our personal struggles—our weaknesses. In essence, they serve as reminders for us to 'grin and bear it', as it is not only our own responsibility to do so, but also because openly discussing our personal struggles is often discouraged to avoid causing embarrassment or shame to ourselves and, most importantly, our families (Tanaka et al., 2018; Tuliao, 2014). Such a lens is quite familiar within cultures that are considered collective, where an individual's psychological struggles, issues or even diagnoses can reflect upon the collective mental wellbeing of their family (Abdullah & Brown, 2011; Hampton, 2017).

Owing to this heightened pressure and the resulting climate created within the family system, many Filipina migrant university students, like Luna, often turn to their friends and social networks to find the comfort, understanding, and support they yearn for. Luna shared with me the impact her Filipino friends in her social work course have had on her university experience (see Figure 4). For Luna, these friends were not merely fellow students in her social work class; they became her support system:

> Awww… So this is my uni trio. [laughs] Um, I met them last year at uni and we literally didn't know each other. And it was like, so weird because we were like, *"I feel like we were meant to meet."* [laughs] They're like my little uni family at social work, and we go through it all together. We cry, we message each other like at 2 am, saying, *"Are you done?"* [referring to assignments] [laughs.] […] And it's so nice having them in the same course cause I know a lot of people also struggle in their other courses […] and they actually don't make friends…So I was really blessed and grateful that I got to meet like two people that I can rely on when I'm struggling or something.
>
> *- Luna*

Figure 4. Luna's "little uni family"

Luna's exploration of her relationships with her friends holds significant meaning for several reasons. Above, she affectionately refers to her friends as her "little uni family," emphasising the deep bond they all share. As a 'family', they navigated the demanding journey of university, offering emotional support to one another, even during the late hours of the night when the coursework and the looming deadlines seemed overwhelming. And perhaps in their shared journey, bound by a common cultural background, they realised a comforting truth: there was no expectation to constantly strive to "be enough." In a certain light, this sentiment could be interpreted as harbouring a subtle indication of tension or strain towards parents. However, the fact that Luna uses the term 'family' to describe her friends quite literally suggests that she may actually be yearning for understanding and emotional support from her loved ones, her mother and father.

The complexity of this experience arises from the interplay of various factors. For one, Luna has forged a strong association between the beliefs and feelings she has about her own identity, and her longing for approval from her parents. As mentioned earlier, she has come to believe that to feel secure in herself, to be the daughter who *will* bring honour to her family, she needs "to be strong, like all the time", thus seeing her emotional vulnerabilities as undesirable. Naturally, this weight, which is often too heavy to bear alone, eventually takes its toll, leaving participants to yearn for emotional relief and understanding. So, in the hours of her struggles, Luna finds comfort in her friends in ways that she may not find with her parents because she fears their disapproval above all else. Considering these circumstances, and perhaps unbeknownst to Luna, it is evident that her unwavering concern about disappointing her mother and father has inadvertently trapped her in a prison of her own making. By this, I mean that she is held captive by the paralysing need to "prove so much more" to them, both as a student and as their daughter, robbing her of her confidence to reach out for the emotional support and validation she so silently longs to receive from her parents.

Indeed, the stories that have been shared by Cindy and Luna so far have offered a glimpse into the experiences and perspectives of what it means to be a 'good' Filipino daughter and a 'good' student. Violet, on the other hand, negotiates through these sociocultural narratives in a more profound manner, further building upon the nuances of *hiya* and *pakikisama*.

"Am I doing engineering or wanting to do engineering because my parents wanted me to and not because it was my choice?"

When I asked Violet "what interested you in pursuing your field of study", it provided me a glimpse into how she viewed herself and made sense of her own identity. In tracing her

journey of selecting her prospective degree in university, Violet shared the following reflections:

> So before I started studying at university, Year 12… I went to this Metagenomics Day thing at Massey University, the one with the chicken wing in it; Albany Campus [laughs] […] We got to sequence the DNA from bacteria present in a random soil that they'd picked out somewhere in New Zealand […] we were meant to identify the location where that random soil sample came from. It was so cool! [...] we won and it was so exciting. But then, at that time, you know, my parents wanted me to do engineering, so I was still considering engineering...
>
> And then the next year in Year 13, some of us from high school got a chance to go to Auckland Uni to do their Engenuity Day, which was kinda like an engineering workshop where we got to try different kinds of engineering. Yeah… I did win prizes and stuff, but it wasn't as fun as Metagenomics Day. I was like, sitting in one of the engineering basements, doing something about measuring the circumference of the water or something [laughs]. And I was like, I can't see myself staying here for like four years and living this life of a student, like an engineering student, so it's like, *"Mmhm, maybe I'm not into engineering."* [laughs]
>
> - *Violet*

In the stories mentioned, Violet shifts from accommodating her parents' hopes and expectations to rationalising her own reservations about pursuing an education in engineering. She possesses a clear and firm stance on her preferences, coupled with a deep understanding of what brings her joy and ignites her passion, even if these personally defined decisions deviate from what others expect or uphold. In this sense, Violet's consideration of her academic journey extends beyond being tied to her familial relationships. She recognised the importance of having the chance to leverage her autonomy and actively pursue her personal interests in a manner that is both intentional and meaningful to her.

Moreover, noting a pivotal moment that occurred during Engenuity Day, Violet specifically recalled an interaction with an engineering student that had left a lasting impression on her, further affirming her already held viewpoints:

> And I think there was this part in the end where we had a Q&A, and one of the students there was like, *"I only did engineering because I'm Indian."* [laughs] *"Cos I'm brown and that's what my parents wanted me to do, but I actually wouldn't recommend it to anyone."* Um, just because their parents wanted them to do it—make sure that you actually wanna do it—and that resonated with me, like, *"Am I only wanting to do engineering because my parents wanted me to and not because it was my choice?"* So when I applied [laughs] for Auckland Uni and other universities, I chose genetics and other biology-related stuff.
>
> - *Violet*

By reflecting on the phrase "my parents wanted me to", Violet and the engineering student bring to light the cultural norms prevalent in many 'Asian' societies, where the reality is that our primary social and moral responsibilities lie within our familial relationships and cultural systems (Dy, 1994; Espiritu, 2003; Park et al., 2006). Equally, it underscores the contrasting nature between 'non-Western' and 'Western' societies, like Aotearoa New Zealand, where, based on the majority Pākehā or Settler Colonial lens, individualism is romanticised and the pursuit of personal preferences is highly valued and celebrated (Marshall, 1996). As migrant university students in a country where individual achievements and aspirations are prioritised, there are times when participants experience and can gain a sense of freedom and autonomy—the idea that it is okay to pursue their own interests and ambitions, even if they may be contrary to the expectations of their parents. We are granted a glimpse of this through Violet's reflection on the significance of the field of engineering (see Figure 5) and what it means to her.

Figure 5. Engineering building: "a line of engineers"

Below, Violet considers the ways in which the engineering building on her university campus stood as more than just a structure made of concrete and steel; it echoed a reminder of her family's legacy in the field and the life her parents had paved for her–a monument of both pride and pressure:

> This image symbolises the expectations of my Filipino parents for me and what they expected me to become. This was essentially what they hoped would be the end point of their hard work in bringing us to New Zealand. My parents studied computer engineering, and my grandparents from my mother's side studied civil engineering. Naturally, they expected us all [Violet and her siblings] to eventually follow their path and study engineering after graduating from high school and then find a job right after graduating from university.
>
> - *Violet*

If we evaluate the concept of *hiya* and *pakikisama* from this account, one might say that in her decision to stray from her parents' hopes and ambitions for her—dreams that have traversed borders and oceans—Violet has *walang hiya* and *walang pakikisama*, or an absence

of *hiya* and *pakikisama*. This takes on a new significance because, as has been explored in this chapter, *hiya* and *pakikisama* are deeply embedded in the Filipino psyche, where, as much as possible, it is normative to steer clear of circumstances that call into question our sensitivity, respect, and consideration for the feelings of others, especially of our elders (Bulatao, 1964; Lasquety-Reyes, 2016; Oropilla & Guadana, 2021). As detailed in *Chapter One*, "to call a Filipino walang hiyâ, or "shameless," is to wound him seriously" (Hollnsteiner, 1961, p.75). However, this narrative undergoes a shift as we continue to delve into Violet's story. It becomes apparent that her decision to follow her own academic interests is not inherently rooted in any lack of respect or disregard for her parents' laborious endeavours to invest a new life overseas. The fact that Violet showed a willingness to consider and negotiate the possibility of pursuing engineering serves as evidence of this.

Against the cultural backdrop of *hiya* and *pakikisama*, Violet is creating an earnest shift in how she previously understood her goals, values, and self. She is re-evaluating age-old constructs that prioritise the interests of others over one's own and the deference to persons of authority, namely her parents and, by extension, her grandparents. Through her own reflection and sensitivity towards her familial relationships and her academic interests, Violet dares to be different. In this sense, Violet is capable of experiencing *hiya* and *pakikisama*, but has surpassed being bound by their conventions. She recognises the need to not base her academic journey simply on the goal and aspiration to follow a predetermined, socially expected path. She understands that her personal goals and ambitions also bear equal importance. When it becomes necessary, it is precisely this awareness that allows her to navigate, negotiate with, and/or resist familial and cultural norms and expectations.

One possible explanation for Violet's ability to do this can be attributed to her status as a Filipina migrant living in Aotearoa New Zealand. As explained by Cassim et al. (2020),

the migration experience entails a dynamic process of active self-reconstruction and broadening of one's cultural horizons. In this regard, we can see that Violet is negotiating multilayered sociocultural values and worldviews, leading to a greater willingness to question or potentially reconsider certain Filipino cultural customs, such as yielding to familial expectations because of *hiya* and/or *pakikisama*. At the same time, it prompts one to question whether this would be as simple and straightforward if Violet were living in the Philippines, where children learn to view academic achievement and deference to their elders as a means of living up to sociocultural narratives of being a 'good' Filipino daughter and a 'good' student (Alampay & Garcia, 2019; Espiritu, 2003; Oropilla & Guadana, 2021). Overall, the present study reflects the significance of cultural identity and notion of self in relation to the achievement goals of Filipina migrant university students, which is considerably more nuanced and complex than it may seem.

Chapter Discussion

In a group project, a collection of values is instrumental in guiding the team toward collaboration. These values at play often influence the behaviour and expectations of the group, which emphasises decision-making grounded in the importance of respecting and honouring each member's perspectives and collectively striving towards a common goal rather than concentrating solely on individual achievements. Continuing with the analogy of education as a group project, within our culture, *hiya* and *pakikisama* emerge as guiding principles, encouraging self-reflection and self-correction of what it means to be a 'good' Filipino daughter and a 'good' student. It reminds us to be conscious of our behaviours, actions, and decisions as they create ripples that shape the wellbeing and experiences of those around us, especially our families. Overall, migration, for this community, is only a single bead in a larger

chain of everyday life that these Filipino parents create—that is, done for their children and potentially ensuing future generations, where their children are expected to carry on the legacy. This lens is akin to the notion of legacy—where parents sacrifice for the betterment of their children, and the children in turn are expected to follow suit and work towards the betterment of the collective 'chain'. Here, working towards the wellbeing of the self can be seen as selfish, shameful, or a sign of weakness.

Cindy, convinced that wearing a mask would shield her from the waves of disappointment, shame, and judgement that loomed over her if her parents uncovered the reality of her ongoing struggles, presented a life where everything was well. Luna's academic achievements became more of a crusade driven by her motivation to not bring shame on her family's name—a means to earn the acceptance and approval she so deeply yearned for from her parents. In their stories, allowing space for their struggles meant risking the danger of falling apart, and they simply could not allow that to happen. Not when their personal achievements and failures reflect not only on themselves but also on their loved ones whose hopes and expectations they cannot betray.

At the very foundation, *hiya* and *pakikisama* teach us a sense of propriety, the importance of companionship, and the interconnectedness that binds us all together as inherently social beings. We witness this in the way the women deeply honour connections and validation from those who matter most to them. The complexity, however, arises in grasping the wisdom these cultural values provide without letting them become triggers for shame and guilt, making it increasingly difficult to connect with others and with our own selves. For Violet, this meant taking a chance to pause and reflect, which led her to understand that her education is about more than just meeting her family's expectations; her personal goals and ambitions also bear equal importance. This understanding does not mean rejecting *hiya* and

pakikisama entirely. Rather, she found herself negotiating her connection with it, consciously resisting and letting go of parts that feel confining or restrictive, thereby allowing for a more harmonious alignment with her values, experiences, desires, and needs, ultimately nurturing personal growth and genuine self-expression.

The narratives shared by the women in this chapter highlight the complexity of these migrant women's lifeworlds and associated goals and trajectories, where they consciously negotiate the tensions between working towards and living for the benefit of the collective (their family) versus the individual (themselves). As women straddling the worldviews and values of both their home and host cultures, they are recognising that their lifeworld is one that is both collective *and* individual–rather than being either/or. Navigating, negotiating, and/or resisting parental expectations concerning 'achievement goals' and beyond does not necessitate cultural loss or erasure, nor do cultural norms, beliefs, and values demand conformity and dictate that one has to *live* for their parents or the collective *kapwa*. Rather, it acknowledges the rooted influence of culture—its stories and shared beliefs and values that the participants were taught growing up—while leaving room for the possibility of defining and redefining these elements to work with the realities of their everyday lives as Filipina migrant university students.

Taking a further step, this section on 'education as a group project' also gives us a glimpse into the role of the parent and the pressures *they* may face from the broader collective to ensure that their family (the reason for their migration) does well and that their migration journey and sacrifice was not in vain. For many Filipino families, the entire extended family's efforts—and, at times, resources—are put into a particular family unit emigrating to another country. For instance, in the example I mention in my introduction, my extended family financially supported my father's migration to Aotearoa New Zealand. Thus, the parents' (first-

generation migrants') duty to the extended family is to ensure that their children (second-generation) do well and are successful. This is not to negate the pressures and impacts on wellbeing experienced by the women, which are important; however, it is also important to acknowledge that it is not solely on the shoulders of the parents. Rather, there are larger processes that result in this type of attitude and set of expectations, among other things. This links to the historical and political processes of colonisation mentioned earlier in this chapter, where the only way to succeed in life was—and still is—through educational achievements.

In the subsequent chapter, I turn to the women's stories of deep emotional obligation to fulfil parents' expectations as a way of honouring and expressing gratitude for everything their parents have done for them. Therefore, in the next chapter we turn to the role of the women towards their parents, and the broader collective *kapwa tao*.

Chapter Four: Utang na Loob

Hefty financial expenses are often part of the path to a university degree for many students, so much so that they must consider not only the cost of tuition fees but also course-related costs and living expenses. Considering that not everyone possesses the means to pay for these expenses upfront, student loans often serve as a practical solution for many – resulting in an incurrence of a financial debt. However, for some, like the participants of the present study, financial debt is not the only debt that needs to be repaid. Here, we turn to the concept of *utang na loob*—a 'debt of the inner self'.

The Filipino concept of *utang na loob* embodies a deep sense of personal and emotional obligation to repay those who have made significant efforts or sacrifices for our benefit, whether they are our family, community, or anyone else (Hollnsteiner, 1961; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000; Reyes, 2015). Thus, much like a student's commitment to repaying their loans, some Filipino migrant university students experience a comparable sense of obligation to repay their parents' efforts in moving abroad to provide them with a more comfortable upbringing and education. In this context, their stories may become one of dedication to attaining academic success, not solely for their personal benefit but also as a means to acknowledge and reciprocate the *utang na loob*, or 'debt of the inner self', they feel towards their parents.

Chapter Three highlighted the notion of how education as a 'group project' informed the women's academic goals, achievements and ultimately their lives, particularly in relation to their parents' expectations. Building upon this discussion, this chapter takes a closer look at how and why participants navigated the intricate relationship between their education and their families, and specifically, familial expectations. This chapter focuses on how they reconciled

the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* concept of *utang na loob* with filial piety as Filipina migrant university students. To unravel the complex obligations of *utang na loob,* this chapter begins with an exploration of the notion of 'The Parents' Project', which Bell characterised as the idea that one's education is a testament to the opportunities provided by their parents. Based on this premise, the chapter then delves into the ways in which the women in this study negotiated their *utang na loob* with regard to filial piety. Finally, the concluding section of this chapter considers how *utang na loob*, or the 'debt of the inner self' is, ironically, a form of indebtedness that cannot be truly 'owed'.

'The Parents' Project'

While the practice of *utang na loob* is observed in various forms of social connections, including friendships, community relationships, and workplace interactions, it is most commonly enacted within parent-child relationships. As noted in *Chapter One*, Filipino parents, like many Asian migrant parents, often rationalise their decision to migrate overseas by prioritising the potential benefits it may bring to their children's welfare and wellbeing, even if it means making personal sacrifices (Park et al., 2006; Peddie & Liu, 2021; Roces, 2021; Tan, 2008). These sacrifices often involve leaving loved ones behind, juggling several jobs, or confronting language barriers and discrimination in the host country. They persevere through these challenging circumstances, driven by the hope of creating a better life and future for their children, sparing them from the hardships they themselves endured. The notion of 'The Parents' Project' highlights how children, in turn, may develop a sense of *utang na loob*, viewing their educational experiences in the host country as a reflection of the opportunities afforded by their parents—opportunities that may have been less attainable in their home country. This idea merits thoughtful reflection for two separate reasons. First, to gain insight

into the ways in which participants may experience *utang na loob* and thereby recognize and value their parents' hard work and sacrifices. Second, to consider the weight that this 'debt of the inner self' places on the participants In this section, I present an analysis of *utang na loob* in relation to Bell's notion of 'The Parents' Project'.

"They just don't want to see you squander the opportunity they have worked very hard on to give to you."

In talking about her university experience, Bell, a Law student at the time of the research conversations, recalled a particular moment when she felt the need to temporarily take a break from her studies. In the following excerpts she talks about her attempts to communicate this with her parents:

> […] I think I've had this conversation with my parents before and an argument [laughs]. There's also 'The Parents' Project'. Like how you turn out in life, it's a direct result of the opportunities given to you by your parents. And it probably gave them a scare that I wanted to take a break from studying. They probably had thoughts of, *"What if she doesn't go back and finish it?* [degree]. *No achievement? Giving up too early?"* […] They just don't want to see you squander the opportunity they have worked very hard and sacrificed for to give you, and I can understand the importance of seeing through that. Education is a big thing, and we have to finish it because our parents went through a lot to give us what we have […] Wording it is hard, and it's hard for parents not to take offence, but education is something you do *for yourself*. I am grateful to have the opportunity to study and get an education. I think the best way to think about it is that I am showing *utang na loob* by not wasting the opportunity given to me by my parents, and just because I'm taking a break [against parents' desires and expectations], it doesn't mean I'm wasting the opportunity.
>
> *- Bell*

Aside from highlighting that education is a group project for this community, as discussed in *Chapter Three*, Bell's story also epitomises the cultural concept of *utang na loob*,

where Filipino children are expected to honour and respect parental authority and put the needs of their family before their own as an expression of their gratitude and indebtedness for the life and opportunities given to them by their parents (Alampay & Jocson, 2011). *Utang na loob* is also equally tied to the norm of reciprocity in the Philippines, where children are not only expected to be grateful to their parents for raising them but, more importantly, for giving them life (Hollnsteiner, 1961). Presumably, then, Filipino children owe their parents for the life that they have and, as such, must follow what they decide is best for them. Bell rebelled against this. To return to Bell's sentiments, while parental expectations and instructions are important to follow, education, ultimately, is a personal endeavour that children should not 'sacrifice' their own wellbeing for, even in the name of *utang na loob*.

Here it becomes clear that Bell's story above is more than just a simple recounting of a disagreement between her and her parents. It is also about the delicate thread of *utang na loob* that weaves parent-child relationships, where various desires, expectations, and negotiations of control can often become entangled, leading to tensions and arguments among family members. *Utang na loob*, in this regard, is a cultural concept that encompasses a mosaic of the deep emotional resonance that exists within Filipino families.

Certainly, achieving academic success by completing a degree and graduating is a clear expressive act of *utang na loob* and not squandering the opportunities provided by one's parents, especially as a migrant student. All the same, even if a student takes a longer path to achieve them by resting to catch their breath in the thick of university life, it does not eclipse the *utang na loob* they feel towards their loved ones for the educational opportunities they have been given. As Bell communicated, "I just wanted to take a break from using my brain." In the heart of the matter, Bell is merely stating that temporarily taking a break from her studies is simply about prioritising her mental and emotional wellbeing amid the rising tide of stress and

burnout that comes with being a university student. This is a key aspect to highlight, particularly as these nuances illustrate the complex nature of *utang na loob* when considering academic achievements, living up to parental expectations, and suppressing one's personal desires as a means of validating and reciprocating the sacrifices made by one's parents.

In the unfolding narrative of our conservation, Bell also touched on how she felt about *utang na loob* and the burden that comes with trying to reciprocate and "live up to" the sacrifices her parents made for her:

> Maybe sometimes I get overwhelmed? How much I live up to [parents' expectations, hard work, and sacrifices], I guess? And cos there is an expectation for you to finish your degree. So maybe that's one of the reasons why I feel it's important for me to be able to finish [my degree] and get a stable job so that I can give back what my parents have sacrificed to give me [...] But yeah, so I think overall, just sometimes, it gets overwhelming, kind of like a burden? Because there's an expectation of you to pay back what you are given.
>
> *- Bell*

As detailed in *Chapter One*, *utang na loob* is often seen as a positive and enriching element of Filipino interpersonal relationships that fosters familial interconnectedness, especially in parent-child relationships (Kaut, 1961; Oropilla & Guadana, 2021). Yet, for Bell, it also embodies a weighty obligation, often at great personal cost. In Bell's description, the concept of *utang na loob* imposes considerable pressure on her to measure up to her parents' expectations. This is evident in how she draws upon the significance of finishing her university degree within a designated time frame (i.e., as soon as possible) and securing a stable job as the guaranteed path to meeting their expected outcomes, despite the fact that it conflicts with her personal desire to temporarily pause her studies, as previously mentioned. Without a doubt, this reinforces the notion that achieving academic success can be interpreted as an act of *utang na loob* for parental support (Tan, 2022). However, it also depicts the emotional burden that

can ensue when students feel obligated to perform as such because of a deeply ingrained sociocultural belief that they 'owe it' to their parents.

To tease this apart further, it is helpful to consider how Filipino children frame their migrant parents' experiences through the lens of sacrifice. Here I am referring to the ongoing narrative of migration in the Filipino family as a hardship and a sacrifice endured by parents (Basbas, 2009; Roces, 2021), and the ensuing sense of *utang na loob* and incurring emotional obligation felt by children to reciprocate and honour that sacrifice. Take, for example, Bell's repeated use of the word 'sacrifice' in the excerpts above to make sense of her parents' efforts to give her the life she has today in Aotearoa New Zealand. As Zhou (2004) highlights, when the experiences of migrant parents are perceived as acts of self-sacrifice, children more or less develop an internalised need to reciprocate and honour their parents' efforts, regardless of whether it is at the expense of their own desires. Otherwise, they could be perceived as lacking *hiya* or lacking *utang na loob* (having no sense of propriety or sense of gratitude), reflecting an impression that they are not 'good' and 'dutiful' children, much less decent individuals (Bulatao, 1964; Hollnsteiner, 1961).

With this in mind, it comes as no surprise if participants, and perhaps other migrant students facing similar situations, experience an overwhelming and, at times, burdensome sense of obligation to rise above and beyond their parents' expectations. This is a particularly important issue to address, considering that many Asian migrant students often construct their notion of self in relation to their ability to satisfy and honour the standards of their families (Kewalramani & Phillipson, 2020; Li et al., 2018; Quinain et al., 2017). We can see this at work in the moment when Bell questioned her own worth in light of the achievements, she feels she has *yet* to accomplish in order to fulfil her *utang na loob* to her parents: "Maybe sometimes I get overwhelmed? How much I live up to, I guess?" Here, Bell's words carried a

compelling sense of gravity, reflecting her emotional exhaustion as she wrestled with the weight of measuring her academic achievements in relation to her parents' expectations and cultural norms. While this may stem from a sense of gratitude in which she views her academic success as a way to repay her parents' hard work and sacrifices, such a meritocratic measure of honouring one's *utang na loob* can lead to negative psychological consequences for a student. This includes heightened levels of stress, anxiety, guilt, burnout, and depression, especially when one feels their achievements fall short of their parents' standards and expectations. It is precisely within this narrative that *utang na loob*, or the 'debt of the inner self', becomes a weighty obligation that comes at great personal cost. Giving back to one's parents, in other words, becomes a transactional exchange, wherein students feel obligated to achieve and 'pay off' their parents' sacrifices with sacrifices of their own. The following section delves into these aspects in greater detail. In particular, it explores how participants negotiated their *utang na loob* in relation to filial piety by assuming household roles and responsibilities as a way to repay their parents' hardships through their own hard work and achievements.

Role models and Breadwinners

As discussed more extensively in *Chapter One*, in the hearts of Filipino families, there exist beliefs and values that form a continuous thread across generations. Of special interest in this section is the deep familial bonds shown through filial piety, which is considered to have been inherited from Chinese customary practices, particularly that of Confucian philosophy (B. S. K. Kim et al., 2001). Filial piety, much like the concept of *utang na loob*, underscores the importance of showing devotion and profound respect towards parents, which goes deeper

than simple obedience; it stems from a heartfelt recognition that we are indebted to them for our very existence (Clemente, 2017; Hollnsteiner, 1961; Shea et al., 2020).

In many instances, showing respect and gratitude towards parents is constructed through upholding filial obligations, which may encompass providing emotional and financial support. For some of the women in this study, these obligations include acting as a positive role model for their younger siblings and helping to contribute financially to their families. These commitments symbolise their sincere love and care for their loved ones, particularly their parents, driven by a genuine desire to repay the unwavering support they have received throughout their lives. Many Filipino migrant children have such a story where making personal sacrifices becomes an anticipated and *integral* part of assuming these roles and responsibilities, owing to their deep sense of *utang na loob*. Weaving in my conversations with Sky and Cindy, I unveil the intricate layers of this experience.

"I've always felt like I had to do well academically, especially given that I'm the eldest child."

In presenting herself as the eldest child in her family, Sky shared the following sentiments:

> I've always felt the responsibility to succeed […] And I suppose since my parents were so accommodating [supportive of academic path choices], I guess that set my expectations of myself very high? I need to live it up for them […] And I need to be a good role model for my siblings.
>
> - *Sky*

Leaning on her "responsibility to succeed," Sky consciously positions herself in a way that seemingly demands that she is everything for everybody at all times. That is, an eldest child who holds it upon herself to make her parents proud, and an eldest sister who feels the pressure to excel academically to model good 'achievement' for her sibling. Truly, the plight of feeling like the wellbeing of the entire household is hinged on your hard work and academic

success is a heavy load to bear. This is because feeling the need to constantly attend to everyone's needs can occasionally lead to feelings of guilt when certain obligations, whether self-imposed or not, are inevitably unfulfilled. We gain insight into this matter from the conversation I had with Sky regarding a particular time when she felt reluctant about joining her family for dinner (see Figure 6). This hesitance stemmed from the mounting stress of the university weighing on her, as elaborated below:

> *That's my brother and my sister. Actually, I sent this photo because I know that during this time here, I was writing my Honours thesis, and it was a really stressful time, and like, mum and dad—we just go out sometimes spontaneously for a drive, have a meal, have ice cream, etc. Um, so, I suppose... I was actually hesitant to go out because, of course, I was stressed, but then I was like, "Okay, I'll go." […] On one hand, I felt anxious about taking precious time away from writing since I had so many deadlines coming up. On the other hand, I suppose, I thought that I shouldn't miss out on dinner because, if I did, what would that tell my younger sister and brother? That they should prioritise work over family?*
>
> *- Sky*

Figure 6. Dinner with family

To speak broadly on this matter, taking part in communal activities, such as the sharing of family meals, is a common practice and a socially expected behaviour in Filipino culture, as well as in many other cultures. It fosters a shared sense of belonging, mutual respect, and active engagement within the familial system (Blum-Kulka, 1997). Accordingly, Lestar et al. (2023) discuss how family dinners are a social practice that signify an appreciation for shared values and traditions as well as a commitment to nurturing familial relationships, both of which are fundamental elements of filial piety and respect. In this sense, Sky's inner mental negotiations and subsequent conscious effort to join her family for dinner despite being already overburdened by her academic responsibilities, are a testament to her deep respect for her parents. Moreover, this decision sets a positive example for her younger siblings. This can be traced back to its weight in modelling the importance of maintaining family unity and stability amidst life's demands and obligations, which can be profoundly meaningful and gratifying for her parents.

In addition, as Reese (2002) has suggested, the eldest children tend to be the first to reach major milestones, such as starting school, before their younger siblings. Consequently, they may feel compelled to hold themselves to a high standard and embody strong leadership qualities in order to serve as positive 'role models' for their younger siblings (Reese, 2002; Volk, 1999). Sky puts on a brave front, setting exceedingly high expectations for herself, refusing to show any signs of weakness in front of her loved ones. This is because she has anticipated that her achievements will inevitably act as a point of comparison for her younger siblings, who will either model themselves after her or keep her in mind as a lesson of 'what not to do'. Simultaneously, this highlights the instances in which some students become familiar with emotional hardships and challenges as a result of prioritising the needs of their family over their own, as discussed in *Chapter Three* (Bernardo, 2008; Tan, 2022; Tan, 2008).

In Sky's view, being the eldest child entails an inescapable sense of duty and responsibility to achieve academic success. This explains why she hesitated when it was time to join her family for dinner. Nonetheless, when the time came, Sky prioritised her family and set aside her thesis to share a meal with them, in spite of the mounting levels of stress she was already experiencing from the impending deadlines. In sum, Sky was accepting of bearing the weight of this 'sacrifice', recognising that it was a small price to pay to ensure her family's sense of unity and peace of mind, even if it meant sacrificing her own.

In this narrative, Sky finds herself burdened by the layers of roles she has been attributed: a Filipina migrant child, an eldest child, and a role model. Reminiscent of Bell's concept of 'The Parents' Project', Sky desires to respect and honour her parents by demonstrating that she has not squandered the opportunities they have provided. As Sky pointedly explained, "I need to live it up for them." At the same time, she takes full ownership of the role and obligation of being the eldest child and holds herself to rise to the occasion morally and academically to ensure the best interests of her younger siblings. I mention this to illustrate the likelihood, that by and large, Sky held the belief that she needed to project an air of composure and mask any traces of vulnerability or emotional fragility, in accordance with the duties and responsibilities of the roles she is modelling and embodying. This reluctance to openly share personal challenges with family, due to feelings of shame and guilt that such struggles may tarnish the overall happiness and harmony of the household, has emerged as a prominent theme in my *kuwentuhan* with the women in this study.

"I'm the eldest and I can't show them that. I can't do that to them."

After completing her undergraduate studies, Cindy immediately secured a full-time job out of a strong sense of duty to support her family's financial needs. Cindy reflects on the unique expectations and responsibilities of being the eldest child in her family when she said:

> After graduating from my Bachelor's degree, I went into a straight full-time job, um.... It's only because, like, I guess I was afraid of just being lost. Being lost... [voice breaks] [...] I had to be doing something for my family. But at the same time, I didn't know what I was doing, like I was just pushing through. [...] When I got the job offer, my mum was so happy. She was like, *"Oh, thank you."* [laughs] Yeah, I was like, *"OK, I'll just do this for them."* But then I didn't like that job, and that sent me into a really deep depression, but I didn't reach out to anyone… Yeah, I just remembered [sniffles] that during that time, I would literally cry every single night.
>
> Um, yeah, so I just took it upon myself to push through so I can at least contribute something to the family [sending remittances back to the wider family back in the Philippines] as the eldest cause at that time my mum wasn't working and the income that my dad makes is just enough for the family here […] They didn't tell me anything like, *"You have to take a job"* or anything, or anything like that. It was just a responsibility that I took upon myself [voice breaks]. But after I got that first full-time job, I hated it. I hated it. It was just me going on autopilot again and again […] I had one last full-time job, and that was in an office. And that was like, [laughs] so out of place for me. Every full-time job that I had, I felt so out of place.
>
> *- Cindy*

For Filipinos, completing their education holds immense importance because it enhances their prospects of securing a well-paying job and thus fulfilling their obligations and responsibilities to support their families. And, given the cultural expectation for Filipino children to help and support their parents once they reach adulthood because of *utang na loob* (Bernardo, 2008; Fuligni et al., 1999; Hollnsteiner, 1961), those who take on the role of 'breadwinners' often find themselves navigating a precarious tightrope between fulfilling their filial obligations and maintaining their own mental and emotional wellbeing. In the excerpts above Cindy felt a sense of duty to support her family and wider family financially, which imposed an immense weight on her. This is vividly captured in her description of how she

found herself spiralling down into a deep depression, crying herself to sleep "every single night." Still, she chose not to seek support from her parents.

Adding another layer of complexity to this situation is the occasional oversight of the breadwinner's own wellbeing by their family, even if subtly. For instance, Cindy finally opened up to her parents about her emotional struggle with the occupations she has undertaken:

> I told my mum and dad that, uh, I'm gonna resign and I'm just gonna take a break. And then mum was like, *"Bahala ka na. Bahala ka na"*. [It's up to you. It's up to you.] I was just like, um... She didn't want me to. It *felt* like she didn't want me to... I felt bad for resigning and, like, just taking a break.
>
> - *Cindy*

While Cindy's mother explicitly stated that the decision to resign from her job was entirely up to Cindy, it is worthwhile to delve into the emotional undercurrents of their conversation beyond mere linguistic communication. Certainly, many children are familiar with the unmistakable stifling tone from a disapproving parent, which often speaks volumes and conveys more meaning than words alone (Burgoon et al., 2021). Take, for example, where Cindy mentions that "she didn't want me to. It felt like she didn't want me to." In this situation, Cindy is entangled in two conflicting dialogues. Although she is verbally told that it is okay for her to resign from her job, she is unable to escape the impression that her mother's unspoken and emotional cues and expectations indicate otherwise, leading her to believe that her own emotional exhaustion is seen as deviant rather than a cry for help. Cindy then expresses her shame and guilt for resigning, "for taking a break,". This indicates that communication extends beyond language alone, as its complexity is difficult to define precisely. Such complexity, as elaborated by Burgoon et al. (2021), highlights how the subtle aspects of communication, both spoken and unspoken, have a significant influence on the position, expectations, and ultimately the wellbeing of the listener or recipient. This illustrates how Filipina migrant students are grappling with the blurry nuances of their roles and responsibilities, as they are clearly

articulated by their family, as well as those that are unspoken, but expected and embodied. In this respect, it comes as no surprise that Cindy, along with other women involved in this study, displayed a tendency to suppress their emotional distress and stifle their true feelings from their parents. They feel a deep sense of shame and guilt for daring to think about, let alone prioritise, their own needs and personal wishes, resulting in burnout and a downward spiral in their mental and emotional wellbeing.

The tendency of women in this study to suppress their emotional expression, particularly when it involves distressing feelings, may also be attributed to the cultural expectation for Filipino children to prioritise their parents' wellbeing, peace of mind, and fulfilment over their own (Hollnsteiner, 1961), reflecting adherence to the concepts of filial piety and *utang na loob*. Supporting this notion, Oropilla and Guadana (2021) mention that Filipino children are instilled with a deep understanding of the importance of respect, gratitude, and responsibility from an early age, with the purpose of honouring and caring for their parents and older family members. Therefore, in line with placing one's *kapwa* as a priority above oneself (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000; Reyes, 2015), Cindy selflessly put the needs and wellbeing of her loved ones, even if it meant sacrificing her own. She understood that her personal troubles could compromise the financial security and overall collective sense of harmony within her family.

In this light, *utang na loob* is not only internalised but also embodied in the lived experiences of Filipina migrant university students. It becomes a persistent presence or 'voice in their head', consistently reminding them of their obligations and the expectations placed upon them, both in their education and in their familial roles and filial responsibilities, irrespective of whether or not their parents are actively expecting this of them. From this perspective, it is understandable why the women in this chapter placed a higher value on the

needs and wellbeing of their parents and loved ones. And revisiting the context of 'The Parents' Project', this is a poignant reminder of our deep emotional obligation to give way to our parents' wishes before ours' as a means of expressing our gratitude for all that they have done for us. At this point, I wish to emphasise that the roles these women find themselves obligated to take on are implicit social norms that have emerged within their families, with the goal of ensuring that their parents' hard work and sacrifices are honoured and reciprocated, ultimately benefiting both past and future generations.

Continuing with her story, we see that Cindy begins this process by becoming more open about her struggles during a separate conversation with her father:

> I might cry [laughs] telling this again. I told him, *"Oh dad, mag re-resign na ko. I'm gonna take a break."* [Dad, I'm going to resign. I'm gonna take a break]. And he was like, *"Bakit? Burnt out kana?"* [Why? Are you burnt out?] Oh my gosh... [sniffles] I guess I didn't expect [voice breaks] for him to get it. But I was like, *"Yeah, yeah, I'm tired"* and he was like, *"OK, it's fine."* [sniffles].
>
> Yeah… I just didn't expect that from him […] And I guess that made me see my dad in a different light as well, like, *"Oh, maybe he understands cos he went through something similar, or maybe he's going through something similar."*
>
> - *Cindy*

Here, Cindy discovered an unexpected realisation: a strengthened sense of familial support and empathy. It offers a full picture of how voicing one's stress can help ease the mental and emotional burden that Filipino children often carry, especially when they feel weighed down and confined to their filial obligations and *utang na loob*. As briefly outlined in *Chapter Three*, there is stigma-related unease and discomfort when it comes to discussing mental health issues and personal struggles in Filipino society (Tanaka et al., 2018; Tuliao, 2014). This has caused the women in this study to experience challenges in seeking help in

addressing them, even from their own family members. Therefore, if we consider Cindy's narrative, we can see how she is overcoming significant emotional barriers, especially considering how she has always prioritised her family's wellbeing over her own.

Cindy's relationship with her father highlights the development of a deep emotional connection when people share meaningful experiences together, such as holding space for one another during difficult times. The message here is that this relationship goes beyond conventional expectations of obligation or emotional indebtedness—spoken or unspoken—that are often intertwined with *utang na loob* within a parent-child dynamic. Instead, it fosters *malasakit*, a sincere sense of communal responsibility to love, care for, and support one another (Maria, 1999).1/07/2025 7:24:00 PM This is captured quite beautifully in the excerpt above during Cindy's moment of realisation as she sees her father in a "different light." He is no longer just a carer or a fellow breadwinner attending to his role and responsibilities, but rather a devoted father, tirelessly striving to secure a better life for his family. She came to understand and develop a deeper appreciation for the hard work and sacrifices he had put into safeguarding the wellbeing of his family, and perhaps realised that she, too, had embodied these attributes, motivated by her *malasakit* for her family. As Cindy delineates, "And this, I guess, relates to my *utang ng loob* to them: to give something back to them as a massive thank you... to let them rest."

Chapter Discussion

The narratives of Bell, Sky, and Cindy illustrate how *utang na loob*, or the 'debt of the inner self', paradoxically, is a form of indebtedness that cannot be truly fulfilled or 'owed'. This is because our love, respect, and gratitude are perpetually valuable and never squandered, for their value is not contingent on reciprocity. For instance, Bell taking a longer path to achieve

her goals and taking a break to catch her breath amidst the challenges of university life does not diminish the *utang na loob* she feels towards her parents for the educational opportunities they have provided. Sky's internal negotiations on prioritising her academic work over attending family dinners do not imply a lack of commitment to the wellbeing and emotional needs of her parents. Rather, it reflects her way of handling her stress and anxieties privately to ensure her family's sense of unity and peace of mind. Lastly, Cindy opening up about wanting to resign from her job to recover from burnout does not compromise her deep gratitude and appreciation for her parents.

In light of this, *utang na loob* should not imply any expectation or anticipation of self-sacrifice. This is because, in contrast to the earlier chapter's analogy of a student repaying a loan to a creditor or a creditor collecting payments, this relationship transcends simple transactional interactions. It involves a deep understanding of *kapwa*, our shared humanity—the concept and acknowledgement of our interconnectedness and obligation to provide care and support to each other. It thrives in parent-child relationships rife with *malasakit*, where one selflessly acts for the other's wellbeing. This can promote greater harmony within the family, enabling each individual to pursue their personal needs and become transparent about their struggles without being paralysed or weighed down by feelings of shame or guilt.

Following this sentiment, what it means to have *utang na loob* for parents goes beyond simply meeting their expectations or providing them with emotional and financial support. This indebtedness cannot be fully repaid or reciprocated as the true significance lies not in the repayment itself. Instead, it evokes a deep sense of internal acknowledgement and gratitude towards parents, both as students and as their daughters, wholeheartedly recognising and cherishing the care and support they have provided, always striving for nothing but the best.

Taking a step back then, we see that such broader societal and cultural values and processes of caring for, appreciating and respecting one another feed into and perpetuate the ideologies of striving to be better, and to achieve well academically and in life, to ensure that the broader family/collective's efforts towards this migration journey was not in vain.

Overall, these findings force us to question normative, individual-focused perspectives of academic achievements and how future explorations into this topic could work with Indigenous and cultural knowledge systems. The reason for this is that, in contrast to individualistic cultures that celebrate self-made individuals, the Filipino worldview is rooted in the belief that no one can truly be 'self-made'. This is because through *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* concepts such as *utang na loob*, we understand the interconnectedness of our lives and recognise that we have all reached our present positions, not solely as the result of our own efforts. Instead, they are the culmination of the love, support, and care we have received from others, such our families and community. What follows in the next chapter is a narrative that explores the women embodying the spirit of *katatagang loob* in the face of hardships and uncertainties.

Chapter Five: Katatagang Loob

Introduction

Filipinos are familiar with hearing stories of success from people in their lives and communities who have worked hard and remained resilient in their belief to make their goals and dreams a reality. As the Filipino proverb goes: *"Walang hirap na di kinakaya ng taong may tiyaga."* It suggests that with a strong will, one can conquer any obstacle or hardship, no matter how challenging it may be. Accordingly, in this chapter we unpack the concept of *katatagang loob*—inner strength and resilience.

Katatagang loob reflects the Filipino people's intrinsic capacity to create meaning and discover strength and purpose within themselves to maintain resilience as they navigate through life's challenges. Drawing inspiration from the Sky's story, I begin with an exploration of her *katatagang loob* when working towards realising her childhood dream. The following section broadens the discussion of *katatagang loob*, capturing the essence of Luna's strength of character through the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* concepts of *bahala na* and *kapwa*. This chapter concludes with the idea that *katatagang loob* involves more than what the women are capable of or can achieve on their own.

"Fall down seven times, stand up eight."

From enduring sleepless nights to conquer a mountain of assignments to confidently walking across the stage to receive their diploma on graduation day, a common thread in the women's stories is the notion that *katatagang loob* will only be learned from discomfort. Sky, for example, faced disappointment when she was unsuccessful in obtaining admission to the engineering programme at her university. As she details below:

> That was one of the low points in my student life. And then, I remember growing up [laughs], I had several different ideal pathways. I was thinking I was either going to be a teacher, like my mum, or a civil engineer, like my dad. I just came to like math and just the idea of engineering, like constructing buildings and roads, and then, you know, I didn't pass […] I was disappointed in myself.
>
> […] So I went back to the drawing board and asked myself, *"What can I do?"* I mean, my second option was architecture, but... I didn't apply for architecture. Urban planning… I had also missed the UE [university entrance]. But you know, *"Fall down seven times, stand up eight."* And what I found actually in high-school was that I've always been interested in human and nature interaction, so I saw that as a pathway into doing a Bachelor of Science in Geography and Environmental Science. So then I told my parents about my plans, and they were supportive of it.
>
> - *Sky*

Sky's story echoes the ever-familiar narrative that many students can relate to—the disappointment and sense of personal failure when their goals and dreams fall short of reality. Clearly, life is a constant journey of unexpected twists and turns, where discomfort brought about by circumstance can unexpectedly rear its head. However, beneath it all, in spite of the challenges and setbacks, *katatagang loob* serves as a source of inner strength and resilience that empowers the Filipino (Tiangco, 2005). It acts as a stress buffer, enabling the Filipino people to proactively and creatively navigate their discomfort and find meaningful solutions to handle life's inevitable challenges (Tiangco, 2005). Note how Sky, refusing to let disappointment dampen her spirits for long, stepped back to reflect and revise her 'game plan' from the ground up, pondering, "What can I do?" Although she was in one of the most trying moments of her student life, she was not preoccupied with it. Through, with, and in her *katatagang loob*, she was able to create an alternative route towards her academic journey, even when her initial desired outcome eluded her.

Quito (1990), a Filipina professor of philosophy, writes at length of this indigenous concept. In her view, *katatagang loob* is the *diwa* ('spirit of the people' or 'national character') that guides the Filipino way of thinking and being (Quito, 1990). One may ponder, in connection with the *diwa* of the Filipino people, "Why do they smile during the height of the storm or flood?" Or, "Why do Filipinos have this unspoken hope even among tragedy and suffering?" In many respects, it is the belief, I argue, that everything is transient and that, eventually, everything will fall into place. In a similar vein, this belief is what allowed Sky to recover from one of the most disheartening challenges a student might encounter. Sky proceeded to explain how the *Daruma doll*, a Japanese amulet, perched on her desk (see Figure 7), stands as a symbolic aspect of her refusal to give up:

> Sky: So that tiny Japanese doll on the right edge of the table—that's called a Daruma. Um, so essentially what you do is, you've got the two eyes, and they're both just white, the pupils. What you do is shade one eye, and as you shade it, you create a goal. I got this daruma when I was in high-school, when one of the Japanese teachers gave it to us. My goal was to graduate from university... And then yeah, so when I graduated from my Bachelor's, I got to shade the other eye.
>
> Researcher: Oh yeah, I've heard about those before. When you push them over, they stand back up, right?
>
> Sky: Yeah, they stand back up. So, I suppose the idea behind the Daruma is that, no matter what brings you down, you always get back up... So, I suppose you could say it's quite telling of what I've experienced and am currently experiencing, cause I suppose no matter what the hardships are or however hard I find things, I still manage to find ways to get back up. Like after that [missing the university entrance for engineering] and making it through my Honour's year, and now I'm doing a Master's in environmental engineering to fulfil that childhood dream... [laughs] It's a long, winding story.

Researcher: You went the full circle [laughs].

Sky: Yeah, I would say so [laughs].

Figure 7. Daruma doll on desk

For Sky, the Daruma doll stands for the inner strength and resilience she developed as she rose after every setback and navigated the twists and turns of her academic life in university. As Sky had briefly explained, when a person establishes a goal, they fill in one of the Daruma doll's blank eyes, which serves as a reminder of their commitment to realising that goal. Upon achieving the goal in mind, the second eye is filled in, symbolising its completion. However, years down the line, even with both eyes shaded, the doll remains in sight on Sky's desk, a constant presence in the space where she often immerses herself in her studies at home. Once again, it could be because the doll stands as a personal reminder of her previous achievements and memories of *katatagang loob* she developed, offering a continuous source of inspiration as she strives to realise her childhood dream of becoming an engineer, just like

her father. It guides her through the inevitable moments of progress and setbacks that she is currently experiencing and will face in the future.

Following through Sky's account on the Daruma doll, our conversation also highlighted its symbolic trait of consistently returning to an upright position when pushed or toppled over. Here, I briefly draw narrative comparisons between the cultural and historical elements of *katatagang loob* and the philosophy embodied by the Daruma doll.

As mentioned in *Chapter One*, *katatagang loob*, much like the other *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* concepts that I have explored throughout this thesis, is unequivocally a product of both culture and history. In particular, *katatagang loob* is deeply rooted in the people's colonial and neo-colonial histories (Tiangco, 2005). Historically, the Filipino people have endured subjugation through both coercion and efforts at pacification, exemplified by the Spanish conquest, the subsequent American assimilation period, and the Japanese era of occupation, as discussed in *Chapter One* (Nadeau, 2008). Nevertheless, in a way that echoes the philosophy of the Daruma doll that rises after each fall, the Philippines, as a nation valuing *katatagang loob*, has continuously persevered in reclaiming its independence. And even after centuries of colonisation, this *diwa* of *katatagang loob* endures (Tiangco, 2005), as evidenced by the emergence of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*, which honours and preserves the indigenous beliefs, values, and notion of self of the Filipino people (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000; San Juan, 2006). In this connection, I aim to emphasise that *katatagang loob* weaves its way into the conscious, and perhaps even the unconscious, minds of the Filipino people. That is, while we may not have a tangible symbol like the Daruma doll to represent our shared belief that all things are transient and will eventually fall into their rightful places, such spirit of *katatagang loob* is vividly reflected in the lived experiences of the Filipino.

Sky's reference to the passage "Fall down seven times, stand up eight" captures the idea that in the grand scheme of things, achieving success does not depend on avoiding failure entirely, rather, challenges are a part of the journey to success and achievement. Within this framework, it is equally important to explore how the Filipino concept of inner strength and resilience flourishes when it is nourished and supported by faith and family. The following sections provide a more detailed discussion of this narrative through an analysis of the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* concepts of *bahala na* and *kapwa* in relation to *katatagang loob*.

"There's a saying, "If you feel heavy, always go to Jesus and you will find true rest.""

Furthering the research conversation on *katatagang loob*, Luna shared the profound impact of her religious faith, which served as a steadfast anchor during the turbulent storms in her academic journey and beyond. This revelation is beautifully captured in the photograph below:

> Ah, I took this picture (see Figure 8) when I was having a breakdown [laughs]. There's a hill close to where I live. It was after work, I think, and I went there, and I was like, *'I think... I need to breathe'* and yeah, I went to the hill, which was like a five-minute drive from my house. I just sat down, and I cried... It was so overwhelming. I was just thinking about everything... I don't know; it just all toppled, I guess, over me. And although my faith has been very weak lately, I'm such a strong believer that God can give you strength when you feel like you don't have anything left. *'Bahala na'* [it's all up to God] [laughs]. But it was, yeah… It was a good cry [laughs]. And then I took that picture with the sunset. It just reminded me that at the end of every day, you're never alone, and you can always try again... You can try again, even if it's scary. But, um, yeah, that moment, I felt really at peace.
>
> *- Luna*

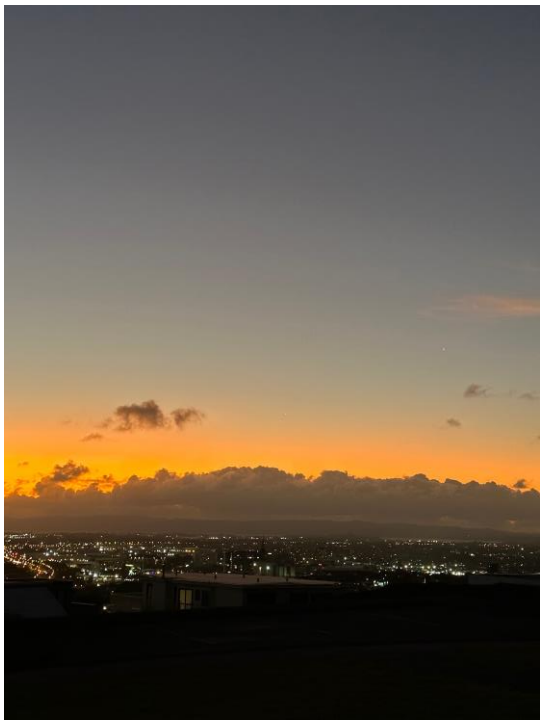

Figure 8. Sunset on the hill

In a country where Catholicism is prevalent, many Filipinos find comfort in the hallowed practice of prayer and quiet moments of self-reflection, believing these customs as a means of refuge from the burdens of stress inherent in daily life. Note, for example, how Luna's sentiment above meaningfully paints a picture of how religious faith can rejuvenate one's life with renewed strength and hope, even when confronted with life's challenges. In that moment, she speaks of a profound sense of lightness that took root within her. Entering in silence and bowing in prayer, so to speak, the shadows of worry and stress that overwhelmed her diminished, giving way to comfort and clarity that "at the end of every day, you're never alone, and you can always try again." In essence, Luna drew strength from her faith, which served as a nourishing force for her *katatagang loob*. It became a wellspring of inner strength and resilience to continue placing one foot in front of the next, knowing that a higher power is making a way for her even in the face of uncertainty. This is an important point to reflect on,

as it echoes the unique way Filipinos navigate, create meaning, and discover strength and purpose within themselves to confront life's challenges with a deep sense of hope and purpose. To explore this more thoroughly, I turn to the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* concept of *bahala na*.

As previously discussed in *Chapter One, 'bahala na,'* or 'leave it all up to God' is a deeply rooted cultural expression that signifies the Filipino people's readiness to accept and trust in the unfolding of events, believing that whatever transpires is part of a larger, more meaningful plan (Joaquin, 2023). Indeed, there is contention behind the phrase, as it conveys a narrative that may be interpreted as embodying an attitude of putting 'blind trust' in luck or fate rather than one's own judgement and actions, which could lead to a fatalistic surrender or a lack of accountability (Joaquin, 2023). However, the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* perspective offers an alternative interpretation of *bahala na*. As Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino (2000) elaborate, *bahala na* does not necessarily represent a sense of powerlessness in the face of success or failure in life, nor does it suggest that these outcomes are *entirely* beyond one's control. Rather, grounded in faith and trust in God's will, it reflects a Filipino's resolve and readiness to confront challenges ahead to make their goals and dreams a reality (Dy, 1994; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000), adopting an attitude of 'I will do what I can, and whatever will be, will be.' Consider, for example, how Luna's expression of *"bahala na"* followed by the subsequent sentiments in the excerpt above acts as a source of encouragement, motivating her to stand strong and remain resilient in the face of fear, anxiety, or uncertainty that life presents. Here, Luna ties together her *katatagang loob* with her faith, trusting that there exists hope and meaning in her struggles, drawing strength from knowing that she is "never alone." In many ways, this lessens the burden of fear and doubt, empowering Luna, Filipinos, and others with similar faith or cultural beliefs to call upon a deeper reserve of inner strength and resilience,

anchored by the knowing and understanding that a force greater than themselves is always guiding and supporting them in whatever they dedicate themselves to.

"The strength is not mine alone"

In making sense of her *katatagang loob*, Luna went on to explain further how her family has played a key role in guiding her journey to the person she is today. Central to our *kuwentuhan* below is Luna recognising that her inner strength and resilience do not come merely from her own personal resolve to persevere but are deeply connected to the love, care, and support that her loved ones have nourished in her. As Luna states:

> I just know that the strength is not mine alone. I am my mum, but more; I am my dad, but more... And all the values, teachings, and beliefs that they taught me growing up have made me who I am today. I mean, I admit that I'm someone who cries a lot about everything, especially when it gets hard, but I don't give up. I continue pushing on. I don't see it a lot either, but they [parents] have told me countless times that you know... I'm them and more. I forget it sometimes, but yeah, they make me feel like I can do anything.
>
> *- Luna*

Considering that the women in this study have consistently viewed themselves and their education in relation to their friends, family and other people around them, it stands to reason that Luna's expression of herself—her strength of character—would take this kind of meaning. In part, illustrative of such thinking is the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* concept of *kapwa*—the crux of the foundation of Filipino values—which encourages an understanding of *the self in relation to the other* (Dy, 1994; Enriquez, 1992; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000; Yacat, 2013). For example, in keeping with the principle of *kapwa*, we can see how Luna's relationship with her parents encourages her to "continue pushing on." She draws strength from their faith and confidence in her, giving further meaning to her *katatagang loob* in that as an extension of them, she is capable of achieving anything she sets her mind to. In this context,

the Filipino's inner strength and resilience—*katatagang loob*—emerge not just as an individual characteristic but as a way of being deeply embedded and nourished within our connections to one another as *kapwa tao*. Tellingly, we human beings are inherently social beings who need and rely on one another.

Chapter Discussion

Tiangco (2005) notes that more often than not, the 'self' sees the 'other' as a significant motivation for embodying *katatagang loob*, especially when the 'other' is a loved one, such as a parent. Consider, for example, how this is well pronounced in the women's achievement goals to complete their education as a way to honour their parents, and in the hard work and sacrifices made by their parents to secure a better future for their whole family (as discussed in *Chapter Three* and *Chapter Four*). Born and nourished through reciprocal love, care, and support, it is through the selfless acts and their shared moral obligation to one another that the women and their parents found the strength and resilience needed to overcome their personal hardships, regardless of how challenging they may be. Hence, *katatagang loob* emerges among Filipinos from their belief that their endeavours will contribute to the greater good of their *kapwa* that transcends far beyond their individual selves (Dy, 1994; Enriquez, 1992; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000; Tiangco, 2005; Yacat, 2013). This shared understanding of being allows them to not only have a transpersonal sense of something greater, but it also gives them meaning and a sense of purpose to go beyond the confines of their self-beliefs because of the support, empathy, and communal strength they experience with others. As Luna movingly shares, "They [parents] make me feel like I can do anything."

It should not be overlooked, however, that this in any way implies that the self and the other lose their sense of individuality, nor does it indicate that tapping into communal strength

diminishes the value and importance of individual efforts. Rather, *katatagang loob* allows Filipinos to acknowledge the significance that, as *kapwa tao,* we grow stronger *with* and *through* the people who stand by us. It is Sky's, Luna's, and the women's relationships with their friends, family, and broader community that provide them with the inner strength and resilience they need, whether they decide to navigate their hardships and struggles independently or in the company of others. And in a beautiful exchange, the women extend themselves to their *kapwa* when the need arises, echoing Luna's earlier sentiment that when all is said and done, no one is ever completely alone in their struggles. This creates a deeply interconnected web of wellbeing, wherein each intricate thread influences both individual and collective outcomes. Reflecting in this way, *katatagang loob,* therefore, is a shared journey that teaches the value of not giving up and maintaining a proactive stance in the face of hardships and uncertainties, while also acknowledging the importance of leaning on others. This is because, while personal will and determination are important, as we are inherently social beings, it is the warmth and encouragement from our friends, family, and broader community that truly give meaning and significance to our inner strength and resilience.

The following chapter weaves together the findings of this research, where I discuss the broader implications of this work and conclude this research journey.

Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusion

In the overarching narrative of this thesis, I have explored Filipina migrant university students' stories of 'achievement' as relating to their journey through tertiary education. Tracing the meaningful, inspiring, messy, and sometimes contradictory stories of six Filipina migrant university students in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, I bring into focus how these women navigate their experiences of migration, education, achievement, cultural identity, and notion of self. I pay special consideration to the women's negotiations and/or resistance to norms and expectations concerning their achievement goals and the need to acknowledge how *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* concepts and values saliently texture these experiences. Within each of these stories and the constellation they create, what emerged shed new light on opportunities for understanding the interconnected and interdependent nature of being a Filipino University student. *Chapter Three* reveals the influence of familial expectations on the narratives of 'achievement', highlighting the significance of acknowledging both historical and contemporary contexts that inform these expectations. *Chapter Four* delves into the role of women in relation to their parents and the broader collective *kapwa*, underscoring the importance of recognising how societal and cultural values, along with the processes of caring for, appreciating, and respecting one another, contribute to and maintain ideologies centred on striving to be better and achieve well academically and in life. Finally, *Chapter Five* explores how the entire academic journey, encompassing the challenges and people involved, helps the women (re)define inner strength and resilience in their everyday lives.

This chapter weaves together all the key sentiments articulated in the preceding chapters, placing the findings of the present study within the extensive context of migration, education, indigenous and psychology theory and research. First, I highlight the influence of

cultural narratives that uniquely shape students' 'achievements' and 'achievement goals' that mainstream psychological frameworks relating to educational achievement do not always account for. Specifically, I discuss the intricate and collective nature of what Filipino students and their parents consider and define as 'achievement' and how it relates to their wellbeing. Second, I address the complex, dynamic, and multifaceted nature of cultural identities, especially concerning migrant students straddling the worldviews and values of both their home and host cultures. Third, I discuss how the process of migration within the Filipino community represents merely a singular bead in the extensive chain of life that Filipino parents create for their children and possibly future generations. Here I pay attention to how children are expected to carry on the same legacy, striving towards a shared goal that serves the greater good of the collective 'chain'. This chapter concludes with a brief discussion of implications and potential directions for future research.

A story of 'achievement'

The findings of this research demonstrates that the notion of 'achievement' for these Filipina students is commonly defined as meeting and fulfilling familial and communal expectations. This may involve performing well in academic endeavours, securing prestigious career paths, or providing support to family members and loved ones. One's achievement is more than just a personal milestone; it is rooted in the shared experiences of family and community, with each journey to success becoming a chapter in a larger story, recognised and celebrated as a collective achievement that elevates the honour and standing of everyone involved. This lens is in contrast to one that is more focused on individual notions of achievement and related success. Much of the research, particularly in the field of psychology, takes on the lens of the latter, an emphasis on the importance of each person's unique journey

to success, underscoring the need to follow one's inner compass, pursue personal goals and interests, and nurture individual progress (Marsh & Martin, 2011; Wu et al., 2021). It is associated with independence, self-determination, and personal fulfilment, all of which are recognised as playing a pivotal role in achieving goals and milestones in many spheres of life, guiding individuals through academic endeavours and career progression alike. Yet, in a world that grows ever more interconnected, understanding the notion of 'achievement' for both our family and personal interests enables us to narrate our experiences and those of others in relation to what truly matters, what holds value, and what it means to lead a 'successful life'. This creates spaces where different interpretations and definitions of achievement are valued, acknowledged, and celebrated. In this thesis, drawing upon the narratives of the women, I conceptualise 'achievement' as an evolving socially constructed narrative. It is written collectively, encompassing participants' histories, present realities, and hopes and dreams for their families and themselves in the future. This research weaves together the intricate and collective nature of what these Filipina migrants consider 'achievement' and how it relates to their wellbeing.

Stories of achievement then, can be seen as a dialogical process as it involves continuous interaction, negotiation, and exchange of ideas among groups or between a person and their social context. For some women, 'achievement' was perceived as the ability to endure and overcome setbacks and challenges. This was especially evident among women who, through *hiya, pakikisama,* and *katatagang loob,* were acutely aware of the ways in which their behaviours, actions, and decisions rippled through the lives of others around them, particularly concerning the welfare and wellbeing of their parents. For instance, in *Chapter Three,* we bear witness to this in Cindy's story of her graduation day, alongside Luna's desire to play a part in her family's achievements. In *Chapter Five,* we hear this through Sky's Japanese doll analogy,

which tells a story about her goal of becoming an engineer just like her father while also embracing challenges and setbacks as integral parts of her journey. By and large, these narratives highlight that the understanding of oneself and others, along with the strength and resilience developed through these relationships, are equally meaningful accomplishments on the journey to achieving one's goals. In this way, falling short of your initial goal does not mean that you have failed to achieve something significant.

Additionally, for some women and their parents, 'achievement' was understood as a form of capital (akin to a form of social capital) and was maintained through *utang na loob*, largely in the understanding that the women had achieved their present positions, not simply as a consequence of their hard work and efforts, but also due to the accumulation of love, support, and care from other people, such as their families and the community. And in turn, this capital ought to be paid forward similar to the exemplars detailed in *Chapter Four*, where Sky serves as a role model for her younger siblings, while Cindy contributes financially to her family and supports relatives in the Philippines. In these moments, 'achievement' is not just an insular individual pursuit; it transcends time and space, and is shaped by relationships, cultural narratives, and dynamic conversations. It is a story of a shared journey that includes the challenges and the people involved and the eventual success, culminating in a meaningful collective achievement. Nuances such as these, challenge the traditional, linear, simplistic notion of achievement as conceptualised in much of the scholarly work in psychology.

As I argued in *Chapter One*, while mainstream psychological frameworks relating to educational achievement, such as personal investment theory, have broadened our knowledge and understanding of student achievement goal motivations, my focus on Filipina migrant university students' stories of achievement cannot be simply determined by discrete categories of goals (e.g., mastery goals, performance goals, social goals, intrinsic goals, and extrinsic

goals) (Elliot & Church, 1997; King et al., 2019; King & McInerney, 2012; Lee et al., 2010; McInerney, 2012; Urdan & Maehr, 1995). My research highlights the sheer importance of how cultural beliefs and values saliently texture migrant university students' 'achievement' and related (academic) success. The participants of this study also enact agency in negotiating and/or resisting these cultural narratives as they continue to make sense of their experiences within a wider sociocultural context. Indeed, the participants' stories demonstrate that there is no simple way of making sense of this occasionally opposing nuances of meaning. In essence, what I have established in this thesis is that imported theoretical ideas and categories concerning 'achievement' may not adequately reflect the culture, history, and ways of being of Filipino students, who, at their core, through the concept of *kapwa*, are interconnected and interdependent in nature. Accordingly, I emphasise the importance of recognising how cultural narratives influence the ways in which students navigate and make sense of their educational journeys and beyond in order to unravel the complex dynamics of their everyday lives in ways that are relevant and meaningful to them.

With that said, in a globalised world, narratives about achievement are constantly evolving where the collective nature of achievement in Filipino immigrant families creates a paradox: striving for collective success can enhance one's sense of belonging and familial pride but may also heighten levels of stress, anxiety, guilt, burnout, and depression, especially when a child feels their 'achievements' fall short of their parents' or the community's standards and expectations. Here, I draw on how acculturation processes can lead to tension when children are influenced by the ideals of the host culture that might value independence and personal fulfilment, while parents maintain home cultural expectations ensuring their children 'achieve' and 'succeed' in a their new home. In *Chapter Four*, we witness this in Bell's story that reveals the emotional burden and pressures of 'achievement' as a relational and construct rooted in

utang na loob. Yet, this is far from being a static endpoint rooted on emotional distress. As migrant students navigating their educational journeys, Bell, along with the women in this study, reveal a delicate balancing act, weaving together communal responsibility and individual ambition; the journeys, struggles, and triumphs that shape who they are becoming. These evolving narratives show how migrant students do not passively regurgitate cultural norms and acculturation processes, but are active and creative authors of their stories of achievement—woven through love, care, duty, respect, hope, strength, and resilience.

Weaving the collective and individual: A relational narrative

Culture is a dynamic and complex construct that shapes and informs people's decisions, actions, and behaviours in everyday life in context-dependent ways, while also being open to negotiation, adjustment, and change. Straddling the worldviews and values of both their home and host cultures, the women in this study are recognising that their lifeworld is one that is both collective *and* individual–rather than being either/or. Indeed, research in psychology and migration tends to often fall into a dichotomy, discussing experiences of within collective cultures versus that of individual cultures. Specifically, scholarship often tends to attribute Asian (including South East Asian such as Filipino) cultures as being collective and 'Western' cultures and nations (Aotearoa New Zealand is often included in this category as relating to dominant Pākehā or European settler cultural worldviews) as being individual. Such a stance disregards the nuances and complexities of the cultures of various nation and peoples, irrespective of whether they are 'Western' or otherwise. Moreover, as this research demonstrates, migrants often straddle the boundaries of the collective and individual, negotiating associated tensions and challenges, but also revelling in the liberatory aspects of this middle space and ability to choose what works best for them. For example, in *Chapter*

Four, Violet, through her conversation with an Indian engineering student on Engenuity Day, strategically shifted cultural expressions from believing her pursuit of engineering was solely influenced by her sense of duty to her parents, to recognising that her own personal aspirations and ambitions hold equal significance.

Migration stories then, are fundamentally relational. The collective and individual dimensions are not separate threads but are interwoven, co-constructing meaning and identity. In my *kuwentuhan* with the women, I was able to document how their stories of achievement and notion of self are relationally constructed, informed by shared histories and cultural narratives, particularly reflected in the concepts and values of *kapwa, hiya, pakikisama, utang na loob, katatagang loob,* and *bahala na*. Simultaneously, their personal stories redefine collective understandings by embracing the wisdom found in their cultural narratives, creating opportunities for healthier expressions that honour and celebrate mutual respect and shared humanity, while also providing themselves the space to evolve as individuals. This cultural hybridity that the process of migration has fostered reflects the complex, dynamic, and multifaceted nature of cultural identities, where cultural meanings are continuously renegotiated and recontextualized. This research builds upon the foundational work of scholars like Cassim et al. (2020**)**, creating opportunities for further exploration into these complexities.

Migration

Finally, woven into the various discussions in this thesis is the idea that migration is a process that people often pursue for a better life, documented in literature in both the fields of migration and psychology (Espiritu, 2003, Peddie & Liu, 2021; Roces, 2021; Tan, 2008). This scholarship largely focuses only on the context of the migrants (the people moving) themselves and their nuclear families. Yet, as evident through the stories and experiences of

the Filipina young people who participated in this research, migration was not only for better lives for themselves and their nuclear family units, but also for the collective *kapwa*. This collective focus is one that remains unexplored particularly in the field of psychology.

In a general sense, this notion of a 'better life' comes hand in hand with class negotiations, as Filipino families aspire to 'achieve' upward social mobility, shaped by the country's colonial past, where in order for a family to 'succeed' and move out of extreme inequality they had to move up the social hierarchy (Cassim et al., 2020). This mobility, or new position on the social hierarchy, is transferrable throughout the family or collective *kapwa*, serving as a conduit, a shared pathway for *all* to 'succeed' *together*. One way that this upward social mobility is often 'achieved' is through education and educational achievement. Here, it is important to note that education should be in specific 'prestigious' professions, such as that of a lawyer, engineer, etc., as experienced and mentioned by all the participants in this study. Simply put, academic degrees and educational qualifications that lead to 'prestigious' and professional careers become the most reliable avenue to 'achieve' success and a means to restore or improve the collective's standing within the host country and, consequently, their home country through increased relative opportunities in life. Relatedly, the *babala*, or cautionary stories (as explored in *Chapter Three*), shared by the women's parents are to ensure that families do not either slip back down the carefully risen hierarchy or take it for granted. Participants' parents sought to guide their children along a path that felt concrete, secure, and legitimate to them—one that would not only bring pride to the family but also present a polished and legitimate standing in the eyes of the world. Such views echo the communal narratives set in place through the Philippines' colonial history, where local and indigenous populations had to actively legitimise their skills, and ultimately their existence (often through education), to be seen and taken seriously (Cassim et al., 2020). Here, we see that social class

is mobilised to lift these families (not just nuclear families but also collective *kapwa*) out of inequality and austerity (Anthias, 2013; Hodgetts & Griffin, 2015).

Importantly, education is considered a *kayamanan*—a treasure—that previous generations worked hard to acquire, and that is then handed down, and must be protected. For instance, we witness this in *Chapter Four*, with Sky and Cindy stepping into their respective roles as a role model and a breadwinner, driven by a desire to repay and pay forward the unwavering support they have received throughout their lives. The roles these women feel they have to play are unspoken social rules cultivated within the family, with the goal of ensuring that the treasure is protected, maintained, and paid forward to future generations. In many respects, these narratives illustrate how the migration process for Filipinos is a deeply collective experience, as goals and dreams for better futures and opportunities extend far beyond one's self.

Overall, migration research largely tends to highlight the importance of acculturation and settlement experiences (e.g., Berry, 2019; Bourhis et al., 2009; Fojas & Guevarra, 2012; Padilla & Perez, 2003; Townsend, 2017), which are indeed significant; however the *kuwentuhan* illustrate that there is much more to the migration experience that warrants consideration. For instance, for this group of Filipina migrant university students, migration is also about negotiating the expectations families and communities in both host and home nations, in a context where the decision to move was often not made by these participants. Therein, their lives and settlement in the host nation was something that was given to them, often not out of choice. In light of this, there is a need for nuanced discussions regarding the broader implications of this issue, which is not confined to the specific participant group of Filipina migrant university students in this study but rather encompasses many Asian migrant communities. For instance, as with Filipino parents, education is of considerable importance

to many Asian migrant communities, especially those of Korean, Chinese, and other East Asian backgrounds (Peddie & Liu, 2021). Central to this understanding is a worldview that emphasises the significance of education acquired in the host country. And in a society where 'achieving success' is relational, the education of Asian migrants not only enriches their skills and abilities as students but also carries the potential to elevate the social standing of their entire migrant family (Peddie & Liu, 2021). In another comparable narrative, first-generation migrant parents who encountered hardships and struggles in their home countries or during migration are driven to push their second-generation migrant children more intensely to 'achieve' in the host country to ensure a better future for them—one that surpasses the life they once knew. From this, what follows is that second generation migrants like myself, find ourselves navigating both the blessings and burdens of our parents' decisions, with the goal of honouring and making the most of the legacy handed down and entrusted to us. Narratives such as this represent a significant domain that invites further exploration in the field of migration and psychological research, revealing layers of complexities that remain to be understood.

Implications and future research

This thesis has revealed the significance and nuances of Filipina migrant university students' stories of achievement. The findings of this project have significant implications for a number of areas, including the provision of mental health support, enhanced career guidance, and improved student and peer support for these migrant young people.

Primarily, recognising the significance of context is essential to fostering the wellbeing of this particular group of young people. Acknowledging the importance of familial context, specifically, can provide valuable understandings of these young people's experiences, identities, values, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds. Mental health practitioners, particularly

those within university counselling services, for example, can acquire a deeper understanding of how familial expectations and broader communal narratives influence the educational journeys and overall wellbeing of students coming from a variety of backgrounds and lived experiences.

The implementation of tailored peer support groups in university institutions designed to assist in addressing mental health challenges within the Filipino cultural context can also empower Filipino migrant university students to come together and share their unique journeys and experiences. Sharing these stories and having these conversations helps peel back the complexities of burnout and guilt tied to academic achievement and parental expectations. Within these spaces, Filipino students can uplift one another as a collective, finding emotional and practical support from peers who have walked similar paths, fostering a sense of *kapwa* and understanding.

This study also elucidates significant implications for university student recruitment services and career support services, such as open days and career days, regarding the perceptions of education and career possibilities held by migrant students and their families. As discussed exhaustively in this thesis, for many Filipino migrant families, akin to many Asian migrant communities, education is perceived as a generational investment for upward social mobility, financial security, and community prestige. However, capturing the value associated with particular degrees and the possible career opportunities they can lead to is not always straightforward. Open days and career days could more thoroughly delineate the career pathways associated with each degree, including information on employment opportunities, income potential, and invaluable transferrable skills that can be carried over into various fields. This approach emboldens migrant students to confidently pursue and achieve their educational aspirations, promoting a sense of ease and preparedness for their transition into higher

education. At the same time, it supports parents in acknowledging and valuing diverse career pathways that are accessible to their children. Such initiatives can be of value to local students as well. Taking a step further, initiatives intended to support successful settlement for migrant communities, whether spearheaded by local government or other organisations, for example, might also consider the educational experiences and aspirations of younger migrants (whether children of first-generation migrants or international students).

Finally, in considering future directions and future research potentials, it is important to highlight that the narratives contained in this thesis are the stories of six Filipina migrant university students in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. Therein, future research could further explore the interconnected and interdependent nature of being a migrant student in Aotearoa New Zealand in more depth. Nuances based on cultural background (e.g., experiences of those from other Asian cultures, Middle Eastern cultures, African cultures, Māori and Pacific Island cultures), gender, age, and socioeconomic status could be avenues of inquiry that build on the research in this thesis.

Concluding remarks

As I reach the end of this thesis, I find myself drawn back to the same place where I started—with a reflection. When I began this research project in 2023, I held a vision that, in hindsight, may have been a touch naive, a thesis that would explore whether or not there are similarities between my story and the stories of other Filipina migrant university students. I envisioned that the degree to which dominant Filipino cultural beliefs and values shape and inform the women's achievement goals would serve solely as an ancillary instrument in my journey to delve into this topic. It became clear that my assumptions were completely misguided. For one, it became evident that this journey was anything but straightforward; its

complexities unfolded in ways that were not immediately obvious. Moreover, I misjudged the impact this project and my related engagements with participants would have on both my academic life and personal life. The journey of this research has been a deeply transformative experience, filled with challenges that tested my resilience, moments that brought healing, and even triggering at times. In writing about how *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* concepts and values saliently textured the women's stories of achievement, I sat with and internalised, before re-storying these cultural narratives in their true essence, centred on mutual respect and the deep connection of *kapwa*. It brought to light the 'messiness' of storytelling, yet it was this very aspect of our *kuwentuhan* that allowed the women and me to genuinely, openly, and seamlessly express the heart of our lived experiences. Overall, it made unmistakably clear the absolute necessity of work to delve into the interconnected, interdependent, and ultimately complex nature of being a Filipino student.

I have always thought of this work as a piece of art that is close to my heart. And its collection of stories is something I hope stirs emotions, offering comfort and understanding to those who find reflections of themselves within its pages. To the six remarkable Filipina migrant university students who graciously opened their hearts and shared their narratives, thank you for the time and the meaningful *kuwentuhan* we had. Your stories of achievement unfold pages brimming with love, care, duty, respect, hope, strength, and resilience.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Invitation to Participate

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Appendix C: Release of Photographs Consent Form

Appendix D: Release of Transcripts Consent Form

Appendix E: Conversation Guide

Appendix F: A 'Neat' Table of Narratives

Appendix G: A Constellation Map of Stories

Appendix A: Invitation to Participate

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
TE MURA PŪRANGA TANGATA

The Cultural Identity and Academic Aspirations of Filipina Migrant University Students

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Name(s) of researcher(s): Kristine Getalado
Name(s) of supervisor(s): Shemana Cassim

Kamusta kabayan!
My name is Kristine Getalado and I am a Filipina who migrated to New Zealand in 2007. Currently, I am a postgraduate student at Massey University, completing this project as part of the thesis component of my Master of Health Science degree in Psychology. My supervisor is Dr Shemana Cassim.

This Project
My research focuses on the migrant experiences of Filipina migrant university students in Aotearoa New Zealand. In particular, I would like to have a conversation with you about your everyday life as a university student in New Zealand, your academic aspirations, and, by extension, your overall wellbeing. Through our *kwentuhan* (light informal conversation), I hope to draw attention to the complex and diverse experiences of migrant Filipina university students, which are understudied and underrepresented in psychological research. The purpose of this research is to create space for your stories and experiences to be heard and brought to the forefront. This study will be conducted over a period of 12 months.

Invitation to Participate
You are invited to participate in this research because of your ethnicity, gender, tertiary education level, location, and because you have indicated an interest and willingness to participate. You can be confident that you will never be required to do anything you do not want to do or asked to commit more time than you are comfortable with. I hope to speak with a small group of 6 to 8 participants like yourself, in this study to explore and listen to each participants' stories and experiences on a deeper and more meaningful level.

Participant Involvement
If you wish to take part in this research, I would like to have a few *kwentuhan* sessions with you so that you can share your stories of your migration and tertiary academic experiences in New Zealand. We may need 1-3 sessions for this purpose, each lasting from one hour to an hour and a half. The date, time, and location for our *kwentuhan* will be arranged between us beforehand. You are welcome to bring any support people you wish along with you, which will be held at a local library's private discussion room, or if you prefer somewhere else, we can also meet at your home—wherever you feel most comfortable.

This is what your participation would involve:
In our first meeting, I will reach out to you via Zoom or phone call so that we can meet properly, and to explain and outline the study details. Following this, you will have the opportunity to ask any questions you may have about the research project. If you agree to participate, I will send you a consent form to sign and return to me via email. This document indicates that the study has been explained to you and that your participation is entirely voluntary. After this, I will ask you to take up to four photographs of what you consider best captures your experience as a migrant university student in New Zealand, which

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you will email to me. This will be in preparation for our second meeting. You will have two weeks to complete this, after which I will schedule a meeting with you.
At the start of our second meeting, you will be given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym (false name) for yourself. Following this, we will have our *kwentuhan* about the photographs you have taken. I'd be keen to hear why you took the photographs and what they mean to you. I will also bring up a series of topics relating to your thoughts, feelings, and experiences regarding what migration means to you, your identity as a Filipina, and how this relates to and affects your academic aspirations and wellbeing.
At no point will you be encouraged to divulge any information that you do not want to or answer any question that you do not wish to. I would also like to audio record our *kwentuhan* so that I can transcribe them into a written document later on. I may also take notes while we talk. After the interview, you will have the opportunity to debrief and ask any remaining questions you have about the research project. Ideally, I would like to have two sessions of *kwentuhan* with you in case I need to follow-up and clarify anything we have discussed, but you are welcome to decline the offer of a third engagement.

It is possible that some of the topics discussed will be sensitive to you. If this happens, remember that we can pause the recording at any time and resume when you are ready. Keep in mind that you are not required to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable.

Benefits of Participation
I expect the primary benefits of this project will be:

- To document, recognise and validate your experiences, thought and feelings as a participant.
- To provide a judgement free space where you are able to share your stories and experiences with me.
- To contribute to the existing literature on migrant experience, the complexities of cultural identities and tertiary academic aspirations, which could improve conditions for Filipina migrant university students long term (improved understanding of their experience, communication, compassion etc.)

Risks of Participation
I have identified that some of the risks associated with this research are: autonomy and anonymity. To manage these risks, I will routinely assure that you have the right to withdraw your consent to participate without explanation at any time during the interview and up to **one month** after the interview. I will also affirm that consent may be withdrawn without consequence. You will also not be required to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable or that you do not wish to.
I will ensure that I maintain your confidentiality throughout the project. This means that:

- I will be the only one who will have access to any information that directly identifies you.
- Identifiable information, like your real name, will be made anonymous with a pseudonym (false name) of your choice, which will be used for all details about your participation (except for your consent form).
- Identifiable faces in the photographs that you provide will be obscured to ensure anonymity.
- If you consent to having the interview audio recorded, I will be the only person to transcribe the recording and the only person who will know or hear your voice.

Data Management
With your consent, our conversations will be audio recorded, for later transcription by me. In addition, I may take notes during or after the interview to help me in writing the project.

The transcript of our conversation can be sent to you via email for approval, if you'd like. At this point you can delete any parts you do not wish to be included.

The content of our conversations and selected photographs will be used to develop an understanding of the complex and diverse experiences of migrant Filipina university students in New Zealand. General summaries as well as specific quotes from our conversations will be used in the final thesis, and any

publications and presentations that stem from this work. But I will make sure I check with you if it's ok before I use this data.

My supervisor [Shemana Cassim] will store deidentified photographs, written transcripts, and my notes of our conversations, on a password-protected Massey University server to which only she and I will have access. The recorded data will be anonymised by removing all names and other identifying characteristics. In the transcripts, research report, and subsequent publications, the pseudonym of your choosing will be used.

In line with the Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct all research data will be stored for a minimum period of six years after the completion and submission of the final thesis. Following that, all data will be permanently destroyed and disposed of (erased and shredded).

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Speak to anyone about the research as you decide whether or not you'd like to participant;
- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time during the interview and up to **one month** after the interview;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- ask for the audio recorder to be turned off at any time during our conversations;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher, and that your photographs will be anonymised;
- be given access to a summary of the project's findings when it is concluded.

Ethical Conduct

"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Prof Craig Johnson, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 06 356 9099 x 85271, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz".

Project Contacts

I appreciate you taking the time to read this. I look forward to meeting with you and hearing your stories. If you have any additional questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor, Shemana Cassim.

Kristine Getalado

[redacted]
Kristine.Getalado.1@uni.massey.ac.nz

Shemana Cassim

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ext +6469517966
S.Cassim@massey.ac.nz

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
TE KURA PŪKENGA TANGATA

The Cultural Identity and Academic Aspirations of Filipina Migrant University Students

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL

I have read the Participant Information Sheet in my first language or had it read to me, and I understand all of the information provided. I have been informed of the specifics of the study, my questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I am aware that I may ask additional questions at any time. I understand that participation is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time [up to one month after the interview].

During the interview, I am aware that I am not required to answer questions unless I am happy in discussing the topic. I may stop the interview at any time, as well as request that the recording device be turned off. By signing this consent form, I understand that ownership of my interview will remain with me, but that the researcher will be able to use my interview for the research outlined the Information Sheet. It has been made clear to me that my identity will remain confidential in the presentation of the research findings. I understand that I will have the opportunity to review the anonymised photographs used in the interview and remove any that I do not want to be included in any way in the study. I am aware that before any of my photographs are used in the presentation of research findings, I will have the opportunity to review them again and sign a release form.

I wish to take part in this research	☐	I am aware my data will remain confidential	☐
I am aware I can refuse to answer any question	☐	I wish to receive a summary of the study findings	☐
I wish for the interview to be audio recorded	☐		
I wish to review a copy of my interview transcript	☐		

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ hereby consent to take part in this study.
[Print Full Name]

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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Appendix C: Release of Photographs Consent Form

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

The Cultural Identity and Academic Aspirations of Filipina Migrant University Students

AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF PHOTOGRAPHS

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to review the anonymised photographs taken by me for this study, and I am happy with the degree of anonymity provided.

I agree that the following anonymized photographs may be used in the thesis and any publications and presentations arising from the research.

Photograph title/caption:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Full Name - printed _____

School of Psychology - Te Kura Hinengaro Tangata
Private Bag 11222, Palmerston North 4442, New Zealand
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Appendix D: Release of Transcripts Consent Form

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
TE KURA PŪKENGA TANGATA

The Cultural Identity and Academic Aspirations of Migrant Filipina University Students

AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview(s) conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used in the thesis and any publications and presentations arising from the research.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Full Name - printed _____

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Appendix E: Conversation Guide

- Introduce self
- Briefly outline project and what you hope to achieve (lay language).
- Go through PIS, sign consent form
- Did you have any further questions?
- Consent to turn audio recorder on.

Interview Questions and Prompts

Migration Experience

1. *Tell me about your migration story…*
    - When did you migrate to NZ?
    - Who did you come with and who did you leave behind?
    - Did anyone come ahead of you?
    - Can you tell me a little bit about why you/your family decided to move?
    - Migrating involves many changes; as a student, what was the most challenging part of adjusting to life in NZ?

University Experience

1. *Tell me a little more about yourself as a university student…?*
    - What do you study?
    - What interested you to pursue that field?
    - Full-time/Part-time?
2. *Looking at these photos, tell me why you took them and what they mean to you.*

    If a place…

- Why is this place important to you?
- Tell me a story around it?
- How does this place make you feel?

If people or a practice…

- Can you tell me a little bit about what's happening in this photo?

3. *Please tell me more about the types of things you think about as a university student…*
    - What's the thing you are proudest of so far, and why?
    - What's the hardest thing you've faced so far, and why?
    - What are you hoping to accomplish in the future?

<u>Filipino Culture</u>

1. *Sometimes, certain cultural beliefs and values influence how people develop a work ethic. As a Filipina student…*
    - How do you think our cultural background has influenced your life in university/as a university student? (i.e., ***utang na loob*** (debt of gratitude), ***hiya*** (shame), ***pakikisama*** (being along with), ***bahala na*** (accepting sufferings/problems, leaving it up to God), ***lakas ng loob*** (guts)
    - How do these beliefs make you affect your wellbeing? Can you tell me why? (i.e., accommodative/confrontative values; development of people pleasing, perfectionism tendencies? overwhelmed, stressed)
2. *Our culture gives so much value to education…*
    - Why do you think this is?
    - Expectation/Responsibility…? (Are they more so self-imposed, parental/family, or cultural/social norms?);

- How do you think your academic aspirations compare/relate to your/their/cultural expectations? What are some ways these expectations have shaped your academic experience/aspirations?

Reflection

1. *Do you see similarities in your story and the stories of other Filipina migrant university students?*
2. *In what ways do you believe our cultural beliefs and values have made YOU strong?*
3. *Are there any other thoughts or stories you'd like to share?*

Conclude

Thank participant for their time 😊

Appendix F: A 'Neat' Table of Narratives

INTERVIEW DETAILS **BELL**	**Importance of Family** **Migration definitions**	**THEME 1: Reasons for migration** *"I think for my mum mostly because family was here. Like so my grandma—well, my immediate family—my grandma, my granddad, my maternal grandparents, and then my auntie. When we first came back in, like in 2002 or '01, I think she kind of saw that life was better here, obviously."* *"First it was my mum, and then I think it's about six months later it was my dad, myself and my brother."* • **Family reunification**; a parent secures a relatively stable job first, partner then children follow suit • **Economic opportunities**; possibly bring up how parents might have had a different (perhaps better?) career back in the Philippines that they exchanged to secure one in NZ…?
		THEME 2: Challenges of migration *"Language? Well I think we're quite lucky cos we came at a very young age. But I think language was still pretty hard like I never… I didn't speak that much English, even though at school, in the Philippines, they do encourage it."* *"Yeah. I think also um Western culture's… different…"* *"As like when you're growing up—as I've grown up, I feel like I have—I still have Filipino roots and, like, like those kind of cultural manners... but I've become more Westernised, I think." Um, I don't know… Like values maybe and beliefs, cos Filipinos are very religious and Christianity's a core part of who you are you know?*

		• **Cultural adjustment**; Doesn't resonate with certain Filipino cultural values (resistance?)
INTERVIEW DETAILS VIOLET	**Importance of Family Migration definitions**	**THEME 1: Reasons for migration** *"We moved March 2010. Before that my dad's already been working for like a year or two in New Zealand, and then when we moved here (mum, younger sister and younger brother), um, when he was pretty much financially ready for us to start renting."* *"Ahh yeah um, money *laughs* Pays better and as well as the education. My dad was excited because education was pretty much free *laughs* 'It's free! You're gonna go!' And I'm like, 'OK' *laughs*"* • **Family reunification**; a parent secures a relatively stable job first, partner then children follow suit • **Economic opportunities** • **Education opportunities**; free education in NZ
		THEME 2: Challenges of migration *"In my first year I had an issue with the accent *laughs* so like understanding the accent, cos I think the first topic I remember properly like—first topic was on the world's 'breads' but the way they said breads I was thinking, 'dog breeds?'"* • **Language barrier**
INTERVIEW DETAILS LUNA	**Importance of Family Migration definitions**	**THEME 1: Reasons for migration** *"Well I came to New Zealand when I was like two years old, I don't really remember much… But… I remember—well now that I've grown up, I see so much of the hardship, but when I was young, I never saw that…*

		I saw… I don't know… fun… Yeah, all I remember was fun." *"Well, like, at first it was my dad, and then I don't really remember much, but I know we came, like after like a month of him being alone here; he took as straight away."* *"Mmmhm… Philippines… It's a hard life to grow up in. There's very little chance, you know that you'll have a future or you'll succeed there even with a degree."* *"They wanted a better future for us."* • **Family reunification** • **Economic opportunities** • **Education opportunities**
		THEME 2: Challenges of migration *"Oh my God… It was like definitely the culture, or like the values of—cos obviously at home, it's very traditional."* *"The language as well. It's like when you go out, it's *laughs*, it's like, 'Solid dox' *laughs* It's all that and you're like confronted with a whole different culture and it's… it's overwhelming… sometimes, and you don't fit in a lot. Growing up yeah, I didn't fit in a lot, and I was a shy kid." *laughs* • **Cultural adjustment** • **Language barrier**
INTERVIEW DETAILS SKY	**Importance of Family Migration definitions**	*"My dad actually moved here to New Zealand in 2007."* *"He came here and then that was December 2006 and then the rest of my family—so it would be mum, myself, my younger sister and my younger brother um, followed suit… Ahh July of 2007? So I suppose 6/7 months later."*

		"That would obviously be because of better opportunities for our families and I suppose for mum and dad… for the kids… *"Given the promises of a better life abroad compared to the Philippines."* • **Family reunification** • **Economic opportunities** • **Education opportunities**
		THEME 2: Challenges of migration *"I remember when we moved here, since given that the schooling education in the Philippines is very intense. So, when we came here, like, I was seen as a really really smart kid. Like who knew Maths. People would look to me whenever there was like a really hard Maths question or if there was anything hard um… I found it— *sighs* I wouldn't say I found it hard… But I found it peculiar, just because of the… differences in the learning so far. But then I suppose as the years went by from intermediate to high-school, my learning adjusted to the New Zealand schooling system."* *"Um, and then, apparently according to my friend who's still one of my closest friends, according to her I didn't speak much English. I was really quiet."* *"So, I guess I was just not… aware of how to interact with people, or whether my English was understandable."* *"Yeah and as a kid um, I was a shy kid growing up as well so that might have been a factor to it as well."* **Cultural adjustment**; education in NZ being less intense compared to the Philippines **Language barrier**

INTERVIEW DETAILS **CINDY**	**Importance of Family** **Migration definitions**	**THEME 1: Reasons for migration** *"I came with my mum in 2008. But my dad already moved here like 2007, in May, and he actually left while my mum was still in the hospital after an operation. This was in the Philippines before he left. The thing is like he had just gotten back from Saudi Arabia, and like he stayed a few months in the Philippines with us."* *"For better opportunities. Yeah… Better opportunities and education. Mostly for me, yeah… Mostly for me. Like my dad did it… because he got a job offer, and then mum and I followed because they want me to have a better future rather than in the Philippines."* • **Family reunification** • **Economic opportunities** • **Education opportunities**
		THEME 2: Challenges of migration *"Mmmhm… I guess like… a different environment, and like having to speak English all the time." *laughs** *"Just feeling like out of place, cos I also came in the middle of the school year."* • **Cultural adjustment** • **Language barrier**
INTERVIEW DETAILS **BLUE**	**Importance of Family** **Migration definitions**	**THEME 1: Reasons for migration** *"So I migrated here back in November 2013. Yeah, so my mum and dad came together, ahh a year before us and I think they got their residency—permanent residency first before they decided to come get us just to make life easier I guess." *laughs** *"I mean I guess same with everyone else, just to have a better life, better opportunities. Um, to be able to afford things more and also to*

		actually be together as well cos my dad used to work in Saudi when we were in the Philippines because they paid better there and he would like send money to us. But if we all… went to New Zealand together, the plan was that we could… they could earn more and then that way my dad doesn't have to go all the way to Saudi to earn money for us." • **Family reunification** • **Economic opportunities**
		THEME 2: Challenges of migration *"Mmmhm… Well actually cos I came here when I was 12. It was Year 8 so academically, I'd say it was easier. *laughs* "In the Philippines you have so many subjects pa and in Year 8 dito kasi, mostly laro laro lang diba?" [In the Philippines you have so many subjects and in Year 8 here, it's mostly just fun and games, right?"]* *And P.E.. Oh! Actually that was the most challenging *laughs* thing cos back in the Philippines we didn't have, oh, at least we rarely had P.E., it was like a secondary thing compared to your academics. But here, it was really important, so I would struggle when they made us do um… what's it called? Cross-country."* *"And also I guess it was hard cos we weren't—I wasn't used to speaking in English yet."* • **Cultural adjustment** • **Language barrier**

Appendix G: A Constellation Map of Stories

UTANG NA LOOB

Often studies at home

* I think it's always cos I've always been a homebody, so just the home is where I focus better and feel more comfortable."

play with idea of homebound & culture bound (being a "homebody")

On a Filipino social norm that Bell doesn't agree/identify with

"When you're here in NZ, when you turn into an adult, 18, you can do whatever you want. This idea that like your parents don't really have that kind of influence as much. In Filipino culture, you may be 18, but you're still under your parents... if you live under their roof, you follow every rule, what they want and everything like that. I'm pretty obedient so I don't really do much."

Out of respect, love and duty to the family — Filial piety

On Utang na Loob

* How does it affect me? Maybe some time you get overwhelmed? By like how much you live up to I guess. Cos there is that expectation for you to finish your degree. I think it's a Filipino thing right, like you have to be educated. Education is massive. Education is such a high part of being Filipino. High emphasis on learning deeply rooted in Confucian traditions (Park, Endo & Goodwin, 2008)

"It's kind of like a burden isn't it? Because there's an expectation of you to pay back what you're given." Gratitude feeling like an entitlement...

By upholding your end of the exchange, that's how you show your respect and gratitude

The masculine role of being an "ate" (eldest sister)

Introduce Sky's story with how when she was younger she aspired to either become a teacher/engineer because those were her parents' jobs. Really wanted to become an engineer, didn't get UC entrance.

Sky: "Luckily, my mum and dad, I know they're always supportive of whatever I do, um... regardless when I failed my UC entrance for the degree I wanted to do in high-school; they were OK with it." On the flip side, currently finishing Masters in Environmental Engineering

"Yeah it wasn't enforced. I never felt the pressure from them, hence why it's not utang na loob. It's more like, 'thank you for bringing us here. I want to be successful because you brought us here, and make you proud and make you happy.'" doesn't trigger a sense of internal conflict :. the ecosystem of utang na loob is working for this family system

"I wouldn't call it utang na loob. I always just felt the responsibility to succeed given that in the Philippines, like you know, you always have to work hard in life if you want to succeed." Especially given that I'm the eldest child, that I don't know. I might have set myself unnecessary expectations and responsibilities." Idea of younger siblings looking up to you as the eldest

"Not a debt of gratitude... I suppose since my parents were so accommodating, I guess that set my expectation of myself very high? I need to live it up for them... So I guess there's that immense pressure that I sometimes put on myself that can sometimes be detrimental to my wellbeing."

"It was more like making them proud as opposed to owing them something. I want to make them proud. I want them to feel satisfied with their sacrifices and decisions." Framing immigrant parents' experiences through the lens of sacrifice :. the feeling of having to do right by that sacrifice and striving to achieve their goals using this meritocratic metric for achievement which does a lot of damage to their self-concepts and negatively affects their overall wellbeing

Dinner with family

During this time, Sky was writing her Honours thesis... "I was actually hesitant to go out cos of course, I was stressed and what not."

Younger brother and younger sister in frame

"Oh yeah! That necklace that I'm wearing, actually my sister gave it to me when I graduated Bachelors. She got us matching necklaces."

"I've always felt like I had to do well academically and in life in general because I don't know... it's like a sense of responsibility to be a good role model for my siblings."

Relationship with younger sister

"We've closer in age compared to my brother, so yeah we're close. "I don't really tell her much about what I'm struggling with though, but I know she knows what I'm going through."

KATATAGANG LOOB

Desk at home (Lockdown era) 2020 Sky

Daruma doll A reminder of self-perseverance, focus, and discipline
A talisman that acts as a reminder of your own life aims
Drawing in the daruma's eye is not a wish; it's a promise to yourself that you will follow your ambition and achieve your objective, regardless of the hurdles and traps that may arise as you continue your journey

delve into history, cultural/religious significance of daruma, connect with bahala na

Got daruma from Japanese high school teacher

"My goal was to graduate from uni...? Or to get into uni? Either of the two. It must've been to graduate uni because for me, it makes sense that I have set that long term goal as supposed to just entering uni. And yeah, so when I graduated from my Bachelors, I got to shade the other eye."

Fall down seven times, stand up eight

"The idea behind the daruma is that no matter what brings you down, you always get back up. You could say it's quite... telling of what I've been experiencing cos I suppose no matter what the hardships are, or however hard I find things, I still manage to find ways to get back up." Resilience

insert story about not getting UE for engineering, a complete 180 cos Sky's now doing her Master's in Environmental engineering

Having the daruma on her desk stands as a continual reminder of what Sky initially desired, why she made that pledge to herself in the first place and how far she has come.

"Dream" Why Sky decided to do Masters in Environmental Engineering

"I suppose I would say is that it's to fulfil my childhood dream I've always wanted to become an engineer, and environmental engineering was what I thought the perfect balance of the environmental side, the technical side and also I can bring my social side to it."

This object represents transformational moments in Sky's life. There's this kind of use factor and memory factor where you kind of go back and form with engagement and memories

Katatagang loob

"'Dream' has always been my 'it word'."

- Dared herself to dream (Lakas ng loob) Sky dedicated herself to her desires and ambitions
- The quote: a projection, an extension of Sky's being, of who she is as an individual. Alludes to the idea that Sky values the importance of having a dream and yearning for its achievement

On 'Bahala na'

"I do believe that God's will is God's will for you, but you have to put in the work. So even though God intends for this to happen to you or what not, everything's on you." Sky's ready to face with courage the difficulties of whatever situation she's in and will do her best to accomplish her objective

courage is fueled by faith more change to "FL"

Bahala na is sometimes translated as 'fatalism' or 'resignation', but in a Filipino worldview, it's translated more positively as 'courage to face uncertainty'

Bahala na = contemplation of uncertainty → lakas ng loob (inner strength) → realise her dreams