

Saling-Pusa Tayo [We Are Saling-Pusa]: Toward Being and Teaching Filipinxs
on Indigenous Lands

Kriya Issa Anguluan Velasco

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Reading Committee:

Django Paris, Chair

Enrique Bonus

Jondou Chen

Jean Dennison

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

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Kriya Issa Anguluan Velasco

University of Washington

Abstract

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Kriya Issa Anguluan Velasco

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Django Paris

College of Education

Filipinxs in the United States/Turtle Island are both racialized “others” and settlers on Indigenous lands. This study asks the two following questions: What does it mean to be Filipinx on Indigenous Lands? How do Filipinxs navigate the world? My co-researchers and I employed a Projects in Humanization, relational approach to exploring these questions within and beyond multiple Filipinx-themed undergraduate seminars I facilitated between 2017 and 2021. Our focus for the first question was elucidating Filipinxness in terms of group identifications (e.g., Filipinx, brown, Catholic). Our focus for the second question involved highlighting actions and commitments that we related to our responsibilities, roles, and commitments as Filipinxs on Indigenous lands. I employed a constructivist, grounded theory approach to develop a theory of the saling-pusa, or “informal member,” as both ontological and pedagogical tool that involves

refusal and desire. I propose that Filipinxs as saling-pusa on Indigenous lands lean into liminality as a strength and a place of radical possibilities toward being ourselves, teaching within and outside our communities, and solidarities with Indigenous peoples and other groups marginalized by systemic injustices.

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Pronunciation Guide

saling-pusa: SUH-lehng POOH-suhh

tayo: TUH-yoh

kapwa: KAHP-wuh

Hiyas: hee-YUHS

Espie: EHS-pee (or S.P.)

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Para kay Lolo Toribio

Chapter 1

A “Cat” Is Born

Ang hindi marunong lumingon sa pinanggalingan hindi makararating sa paroroonan.

[They who do not know how to look back upon their origins arrive nowhere.]

—Tagalog proverb

If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.

—Lilla Watson (Gangulu) and Aboriginal Rights group, Queensland

This dissertation was born of a search for the meaning of my own Filipinoness, a way to look back at the past to live the present to the fullest and to imagine the possibilities of the future. I first took on this search subconsciously when I was a toddler in Quezon City, Philippines, learning the English alphabet and asking why “C” was for cat (not K); in high school, as a teenager, when I was simultaneously bored and incensed at why I had to get tested on how much of a book I had memorized; at 17 when my family moved to Hollywood, where my English language skills and aptitude in memorization enabled me to “blend in” with the dominant culture despite my brown skin; at age 21, when the model minority myth and the pressure to “succeed” as a first-generation immigrant imploded a sense of self that had been taught to be inferior, disposable, weak, and assimilable; and then again with intention at age 27, when, after finishing my bachelor’s on my own people’s histories, languages, and ways of being, I realized that the ongoing process of knowing about myself and my ancestors was something that I wanted to continue to develop and share with my community.

My graduate studies have been a way for me to reflect, write, and practice about the ways that this sharing may take place. In one of my first courses at the University of Washington, I had to look back—“lumignon” in the first epigraph above—at the stories of my family to establish and contextualize my current place in the world as a member of the Philippine diaspora. In this process of looking back I discovered that our stories of crossing the Pacific, the search for a good life, and the concomitant search for meaning, had begun almost a century ago.

On March 24, 1928, the Steamship (SS) President Lincoln departed Manila Bay bound for Honolulu, Hawai'i. On board was my maternal great grandfather, Toribio Abiva, replete with optimism and ambition for a future in a new land. Unemployment was high in the Philippines and he needed to provide for his family. At 39 years old, he was over a decade older than many hired farmworkers and other Filipino migrants of his time, 84.3% of whom were under the age of thirty (Banks, 2009). Nevertheless, he was a non-disabled family man who was willing to work the sugar cane fields more than 5,000 miles away from his family and hometown of Pasuquin, Ilocos Norte.

Lolo Toribio was one of many who heeded the call of the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association for field hands. After the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Japanese immigrants replaced the Chinese as a source of cheap labor in Hawaii and the Western U.S. Japanese immigration was halted 25 years later with the passage of the Gentlemen's Agreement in 1907, and the Immigration Act of 1924 further limited the number of immigrants from Asia. With the Treaty of Paris in 1898 having “handed off” the Filipino people from Spanish to American rule, plantation owners then looked to Filipinos, who were considered U.S. nationals (i.e., a category of citizenship that allows movement in and out of the nation-state's borders but does not provide land ownership or voting rights) as a new source of labor. Lolo Toribio became

part of this new workforce. Throughout his middle ages and towards the end of his life, he would go back and forth between being a sakada—a contract laborer recruited to work in the sugar fields of Hawai'i—and a father and husband to his family of six in the Philippines.

In 1940, the U.S. Census Bureau reported Lolo Toribio as residing in Lahaina, Maui (E. Anguluan, personal communication, November 12, 2016). He was already a widower. Nevertheless, it was his earnings that continued to sustain his daughter (my grandmother) and her siblings. His remittances allowed my grandmother to finish her education as an elementary school teacher. As it was almost a century ago, many Filipinos in the diaspora believe that the sacrifice of being away from loved ones for extended periods is worthwhile as long as the family at home is receiving the financial benefits of those working abroad. The exportation of labor continues to be promulgated by the Philippine government, with close to \$40 billion in annual remittances from 12 million overseas workers buoying the country's economy (The World Bank, 2021).

Like my great grandfather, many members of my family have decided to try their fate in the United States, lured by the promises of higher pay, better educational prospects, and an improved quality of life. My grandmother, Lola Aniceta, or Anching, as she is more commonly called, went through a process of migration herself. However, her story is a lot more meandering. In 1948, when she was 26, she was cleared to immigrate to the United States as the daughter of my great grandfather who had become a U.S. citizen in 1946 through the Luce-Celler Bill, which granted a path to naturalization for Filipinos who had been in the U.S. prior to 1934. Her trip was cut short when her boyfriend, my grandfather, took away her passport (E. Anguluan, personal communication, October 21, 2016). Surprisingly, she did not hate him for doing so. They were married within a couple of years and started raising their own family. My grandfather's act of

larceny is responsible for my mother's existence and subsequently, for mine and the rest of my maternal kin. If Lola had left for the States then, she would have most likely had a different family.

My grandmother had a second chance to go to the United States in 1985. Unlike my laborer great grandfather, she was already a retiree before she was even stateside. The Immigration Reform Act of 1965 not only allowed the entry of professionals into the U.S. but also the unification of Philippine-American families. My aunt Lilibeth, who married her American boyfriend in 1980, had preceded my grandmother by five years. She then petitioned for my grandparents, for in Filipino culture, it is customary for the children to take care of the parents once the latter get older. My grandparents and their children decided that the United States' welfare and social security systems would be a better milieu in which to retire and grow old (G. Anguluan-Thater, personal communication, November 10, 2016). However, once they got to Los Angeles, they discovered that the material comforts and governmental support for older adults were inadequate to live a happy life. My grandmother thrived, being the social butterfly that she was, but my grandfather missed his life, family, and friends back in the homeland. He bore nostalgia for the Philippines until his death in 1992. I sometimes wonder if his body, buried in Los Angeles, would have found a better resting place in his hometown.

My mother, Milagros, is also a product of the Philippine diaspora. She arrived at LAX in the year 2000 with a goal of providing the best opportunities for her six children. That same year, the Los Angeles Lakers became the National Basketball Association champions. My mom considered their victory a good omen welcoming her to the United States. Coincidentally, it was also in 2000 when she met Tim, another Lakers fan, when she visited my grandmother in Hollywood. They were married a year later. Through the family reunification program that was

part of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, my mom and Tim petitioned for three out of her six children, defined by the U.S. government as unmarried and under the age of 21.

However, my older brother Om had a technical hiccup during his interview at the U.S. embassy in Manila, and consequently it was only my younger brother and I who were approved to migrate in 2003. We joined my mom, Tim, Lola Anching, and our aunts and cousins on the West Coast and have lived here since.

I am sharing my family's stories spanning multiple generations because I believe that these stories are fundamental to why I am studying what it means to be Filipino in the Americas as a guest/settler/migrant on the lands and waters of Indigenous peoples. The rediscovering, retelling, and relationship building that my family does with our storytelling serve to distill the purpose of our continued living between different lands and waters, and the contextualization of our stories with the histories of the Philippines and the United States connects them to broader systems of power which we have been navigating. I argue that our stories, some of which I shared above, are not just the driving force for my dissertation study but also a blueprint that I intend to use to introduce my students/co-researchers to the centrality of stories in meaning making as well as the opportunities presented by stories and storytelling in understanding our positionalities, responsibilities, and commitments as Filipinos on the Indigenous lands and waters on which we live. I also argue that it is through our stories and their restorying (Kovach, 2018) that we can imagine futures beyond those that are merely oppositional to oppression.

But why do we need to share our stories? One could argue that the demographic imperative spurred by the continuing growth of communities of color in the United States (Banks, 2009) is reason enough to study curriculum and instruction for Filipinos or for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), as knowledge on how to effectively teach them will be

crucial for the sustenance of non-dominant languages, cultures, and lifeways and ultimately the healthy functioning of a pluralistic societies (Alim et al., 2020; Paris, 2012). Another argument I could make is that there is a dearth of theorization on Filipino/Indigenous intersections in a classroom setting, with virtually no previous studies investigating the possibilities of undergraduate classroom-based participatory research in imagining justice and liberation¹ for Filipinos vis-à-vis Indigenous communities and other communities of color. I mention these arguments here because I cannot understate their importance. At the same time, I would like my work to be driven not by an academic or scholarly need to fill a “knowledge gap” but rather by the desires, storying, and creativity of my own community.

Further, my intentionality in pursuing this research as a means to explore my place in the world is paralleled by my endeavors to free myself, members of the Filipino community, and other communities of color from the various interlocking systemic oppressions of the world. More specifically, it is guided by a call to go beyond “giving back”—common in Asian knowledge systems and practices (e.g. *utang na loob* or shared humanity in Filipino culture)—to “standing with,” Kim TallBear’s (2014) adaptation of Neferti Tadiar’s *sampalataya* (Tagalog for “act of faith”). *Sampalataya* challenges us to be co-conspirators, to speak in concert with rather than on behalf of, peoples to whom we are connected without the need to conform to “some imperialistic, naïve form of perfect representation” (para. 7). In other words, *sampalataya* as guiding principle offers us the opportunity to articulate our commitments to our communities and to the lands on which we live beyond liberal notions of “helping” (captured in the second epigraph of this section).

¹ I use the terms “justice” and “liberation” to signify current and future efforts of resisting and being that aren’t merely oppositional to oppression.

I raise my usage of “lands” here to articulate my own status as a non-indigenous settler of color currently residing on the lands and waters of the Duwamish and Coast Salish peoples. From our genealogical origins in the Philippine archipelago, my family migrated/settled onto the lands of the Chumash, Tongva, and Kizh peoples. I went on to finish college in Ohlone lands and was a guest and settler there for seven years before I moved back to the Philippines to teach in 2013. Two years later, I made my way back across the Pacific and settled on Coast Salish lands of the Duwamish, Suquamish, Muckleshoot, Tulalip, and Puyallup Tribe of Indians. It is on these lands where I currently live and study and where I work towards standing with my community and with others that continue to be systemically marginalized by a settler colonial, white supremacist, English-only, cisheteropatriarchal, classist, ableist nation-state.

As migrant-settlers and as people of color we have experienced struggles in a racialized U.S. society as much as we have benefited/are still benefiting from the continued dispossession of Indigenous peoples by the U.S. settler colonial state. Facilitating this dissertation study and continuing to build my relations with Native and non-Native folk in the struggle—knowing that our liberations are bound together, that our work may be incommensurable but nevertheless co-constitutive—is part of my sampalataya in the continuing unfoldment of my own, my family’s, and my communities’ stories.

As an educator, I believe it is possible to daylight the narratives of Pinoys/Filipino Americans in the classroom—those of wholeness, creativity, boundary transgression, healing, and joy—beyond those that are damage-centered (Tuck, 2009). While my students and I acknowledge the many negative impacts of invisibility and racial oppression on our community, the undergraduate seminar that I teach and which will serve as the scaffolding for this study also brings to life our narratives of survivance (Vizenor, 2010). This dissertation study aims to

improve the ways in which our class can serve such a purpose of utilizing education for liberation. By education for liberation, I mean a process that not only focuses on content knowledge (e.g., history or ethnic studies classes) but also on imparting the ability to think critically about one's Filipinoness, to derive a positive sense of self from it, and to work toward personal and systemic justice. Other scholars (see, for example, Gutierrez & Johnson, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Lee & McCarty, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2014) have likewise contended the crucial role of critical education in helping youth and adults leverage cultures, histories, languages, and lifeways as resources for consequential learning and social change.

Drawing from Freire's (2000) *conscientização* or critical consciousness theory on education for liberation as well as Perez's (2020) historical consciousness work with Filipinx undergraduates, I believe that Pinoys can work toward justice and liberation through an education that provides a clearer context of their historical origins and current positionalities as migrants, settlers, racialized bodies, guests on Indigenous lands, and "allies." While the education that was part of this dissertation study primarily addressed students' consciousnesses, I want to underscore that this consciousness raising was also done within a context of examining our commitments to the Filipinx community as well as Black, Indigenous, and communities of color and strengthening our current efforts (and planning future ones) toward justice. In other words, my students/co-researchers and I developed/are developing critical consciousness that I argue is part of our ongoing efforts to be in good relations with Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the Americas. This critical consciousness building was part of each of the classes that have I co-facilitated with members of the Filipinx community since winter quarter of 2017. I place this engagement with students/co-researchers in an undergraduate classroom through critical storying, restorying, historicizing, contextualizing, and envisioning as analogous to what

Strobel (2015) and Laenui (2000) have termed “decolonization.” Strobel and Laenui utilize the term to describe a process of healing, a reclamation of the self, for individuals who have experienced the legacies of colonialism. As employed by these scholars, “decolonization” seeks to reconstruct historical, linguistic, cultural, epistemological, and ontological narratives through communal and individual efforts. The process of “decolonizing” promotes healing, empowerment, and self-determination through praxis, “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 2000, p. 32).

I seek to add to and refine “decolonization” as proposed by Strobel and Laenui into Filipinx decolonial education to prevent the co-optation of land-based decolonization movements that many Indigenous community members, activists, scholars, and thinkers are part of, especially in light of Tuck and Yang’s (2012) call on the incommensurabilities of certain movements labeled “decolonization” that are in fact not related to the return of lands to Indigenous peoples. Though it may be possible to argue that as colonized peoples, Filipinos have a need for an “undoing” of or healing from the past and present effects of colonialism in a process of “decolonization,” I also want to be clear that my and my co-researchers’ work in our class does not directly involve the rematriation of Indigenous lands.² Until then, I intend to keep using Filipinx decolonial education as the label for our classroom-based processes and practices.

I argue that a decolonial education could give Filipinos the capacity to be more adapted as racialized individuals in U.S. society and the skill and knowledge necessary for accessing, understanding, and critiquing the knowledge produced by dominant systems. Eventually, through this decolonial education, I hope that alums will understand their potential leadership roles in

² I do argue that Filipinx decolonial education, though potentially incommensurable with decolonization and Land Back, is nonetheless a step towards these movements. A critical decolonial education may also be a necessary step for many Filipinxs to see themselves as, and act towards being, co-conspirators of land rematriation efforts.

their communities and the need to impart similar historical and social knowledge to others. In this way, education not only serves as a tool for rediscovering what it means to be who we are but also as a means to effect positive transformation within and across our many communities.

There have been some curricula designed with Filipina students in mind. One is Pin@y Teach (Halagao, 2004), which sought to center concepts like imperialism, oppression, and race by using Banks' (2009) transformative and social action approaches to education. Though initially launched as a multicultural teacher education program that sought to empower undergraduates to teach Filipinx American histories and cultures to middle-school youth, Halagao (2010) subsequently determined Pin@y Teach to be a curriculum that her students used to historicize and politicize during and after the class. Pin@y Educational Partnerships, or PEP, was founded in 2001 as a lunchtime mentoring program for Filipinx high schoolers. It has since grown into a partnership between universities, K-12 institutions, and the San Francisco Bay Area community to produce critical educators and curricula for Filipinx studies and ethnic studies courses (Tintiangco-Cubales, 2007).

San Pedro's (2017) "sacred truth space" created a classroom setting that is a product of an ethnic studies curriculum and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) or CSP, where students of color can feel safe and comfortable enough to share their truths—their cultures, languages, and lived experiences—and to listen to and learn from the truths of others. However, there is no extant literature on how Filipinx students practice, interrogate, and theorize the dimensions of their Filipinxness in an undergraduate classroom setting, where they learn the stories of their people within the context of U.S. settler colonialism on Indigenous lands and their positionalities as both racialized "others" and settlers, and where just and liberated futures are imagined. The work of my colleague and collaborator Dalya Perez (2020) in critical historical

consciousness is a step toward understanding Filipinx positionalities in the United States. I expand on our work together by situating Filipinxs as racialized settlers on Indigenous lands who are working towards collective justice and liberation with other systemically marginalized communities.

Overall, this dissertation is about studying my own and my co-researchers' Filipinxness through our time together in multiple undergraduate seminars (which I call "Filipinx classes" or "Filipinx-themed classes") between 2017 and 2021, which I consider decolonial education spaces. My aim for this dissertation, which emerged through our engagement in decolonial education, is to add to the theorization of Filipinoness in the Americas. As Filipinxs, we are situated within multiple intersecting margins. On one hand, we have been subjected to Spanish, American, and Japanese colonialisms (Agoncillo, 1974), as well as racial capitalism (Day, 2016) in the form of labor extraction. This extraction historically comprised agricultural workers along the West Coast and Hawai'i and cannery workers in Alaska (Day, 2016). Contemporarily, it includes frontline nurses disproportionately impacted by COVID (National Nurses United, 2020) and miners in the Yukon fast tracked for Canadian citizenship (Johnson et al., 2019; Wingrove, 2014). On the other hand, whether willingly or otherwise and amidst the harms of labor exploitation and racialization, we have been complicit in the settler colonial machinery of the United States and Canada, which have functioned primarily through the continued violation of Indigenous lands, lives, and relations. While acknowledging the work of postcolonial scholars on the dependency/inferiority complex and internalized oppression of colonized peoples (Fanon, 2008; Memmi, 1991) as well as Filipinx scholars who have theorized notions of "split selves" (Strobel, 2005) and "brown skin, white minds" (David, 2013), I instead seek to highlight the dialectic of the racialized, (post)colonial Filipinx with the settler Filipinx. In doing so, I hope to

explore how Filipinx can be in good relations with Indigenous peoples, lands, and relatives in the Americas.

The main theory that emerged—the “cat” that was born—in my examination of the racialized/postcolonial and the “settler of color” (paperson, 2017) positions with my co-researchers is the *saling-pusa*. Literally translated as “a cat who joins in” and more conceptually as an “informal member,” the *saling-pusa* is similar to Anzaldúa’s (2012) framework of the *mestizaje* and *nepantla*, or beings that birth possibilities, act, think, and theorize in the margins. I describe a more detailed notion of the *saling-pusa* in the succeeding chapter. I use the *saling-pusa* as a Filipinx concept of liminality to help us think through what it means to be Filipinx, including our roles, commitments, and responsibilities on Indigenous lands, as well as the possibilities that arise from Filipinxness.

Research Questions

This dissertation seeks to contribute to the practical body of knowledge in the critical education—education rooted in and towards the strengthening of ongoing activism, community organizing, and education of others—of Filipinxs, as well as the theorization of Filipinxness on Indigenous lands, by utilizing a collaborative and participatory qualitative study at the intersections of Filipinx and ethnic studies, Indigenous/Native studies, and strengths-based pedagogies. My co-researchers and I drew from our experiences in the classroom as well as stories that we carry to answer the following two questions: What does it mean to be Filipinx on Indigenous lands? How do we navigate the world as Filipinxs? For the first question, I focus on “meaning” in terms of group memberships—“Filipinx” as an ethnic identifier (Espie’s chapter) and Catholicism (Hiyas’ chapter) as examples. For the second question, I highlight demonstrated actions and commitments in three findings chapters (Ashley’s, Espie’s, and Hiyas’). For both

questions, I emphasize the saling-pusa or liminal status of each co-researcher, myself included, as one of inherent strength and as space for radical possibilities.

Significance of the Study

This work has the potential to enrich scholarship on educating Filipinx/Filipino American students and other systemically marginalized students of color. It could contribute to educational theory by expanding our scholarly understanding of how Filipinxness is navigated, practiced, or theorized within a classroom, with consequent applications for educators in “formal” and “informal” settings as well as with other practitioners outside of education working with Pinoy/Filipinx American populations. This study could contribute to the refinement of pedagogies of ethnic studies, education, Native studies, and other courses that explore students’ positionalities and/or those that seek to use education to work towards justice and liberation. It could also be additive to the literature on participatory classroom research methods and to the theorizations of the roles of Filipinxs and non-Indigenous peoples of color in land-based decolonization and other justice movements.

Besides the above, applications of this study in the U.S. educational context includes epistemological and ontological insights into what it means to be a settler of color on Indigenous land. Scholars of settler colonialism, for example, categorize Filipinxs (at least in the context of Hawaii) as “settlers.” Curthoys (as cited in Fujikane & Okamura, 2008) states that “all nonindigenous people, recent immigrants and descendants of immigrants alike, are beneficiaries of a colonial history” and that all non-native Hawaiians “share the situation of living on someone else’s land” (p. 12). Differences within and across Asian settler groups, whether in Hawaii or in Seattle, complicate the label of settler. While groups like the Chinese and the Japanese have gained political power in Hawaii and in other states through formal US governmental offices,

few Filipinxs have (Do, 2018). In Seattle, for example, there is still strong anti-Filipinx sentiments within the Asian community, and experiences of racial profiling and discrimination against Filipinos still abound (Beekman, 2017; Shastri, 2018).

I argue that contextualizing Filipinx diasporic experiences within the US as products of American colonialism, racism, and capitalism is one of the first steps necessary for orienting Filipinx students to their positionalities. In the process, acknowledging and reckoning with our settler identities must be done if we are to work towards solidarity with the Indigenous peoples of this land. Filipinxs need to recognize how they have benefited from the pursuit of capitalist successes in a system that has been founded on the continued dispossession, displacement, and genocide of Indigenous peoples. Filipinos, like other settlers who immigrated to Hawai'i and to the continental United States, live in a colonized nation where the Indigenous peoples do not possess their human right to self-determination, and because of this Filipinos are settlers (Saranillio, 2008). The violence of Filipinos' own political and land displacement in the Philippines resulting from American military intervention and occupation only reinforces critiques of colonialism but cannot be made as a "pass" for being settlers.

I also see this study as offering possibilities to the language and indigeneity discourses in the Philippines. Government efforts around the incorporation of mother tongues in elementary education have been superficial at best. For example, the Department of Education issued a mandate for a Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) on July 14, 2009 (Department of Education, 2009) which required the utilization of the learners' first language as the primary medium of instruction from pre-school until the third grade in addition to the teaching of Filipino and English as separate subjects. This educational project used students' home languages primarily as gateways for teaching Filipino and English, the country's two

official languages. The Philippines' Department of Education, therefore, is only leveraging the students' linguistic diversity to ease their assimilation into a mainstream education that furthers the interests of the officially bilingual nation-state. Preliminary research articles have bemoaned the lack of teacher training, assessment tools, and instructional materials as well as average assessment scores of students being instructed in the non-Tagalog languages (Burton, 2013; N. T. Cruz, 2015), which I believe corroborate the Philippine government's lip service toward the "preservation" of the country's many languages.

This study can offer insights into the Philippine government's efforts around preserving ethnic and linguistic plurality while potentially promoting national unity. Alternatively, this study could offer critiques of the Philippine nation-state and its relations with Indigenous peoples. For example, hybrid versions of languages already exist in the Philippine vernacular. Taglish, a hybrid of Tagalog and English, is already commonly used by as many as 84% of Filipinos (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2013). Rather than demonizing creolized languages and enforcing American English grammar, syntax, and pronunciation, educators need to understand that localized linguistic varieties have every bit of validity as their "pure" counterparts. CSP-trained educators, like the work done by Bucholtz, Casillas, and Lee (2017) can leverage these important linguistic skills toward student success as well as in making sure that Philippine languages thrive. Indigenous groups in the Philippines could also derive benefits from the preservation and growth of their languages. I see a Filipinx CSP course, for example, as providing potential for education models like that of Lee and McCarty (2017) in not only providing "mainstream" educational success but also in sustaining future generations of Indigenous communities in the Philippines.

Finally, I believe that this study could inform ideas around Indigenous resurgence.

Theories of Indigenous resurgence in North America, such as those proposed by Alfred (2004) and Simpson (2016), among others, express the possibility for settler society listening, learning, and acting with respect to one's position in relation to the colonial difference, in accordance with and for what is being articulated; in short, they offer the possibility of settlers being transformed through anti-colonial resistance. What are Filipinos' commitments toward Indigenous liberation? What can we do about issues of dispossession, land, and disenfranchisement as we also try to grapple with our own racialized and systemically targeted lives? Indigenous resurgence is ultimately about reframing the conversation around decolonization in order to re-center and reinvigorate Indigenous nationhood (Snelgrove et al., 2014). I believe that Filipinx students have much to contribute to the discussion that could lead to both metaphorical and non-metaphorical decolonization (Tuck & Yang, 2012). I see the possibilities of Filipinx students who are informed about systemic oppression and continued settler occupation as formidable "allies" in the continued, collaborative struggle for Indigenous sovereignty and recognition.

Background Literature

As mentioned earlier, this study is at the intersections of Filipino studies, strengths-based pedagogies, and Indigenous and settler colonial studies. I describe in this section other salient works from each field that inform this dissertation study. I am including this background literature as part of the introductory chapter instead of a standalone chapter as I fold in relevant sources in each of the succeeding chapters.

I begin this section with a brief discourse on "Filipinx." Throughout this dissertation, I interchangeably use Filipinx, Filipino, and Filipina. I also use these in combination with "American" whenever quoting someone who identifies as such (e.g., Filipinx American, Filipina

American). Barrett, Hanna, and Palomar (2021) argued that the usage of “Filipinx” and “Pilipinx” in online spaces by LGBTQI+ Filipinos in the Americas is about centering their material realities. The authors argue that scholarly and popular debates of the usage of the “x” instead of the “o” or the “a” have neglected the impacts of linguistic innovations and self-determination in the queer Filipinx community. Barrett et al. thus posit self-naming as radical imagination that is adaptive, grounding, and “offers dignity to lead us to imagine new imaginative possibilities for change” (p. 144).

The Filipino elders with whom my students got to be in conversation with as part of Filipino American Month in 2021 expressed that “Filipinx” was something new to them. They were not opposed to the term, however, and said that they only needed more time and familiarity to incorporate it into their everyday parlance. One of my former students remarked that “the idea of using Filipinx stems from the idea of inclusivity, especially with a movement toward gender neutrality” (personal communication, October 17, 2021). She further referenced how certain discourses on the usage of “Filipinx” has been about policing Filipinoness—that someone who’s born in the U.S. cannot identify as Filipino, for instance—and thus “Filipinx” is also an assertion of one’s ethnic identity and a claim to inclusivity. I agree with this position and want to underscore that “Filipinx” as a label is about inclusion into the Filipinx community rather than a divisive category.

Having discussed the arguments for the use of the X, I now review some Filipinx studies literature. In his seminal essay on the deleterious effects of an educational system founded upon American values of “civilization” and “democracy,” Constantino (1982) argued that the subjugation of the Filipino peoples by the ruling classes is a result of the supplantation of a “Filipino consciousness” through an American educational system and the English language.

With the English language in education and in the public sphere (e.g., judicial courts, legislative bodies, media), he said, the opportunity for Filipinos to develop and nurture a national consciousness that precipitated out of the Philippine Revolution against the Spanish was lost. Constantino added that the American cultural domination of Filipinos, though seemingly affording a global market competitiveness through the English language, only produced “variations in ignorance” (p. 51). Though Constantino’s analysis was imperfect—for example, he was uncritical of a monolithic Filipino nation-state and its effects on the islands’ many Indigenous communities—the impacts of Constantino’s call for the development of a Filipino consciousness and nationalism that would counter the legacies of Spanish and American colonialism are palpable to the Filipino immigrant community in the United States. I draw from his scholarship to demonstrate the many ways that Filipinos around the globe have theorized decolonial educational movements.

Two other Filipino scholars’ work that I want to underscore are those of Enriquez (1990) and Alejo (1990), who spoke about an indigenous *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino psychology) and an expression of *loob* (Tagalog for “the inner self”), respectively. On one hand, Enriquez, who was trained in western psychology at Northwestern University, saw the need for an indigenized, local language psychological framework for Filipinos. The core concepts of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* that he promulgated include *kapwa* (the shared self), *pagkatao* (personhood), and *damdam* (empathy). Enriquez argued that using the native language to articulate Filipino personality theory would help Filipinos understand their own values instead of relying on English equivalents. In doing so, Enriquez asserted that mistranslated Filipino values that western-trained researchers have identified (e.g., *hiya* [sense of shame], *utang na loob* [debt of gratitude or reciprocity], *pakikisama* [blending in or acceding to others for smoother

interpersonal relations]) were merely accommodative or surface values but not core to Filipino psychology. On the other hand, Alejo's conception of *loob* connotes an inward movement as much as an outward one, a connection with oneself as much as a connection with Nature, Creator, and human and beyond-human beings. Alejo posited that *loob* is connected to *kapwa* because the Filipino sense of self is defined in relation to others. Additionally, *loob* refers to an internal foundation that was buried through the imposition of an English language education and other legacies of colonization. I argue that theorizations of *loob* and *kapwa* could prove useful in developing frameworks that adapt strengths-based pedagogies for Filipinos in their homelands and in the diaspora.

In another paper, Alejo (2018) argued for the use of "strategic identities" by indigenous (he uses lower-case "indigenous" throughout) peoples in the Philippines, particularly the Lumad peoples in the southern part of the country. He defined strategic identities as ways in which indigenous peoples assert their identities in their search for solidarity. This approach, according to Alejo, hopes to show that the multiple identities of indigenous peoples are manifested in multiple forms of struggle that demand corresponding multiple forms of solidarity, both global and local. Alejo also posited that we ought to reconsider globalization and development as not entirely antithetical to the concept of indigeneity: as human actors embedded in various contexts, indigenous peoples act according to their complex and dynamic positions vis-à-vis a number of social differences. Finally, he offered a matrix that maps out the various strategies of identity assertion of the indigenous peoples of Mindanao. To illustrate his point that the "same" phenomenon of global links that threaten indigenous peoples may also work for them in accordance with their identity and solidarity strategies, Alejo used several local examples from the Philippines to strengthen his argument, including an account of Victoria Tauli-Corpuz's

discussion on the impact of development projects on the Philippine indigenous peoples, where the delegation was critical of the United Nations while at the same time recognizing that the UN has provided avenues for indigenous peoples to put forward their issues at the international level, as well as a venue where they can gather and establish or strengthen ties of solidarity with each other.

In thinking further about sovereignty and governance for the Indigenous Peoples of the Philippines,³ Alidio (2016) argued for an expanded vocabulary with which to discuss US colonial power, borrowing from interdisciplinary theories of biopolitics, sovereignty, settler colonialism, and childhood to investigate the critical role of the early twentieth-century Filipino schoolchild to the generative and creative forms of US rule in the Philippines. According to her, educating Filipinos into a particular global imaginary was an important way in which the US colonial state worked as a disciplinary and biopolitical regime, and this led to the US colonial order promising a globalized future for the Philippines as a democratic and self-governing, independent nation through “individual Filipinos’ achievement of full subjecthood, reason, and incorporation into US-led geopolitical and economic regimes” (p. 107). Alidio further posited that the US-led geopolitical order expanded and adapted settler colonial logics of elimination and incorporation in an international projection of US settler colonial society. Another justification of Philippine colonization was the assertion that Christianized peoples possessed biological capacity and historical desire to flourish in the modern world, while the indigenous and Muslim peoples who were meant to disappear by decay and amalgamation into stronger groups.

³ I say this with the recognition that sovereignty and governance for each Indigenous community will need to be considered contextually.

Alidio's work offered some insights on the "nestled" sovereignties of the Philippine context: the history of the United States biopolitical imperialism as well as contemporary neocolonial policies that continue to unilaterally influence laws and policies in the country, the Philippine government that has its own agenda in perpetuating and strengthening its own nation-statehood, and the Indigenous Peoples that have lived and continue to live in many parts of the archipelago. Alidio's perspective on how US colonialism in the Philippines was dependent upon the societal influences of schooling adds a whole new layer to consider in thinking about sovereignty and governance for the Indigenous Peoples of the Philippines.

Besides considering indigenous Filipinx psychology, sovereignty, and identity, I also wish to daylight the concept of the "American Dream," specifically with how Filipinx have pursued it through higher education. Carrancho's (2020) doctoral dissertation on the topic contended that first-generation Filipino Americans (i.e., those who had U.S. citizenship by birth or before they turned five) pursue the American Dream "as an ideological symbol of success, freedom, and opportunities for better lives for their families" (p. 66). The participants in the study enacted this pursuit by believing in the benefits of a bachelor's degree as products of the model minority myth (that part of being Filipino was to graduate from college) and familial pressures (family members preaching the importance of college from an early age), even if it meant taking out student loans. The participants' immigrant parents often shared how they were poor growing up and that they didn't want the children to go through the same material hardships. As first-generation Filipino Americans, the participants thus felt that they owed it to their parents' sacrifices—of working multiple jobs and separating from their families in the Philippines—to succeed. Success, as many of the participants defined, was through getting a bachelor's degree, which they believed to be the path to a comfortable middle class. The

participants also generally felt that they wanted to make their families proud by earning a college degree to provide for themselves and their own families and so that their parents don't question why they migrated.

Scholars such as Pierce (2005) have critiqued apolitical, deracialized notions of the American Dream. Pierce remarked that the promise of the American Dream has been imbricated in whiteness and that “the history of the United States is a long and repetitive narrative of the inaccessibility of the promises of the American dream to many people and communities of color” (p. 31). Access to the American Dream is of course influenced by race, social class, dis/ability and other memberships (Carrancho, 2020). However, this critique and others still elide how the American Dream is predicated upon ongoing racial capitalism (Day, 2016), how racialized bodies are used as sources of exploitable labor that is necessary for the perpetuation of empire, and settler colonialism (Wolfe, 2006), the elimination of Indigenous Peoples so that the settler can assume control of lands and waters. Labador and Zhang's (2021) study suggested a notion of “paradoxical postcolonialism” where their participants viewed colonialism as “neither an absolute form of cultural erasure nor a condition that freely allows the colonized to seek authentic, voluntary, or agentic belonging” (p. 13). Labador and Zhang further stated how colonialism is inextricably linked to Filipinxs' migration to the United States, where Filipino migrants have experienced social mobility to support their families while simultaneously being racially othered and colonially erased in their participation in racial capitalism and settler colonialism. At the end of their paper, Labador and Zhang acknowledge that they have yet to consider Filipinxness in relation to Indigeneity both in the Philippines and in the United States. I therefore saw it as essential to draw from the fields of Asian American studies, ethnic studies,

and Native studies to map out the position of Filipinxs as racialized settlers pursuing, redefining, and/or dismantling the American Dream.

Within Asian American studies, Chuh (2003) described the term “Asian American” as deconstructive, “a state of becoming and undoing in the same moment” (p. 8). Chuh thus argues that the overarching purpose of Asian American studies—a descriptor for a field of knowledge that is a contradiction in and of itself given the dynamic and irreducible nature of identity markers and cultures—is the pursuit of the paradox of the concurrent possibility and impossibility of a singular notion of Asian American “justice.” Nevertheless, the usage of “Asian American,” which originated as a self-determined political term to unify separate groups of ethnic Asian students in the San Francisco Bay Area and to subvert orientalist tropes (Kambhampaty, 2020), is useful for advocating for Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Indian, Pakistani, Laotian, Thai, Vietnamese, and other Asian peoples in the Americas. Asian Americans as a racialized group continue to rally behind the eponymous panethnic term despite its imperfections.

Filipinxs in the Americas have always been racialized, even as early as 1765 when the first Filipino Americans settled in Louisiana (Waxman & Cachero, 2021). Both Indigenous studies and ethnic studies consider the different practical processes and social mechanisms through which Filipinos and other Asian Americans are racialized. Ethnic studies has acknowledged that racialization is asymmetric, i.e., it affects and positions groups differently along multiple axes of power and oppression, and that racialization is entangled with imperialism and settlement. Some scholars have triangulated the position of Asian Americans as a racial wedge between whites and Blacks, making Asian Americans more proximate to whites but with the caveat that the former remain culturally unassimilable and therefore perpetually “othered”

(Kim, 1998). Historically speaking, the simultaneous glorification and othering of the Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos (among other Asian groups) was utilized for the exploitation of labor and resources of these peoples, while the partial acceptance of Asians in U.S. society and their resulting successes later transformed into the myth of the model minority. Native studies, on the other hand, considers the racialization of Native Americans as a result of the justification of the violent taking of land by European settlers whose claims to a legitimate United States nationhood is predicated upon the death and erasure of the Indigenous peoples of this land. In both cases, racialization by dominant U.S. society positions both groups as holding less power than whites, though racialization is concurrently a product of, and different from, settler colonialism. As Le (2019) argued, “the formation of settler colonialism is separate from and yet formed by the racialization of Indigenous and Asian alien communities, a racialization that circles toward proprietary whiteness on Indigenous lands” (p. 9).

Many Indigenous scholars have long argued that their relationships to land and relatives—human and beyond-human—is vital to their existence. For example, Teves, Smith, and Raheja (2015) wrote:

Native struggles with colonial powers have generally centered on land, and consequently land is a crucial concept within Native studies projects. Land invokes and is related to such terms as sovereignty, belonging, rights, and responsibility. Land has both material and metaphorical power for Native communities because many indigenous cosmologies are inextricably linked to their land bases. The importance of land stretches far beyond its role as the space on which human activity takes place; for Natives it is a significant source of literal and figurative power. Within Native studies, land has been theorized as the living entity that enables indigenous life. (p. 59)

On speaking about land-based decolonization, Tuck and Yang (2012) remind us what is unsettling about decolonization: “decolonization, which we assert is a distinct project from other civil and human rights-based social justice projects, is far too often subsumed into the directives

of these projects, with no regard for how decolonization wants something different than those forms of justice” (p. 2). In their paper, they emphasized how social justice movements—including multiculturalism and civil rights (calls for racial equity), model minority discourse (racial triangulation), and others—are colonial equivocations, where disparate colonization histories and experiences are flattened into a singular oppression under colonization, or as Tuck and Yang put it, “calling different groups ‘colonized’ without describing their relationship to settler colonialism” (p. 17). They thus articulate how such movements in and out of the academy only reinforce settler futurities and the continued dispossession of Indigenous peoples in the U.S.

Native studies scholars in the U.S. in particular are acutely aware of settler colonialism and how it continues to affect the Indigenous peoples of this land: physically and emotionally (Million, 2013), as well as epistemologically and ontologically (L. T. Smith, 2012). These impacts, as Le (2019) discusses, are entangled and asymmetric, with Indigenous and non-Native racialized peoples having different spatiotemporal relations to the varying enduring forms of colonialism. Leonardo’s (2020) analysis of Edward Said expands on enduring forms of colonialism by drawing from Maldonado-Torres’ take on *coloniality*: “maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many others aspects of our modern experience...we breathe coloniality” (as quoted in Leonardo, 2020, p. 14). Tuck and Yang (2012) argue that Indigenous peoples have been subjected to the internal (e.g., boarding schools, blood quantum requirements for “official” tribal affiliations) and external (e.g., resource extraction from Native lands) modes of colonialisms, which they describe as operative modes that overlap, reinforce, and contradict one another through legal, social, economic, and political processes. Tuck and Yang further maintain how the U.S. as a settler colonial nation-state also functions as an empire

by bringing dispossessed peoples onto Indigenous land through other colonial projects (e.g., labor extraction from China, Japan, and the Philippines). It is important to note that they make a distinction between labor extraction and chattel slavery, where they describe the slave's personhood as excess and whose very presence on land is "an excess that must be dis-located...the slave is a desirable commodity but the person underneath is imprisonable, punishable, and murderable" (p. 6), as once again different forms of colonialism have asymmetrically affected and continue to affect different racialized groups.

Ethnic studies' treatment of colonialism has only recently leaned toward a settler colonial analysis. Racial triangulations by Kim (as quoted in Le, 2019), for instance, have problematized the Black-white racial binary that has pervaded most racial analysis in the U.S., providing a model to understand how groups like Asian Americans are positioned in a superior position relative to Black communities but remain unassimilable into the general U.S. body politic. According to this analysis, then, both Asian Americans and Blacks remain under the control of Euro-American hegemony. Le explains that such triangulations interrupt the "oppression Olympics" and instead bring attention to the relational terms on which non-dominant racial groups are constructed. Le further writes, however, that placing a third racialized group against the Black-white racial rubric only serves to reinforce U.S.-based models of race formations and may also cause certain groups to be privileged theoretically over others.

Beyond Filipinx racializations in the Americas, I also allude to the scholarship of Saranillio (2008), who examined the contradictions and implications of a Filipino settler identification with the United States in Hawai'i (a U.S. colony). One of his arguments was that for Filipinx in the United States, marginalization and subordination are requisite for U.S. citizenship, and these often mask Filipinx' complicity in the U.S. settler colonial machine in

Hawai'i. Compared to dominant groups, for example, Filipinos in Hawai'i lack social, economic, and political power, yet often seek empowerment as "Americans" within a U.S. settler state without considering how the U.S. violates Native Hawaiians' rights to self-determination. Instead of a "Filipino American" identifier, Saranillio suggested the terminology of "Filipino settler" to call attention to Filipinxs' participation in sustaining U.S. colonialism in Hawai'i as they seek citizenship and equality within a U.S. political system. Overall, Saranillio believes that Filipinx settlers in Hawai'i can take positive political action in supporting Native Hawaiians in their movement for decolonization. I would like to think of extending these arguments to Filipinxs as settlers in lands other than Hawaii, particularly here in Duwamish territory (Seattle) and in other parts of the United States.

Saranillio also demonstrated narratives of Filipinx colonial resistance amidst the assimilation of Filipinos in Hawai'i with three biographies: Virgilio Menor Felipe's biography of Bonipasyo (a sakada, or sugar cane plantation contract worker), an account of Americanization by Joshua Agsalud (former cabinet member and former superintendent of the Department of Education in Hawai'i), and Zachary Labez's account of "Filipino American" history through Philippine Independence Day. He juxtaposed these narratives with two contrasting examples of the ways Filipinos have made choices about their roles as settlers: the artwork of Native Hawaiian artist Kēwaikaliko, which offered a critique of former governor Cayetano's anti-Hawaiian acts, and the anti-imperialist activism of an informal collective of ten Filipinas from O'ahu who link U.S. colonialism in Hawai'i with U.S. imperialism in the Philippines.

I want to juxtapose Saranillio's piece to the work of Strobel (2015), who posited "decolonization" among Filipino Americans as an important process of self-reclamation. Strobel proposed that a knowledge of American imperial history in the Philippines, along with collective

acknowledgement of colonial trauma and dreaming of decolonial futures, is part of a healing process that Filipino Americans can undertake. However, works by Saranillio (2008) and Fujikane and Okamura (2008) are in tension with Strobel's theory of Filipino American "decolonization." Some questions that arose out of these tensions included the following: How do we as Filipinos go about "reclaiming" our identities within a settler colonial state? How do we stand with Native peoples and collectively fight against systemic marginalization and dispossession? How do we collaboratively fight against ongoing colonialism within (e.g., continued disenfranchisement and systemic oppression) and beyond (e.g., settler colonial nation-state apparatuses) our Filipinx communities? The findings chapters of this dissertation share some clarity around these crucial inquiries. Other intersections with Indigenous and settler colonial studies could include how everyday practices can be framed as possibilities toward decolonization that do not have to happen at the forefront of "public" activist spaces (Hunt & Holmes, 2015).

Having reviewed some Filipinx studies, ethnic studies, and Native studies literature, I now pivot to discuss pertinent scholarship on education. In the United States, strengths-based pedagogies were built from pedagogical and curricular work that pushed against deficit thinking and research in education. Such pedagogies reframed the cultural and linguistic knowledges and practices of students of color into resources to be acknowledged, valued, and cultivated in schools, while also teaching these students dominant language and literacy skills that they needed to be legible and successful in mainstream schooling.

Moll and Gonzalez's (1994) "funds of knowledge," for instance, built on classroom teachers' work as ethnographic researchers in Latinx communities. Their work highlighted the efforts of educators and students in formal classroom spaces in drawing from historically

accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills present in students' communities. Ladson-Billings' (1995) "culturally relevant pedagogy" proposed a theory of teaching that would produce students who have developed the skills of critiquing the social order and are competent in their own cultures and languages as much as in the dominant language and practices demanded by schools. Many other strengths-based pedagogies (e.g., Gay's "culturally responsive pedagogy," Gutierrez's "third space," Irizarry's "cultural connectedness") build upon previous scholars' and educators' work toward ensuring that students, particularly students of color, can confidently bring their whole selves—histories, cultural knowledges and practices, languages, etc.—to their classrooms without being labeled as inferior, damaged, or unintelligent.

Culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) continue to add to the discourse around strengths-based pedagogies, and I'm looking to utilize these conversations in the study which will build on and develop Filipinx-ness—in all the diverse ways that it is learned and lived (there is no one way of being Filipinx!)—as much as all strengths-based pedagogies consider students as treasures and as "whole," rather than trying to "fix" them and making them assimilate into white, settler colonial, cisheteropatriarchal, middle-class, and other oppressive norms. The precepts of CSP, taken from Alim and Paris (2017), are the following:

1. Critical centering on dynamic community languages, valued practices, and knowledges;
2. Student and community agency and input (community accountability);
3. Historicized content and instruction;
4. Capacity to contend with internalized oppressions; and
5. An ability to curricularize these four features in learning settings.

These precepts suggest the intrinsic worth of the lived experiences of students. This is counter to the assimilationist practices and beliefs (in implicit and explicit curricula) of mainstream US education. Part of this mainstream education that perpetuates white supremacy and other unjust systems of power is performed through rendering invisible the histories, knowledges, languages, cultures, and lifeways of students who fall outside dominant societal norms.

Alim, Paris, and Wong (2020) more recently defined CSP as “a critical framework for centering and sustaining Indigenous, Black, Latinx, Asian and Pacific Islander communities as these memberships necessarily intersect with gender and sexuality, dis/ability, class, language, land, and more” (p. 261). They articulated that CSP aims to

1. decenter hegemonic gazes (e.g., white supremacist, settler, cisheteropatriarchal)
2. recognize culture as dynamic, complex, intergenerational, and locally situated;
3. engage in loving critique and critical reflexivity in theory and practice;
4. foster, revitalize and teach toward socially just, pluralistic societies;
5. practice a desire-based approach to teaching and learning that takes up joy alongside pain and offers a deeper love of ourselves and our young people; and
6. sustain the lives and “revive” the souls of young people and communities (p. 270)

Alim and colleague’s updated take on CSP seems to be a slight distancing from earlier aims of multiculturalism, where, for example Paris (2012) articulated one of CSP’s goals as “supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers” (p. 95). Note also how the updated aims of CSP go from *centering* community practices, knowledges, and languages to a *decentering* of white supremacy, settler colonial, and cisheteropatriarchal gazes. This shift, I believe, is in concert with Paris’ (2012) usage of society from singular (i.e., the United States) to the plural *societies*, which indicates CSP’s global

applications as well as entertains the possibilities of CSP as a framework for sustaining communities and societies in the (settler-colonial) Americas. Additionally, as Paris and Alim (2017) have contended, CSP is about sustaining, building, revitalizing the lives and communities of students beyond the white gaze in response to multiculturalism and other culture-based models of education. Paris and Alim maintained that CSP aims to sustain students and their communities “while refusing to ‘respond’ or be ‘relevant’ to white ways of knowing, being, acting, seeing and speaking” (p. 272).

Ladson-Billings (1995) stated in her seminal article on culturally relevant pedagogy that she was positing a theoretical model that “not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (p. 469). Similarly, Paris (2012) suggested that the term “culturally sustaining” requires that our pedagogies be more than responsive or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of our students. Rather, Paris called for pedagogies that support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence. I will continue to draw upon these contributions from strengths-based pedagogies in the methods and theoretical framework chapters of the dissertation.

Overall, culturally sustaining pedagogies as a field building upon decades of strengths-based pedagogies suggests that students of color need to be exposed to alternative ways of knowing that center their own narratives and that give them tools to create their own. CSP maintains that students of color will need other teachers, other culturally sustaining pedagogues, to help guide them along the path to self-liberation and positive social transformation (Paris & Alim, 2017). I believe that the core concepts of CSP endeavor to teach students how to recognize

themselves as “whole” in spite of being marginalized by systemic injustices. A culturally sustaining and transformative education that draws from Filipinx studies, Indigenous studies, and strengths-based pedagogies could provide Filipinx American students the capacity to make sense of how their positionalities as settlers of color could help them articulate their responsibilities and commitments to marginalized communities and the lands and waters on which they live. With the spread of knowledge and critical consciousness of systems that oppress, Filipinx American students can then begin to work together toward solidarity within the community and stand in solidarity with other marginalized groups.

Alim (2017) cogently supplemented this argument in one of his responses to the cross-pollination of CSP and universal design for learning: “Liberation for some at the expense of others ain’t liberation” (p. 9). And so does Ladson-Billings (Alim et al., 2017), who stresses the distinction between the analogousness and equivalence of different oppressive systems: “we can lay these oppressions out and talk about the analogies, but you cannot lose the specificity of people’s struggles” (p. 11). Both specificity and cross-pollination of ideas is necessary for Filipinxs to work toward our collective liberation.

I claim that Filipinx decolonial education as structured within this dissertation study has served as the space in which my co-researchers and I conceptualized and are working towards liberation in its many forms. I also argue that decolonial Filipinx education is essential not only as a tool to contend with systemic oppression but also because Filipinx students have a lot that we can learn from. Filipinxs have rich, vibrant histories and experiences that have the potential to serve as curricular windows and mirrors (Style, 1996) for students from all backgrounds. Their unique stories and positionalities from almost half a millennium of combined Spanish, American, and Japanese colonization, a resistance that has lasted just as long, and an intragroup diversity

from (among other things) 118 ethnolinguistic groups, means that Filipinx in the Philippines and in the diaspora have so much that they can offer to the world. We can ask, “What do we miss out on when Filipinx students, considered to be in the margins, are not made to come alive and forced to think and behave in constrained ways (i.e., English-only, meritocratic, individualistic epistemologies and ontologies)?” Or we can consider the inverse: What contributions can Filipinx provide as liminal beings to a world that supports linguistic and cultural dexterity and plurality (Paris, 2012)? I hope that this dissertation study can offer some responses to these inquiries in concert with the two primary research questions (What does it mean to be Filipinx on Indigenous lands? How do we navigate the world as Filipinx?).

Mapping out the Dissertation

This is chapter one, the introduction, where I have discussed some background information that led to the dissertation, my positionality as a racialized settler on Indigenous lands in the Americas, my primary research questions, the rationale for the study, and its potential contributions. I have also covered some salient literature in the fields of Filipinx/Philippine studies, ethnic studies, and Indigenous studies, as well as strengths-based pedagogies.

In chapter two, I propose a theorization of teaching and being Filipinx in the Americas through the concept of the *saling-pusa*.

In chapter three, Ashley, my co-author, and I describe our experiences in and out of the Filipinx undergraduate classes as a hybrid methods/findings chapter.

In chapter four, I share Hiyas’ narratives as a *saling-pusa* Filipina American through her religious beliefs and practices and her pedagogy as an educator on Guam.

In chapter five, I tell the stories of Espie and how their saling-pusa Filipinxness is, among other things, tied to their community organizing both in the homelands and in their home community in the Tacoma metro area.

In chapter six, I offer some final stories to connect the research questions, the concept of the saling-pusa, and the previously featured students/co-researchers.

Chapter 2

Theorizing Saling-Pusa

“You want to play with us?”

I’m not feeling the best, but I really want to play tag with my friends. “I’m still trying to get over this cold,” I say.

“You can join as saling-pusa.”

“Okay!” And we start playing.

During my childhood, interactions like this one were common when trying to play with children of different ages, stages of development, or ability/disability, or when one had older siblings they wanted to play with (I have three older brothers with whom I’ve been a saling-pusa). The members of a group can choose to accommodate an informal member, a saling-pusa, to be part of the game. The saling-pusa can participate as they’re able, though the formal rules of the game wouldn’t apply to them. For instance, in a game of tag like the one I described above, I as a saling-pusa could be running away from the “it,” or taya in Tagalog. If I get tagged, I can just keep running and pretend like nothing happened. The taya will still remain in the same role and will chase the other players instead. As a saling-pusa, I won’t ever need to be the taya responsible for chasing people around, but I still get to participate in the game. I wouldn’t lessen other people’s experiences in the game either.

This informal membership in a group of players, as I illustrate, can be utilized to understand teaching and being Filipinx on Indigenous lands and to imagine and enact new possibilities. In this chapter, I theorize how I am adapting my own experiences with saling-pusa and its cultural significance in Filipinx culture as a framework for this dissertation. I develop the concept with Simpson’s (2007) *refusal* and Tuck’s (2009) *desire/desire-based research* as core

elements of the saling-pusa. With additional supplementations from an artist and a writer who have interpreted saling-pusa in myriads of ways, as well as other theoretical frameworks, I posit four dimensions of saling-pusa: relationality, fugitivity, solidarity, and sustenance (through culturally sustaining pedagogy).

Background Information

English (1986) defined salimpusa/saling-pusa as an adjective or noun “referring to a young playmate invited to participate in a game just to please him or her.” Saling-pusa comes from two Tagalog root words: sali, which means “to join”; and pusa, which means “cat.” Saling-pusa can thus be translated literally as “a cat who joins.” The use of a cat is, I believe, an attempt to distinguish that the saling-pusa is joining on a different level compared to the other members or players of the game. I was unable to find an explanation, historic or otherwise, for the usage of a cat (as opposed to a dog, for instance) in the phrase. My assumption is that the reputation of cats in Filipinx cultures for being playful and aloof—content with being fed, housed, petted, and played with, then gone the next day with no certainty of its return—fits more with the term compared to dogs. Both stray cats and dogs are plentiful in the Philippines, and there are also many who are adopted by humans as pets. It is possible that a stray cat visiting a household for more food, shelter, and/or attention could be the source of the phrase, similar to how a player who is joining as a saling-pusa would be “visiting” a game with their friends. I’m also supposing that many Filipinos consider cats to be more playful animals than dogs, especially because the latter are typically contained in an area of the house (which may be outside in a crate) and serve a primary purpose of alerting their humans about potential intrusions.⁴ Dogs are therefore

⁴ Many dogs in the Philippines can be considered as analogues to electronic surveillance and alarms.

considered as archetypes of guardianship rather than playfulness, which is also evidenced by the most popular Tagalog name for Filipinx dogs: Bantay, or “guard.” With the dog holding its role as house guard, the cat is then deemed the more appropriate animal to be used in the phrase.

My own assumptions aside, *saling-pusa* has an immediate connotation rooted in children’s group play. Scholars like Aguila (2014), Sayoc (2016), Tayo (2002), and Enriquez (1992) have likewise referenced the usage of the phrase as it has been derived from common etymology: an informal member negotiating participation in a group. I briefly describe how these scholars’ usage of *saling-pusa* differs from mine in Hiyas’ chapter. Note that from this point, I am expanding the usage of *saling-pusa* from a concept in children’s games to something that can be used as a (playfully) subversive framework for this dissertation study as well as in applications to institutions, groups, roles, behaviors, and other systems.

Filipinxs and Liminality

Most, if not all, of the extant scholarship on Filipinxs as inhabiting liminal spaces has been about Filipinx identities within the context of the United States as nation-state. Filipinos have been referred to by various authors, for instance as “forgotten Asian Americans” (Cordova, 1983), “Latinos of Asia” (Ocampo, 2016), and “the Other students” (Maramba & Bonus, 2013). Filipinxs have also been classified by the United States government as “colonial wards” or “U.S. nationals” for the purposes of labor recruitment in the early 1900s, a time when Chinese and Japanese laborers were excluded from U.S. migration and Filipinos were considered as more assimilable “little brown brothers” (Lott, 2006). Other mentions of Filipinxs and liminality include first generation Filipinx college students who experience difficulties navigating higher education institutions despite their parents holding bachelor's degrees from the Philippines (Buenavista, 2010), Filipinxs as both foreigners and colonial subjects (Buenavista, 2013), and

first-generation Filipino Americans as (dis)located both in their native and adopted countries (Albuero, 2007).

Perez's (2020) dissertation on critical consciousness and decolonizing education for Filipinx Americans likewise explored the theme of liminality as narrated by her study participants. Perez pointed out liminality regarding a sense of home, where participants felt a connection to the Philippines as their ancestral homeland but feeling like neither the Philippines nor the United States was home for them. Participants described the distance between themselves and their relatives in the Philippines, sometimes exacerbated by language barriers, as well as having to navigate differences in social class privileges. Perez's research participants further alluded to a "duality of consciousness, of embracing a journey of defining what it means to be Filipinx American without a binary answer or arrival" (p. 97). This involved grappling with biculturalism and code switching as well as dealing with a sense of loss from generations of colonization and assimilation into white U.S. culture. Participants identified dealing with conflicts between familial/community and individualist mindsets, figuring out "Filipinx authenticity," discovering and reclaiming Filipinxness for oneself as parts of the Filipinx American experience, and navigating values and norms that varied between home and schooling spaces.

These framings are important in how they've described Filipinxs as inhabiting the in-between spaces in terms of racial and ethnic categorizations, navigations of higher education, nation-state belonging, and relationships to people and places, among others. My focus, however, is on how the framework of *saling-pusa* can offer insights into the roles, commitments, and responsibilities of Filipinxs on Indigenous lands in the Americas and how we can educate our people to consider each. I believe that this framing opens possibilities for us Filipinxs to lean

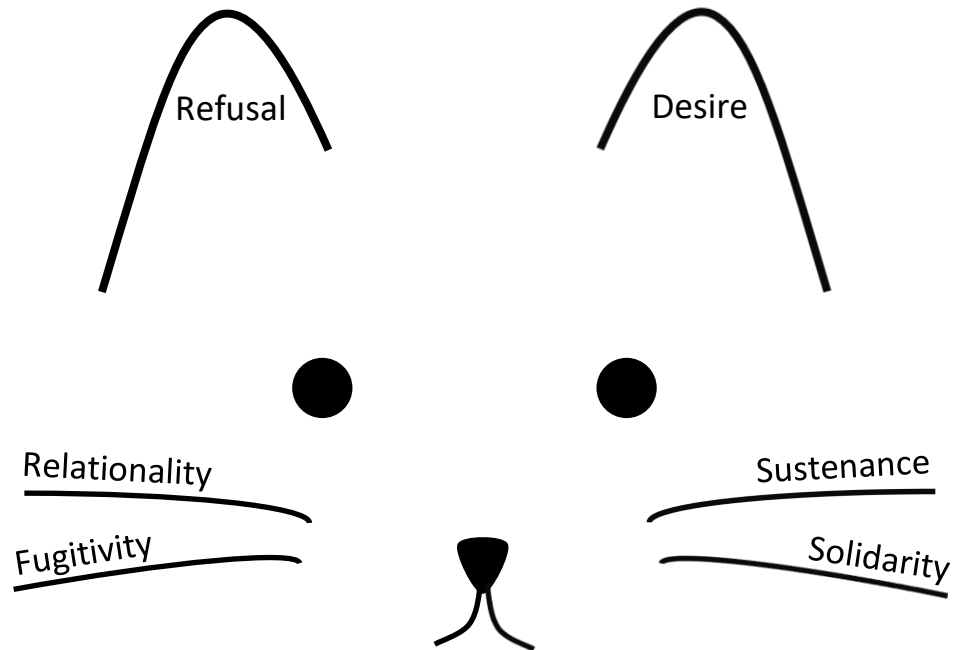
on liminality as an inherent strength, of generating perspectives and ways of being from the cracks (Anzaldúa, 2012), which has not always been the case in previous studies involving Filipinos as occupying the margins.

hooks' (1990) argument that marginality is a site of resistance bolsters this stance. Instead of seeing marginality as a site of deprivation, hooks, like Anzaldúa, perceived marginality as “the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance” (p. 341). hooks further said

It was this marginality that I was naming as a central location for the production of counter hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. As such, I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose, to give up, or surrender as part of moving into the center, but rather as a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers the possibility of radical perspectives from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds. (p. 341)

The saling-pusa is the same: throughout its life, it will remain a saling-pusa. Instead of wanting to move away from the margins, the saling-pusa basks in its role. It creates something new.

From liminality as strength and as site of radical possibility, I propose a visual representation of the saling-pusa as follows:

Figure 1*Saling-Pusa as Conceptual Framework*

The drawing/diagram is naturally off-center to represent the liminality of the saling-pusa. The saling-pusa thrives in the margins, though whether it prefers to be there can neither be confirmed nor denied. Two core elements of the saling-pusa are refusal and desire, and its four dimensions are relationality, fugitivity, sustenance, and solidarity. The saling-pusa is not bound within a box, shape, or even a face; the saling-pusa instead comprises dimensions and elements that may seem like a random assortment of lines, curves, and shapes but when put together represent what we commonly would interpret as a pusa or cat (but it could also be a mouse, dog, otter, or fantastical creature). Certain parts of the saling-pusa are intentionally left unlabeled to represent unknown aspects and future possibilities. Moreover, even though at first glance the saling-pusa representation looks to be perfect and symmetrical, a closer examination reveals incongruencies between its “left” and “right” sides. The saling-pusa recognizes that there is no perfect way of

being itself except through the way that it desires; it is both perfect and imperfect and neither perfect nor imperfect in how it is represented on a page. It refuses norms around representation yet recognizes that having representation holds value.

Refusal and Desire as Core Elements of Saling-Pusa

In her work *with* and *as* a member of the Kahnawake Nation, Simpson's (2007) theory of ethnographic refusal has suggested that the act of saying no, or of staying silent, is generative and expansive. In other words, refusal is not just a simple "no" but a rerouting towards an exploration of underlying assumptions, boundaries, and inquiries. Simpson's analysis and ethnography "pivoted upon refusal" (p. 73): in an interviewee repeatedly responding with different versions of "I don't know," in Simpson writing selectively on the complex politics and experiences of Kahnawake tribal members regarding citizenship, and in the overall refusal of the Kahnawake nation to enact logics of settler colonialism in their definitions and practices of tribal membership. These pivots then led to possibilities hitherto unconsidered: interpreting refusals as insider communication, something along the lines of "I know you know, and you know that I know I know...so let's just not get into this" (p. 77); deciding which ethnographies academia gets access to; and highlighting how Kahnawake members subvert ongoing settler colonialism.

Similarly to Simpson, I posit that *saling-pusa* can be utilized as a pivot onto new possibilities in methodology, epistemology, ontology, and axiology.⁵ The four dimensions of *saling-pusa* I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter—relationality, fugitivity, solidarity, and sustenance—cut across some or all of these possibilities, and I share how these have happened in my research with my students and in my teaching throughout this dissertation.

⁵ I draw from Wilson's (2008) questions on these four concepts to help define them: ontology asks, "What is real," epistemology asks, "How do I know what is real," methodology asks, "How do I know more about this reality," and axiology asks, "What part of this reality is worth finding out more about?" (pp. 33-34)

Saling-pusa as refusal therefore has numerous definitions. At its core, saling-pusa denotes a refusal to simply abide by the official rules of a game. The saling-pusa can leave the game after 10 seconds or 10 hours without having to feel guilty. The saling-pusa in a game of tag never has to be the “it” while still being able to participate as they desire. A saling-pusa who has recently been infirm or has lost mobility can benefit from the physical activity of playing tag while not having to worry about overexerting themselves. In this case, the desires of the saling-pusa to participate socially and physically are centered while their inability (which could be perceived as “damage”) to participate in the game in the same way as their peers is still being acknowledged. Their participation as a saling-pusa is also predicated upon the desires of the other players to include them. In educational settings, a student who is saling-pusa in a course can attend all class meetings, or stick with just a couple of guest lectures. They can maximize their learning without having to worry about grading or registering for the course—in their own time, at their own pace, and as determined by their desire.

Desire, or desire-based research, as Tuck (2009) has argued, is an “antidote to damage-centered research” (p. 416). By crafting research to capture desire instead of damage, Tuck posited that the supposed damage of systemically marginalized communities, as positioned by frameworks of research and dominant systems, can be counteracted. Furthermore, desire-based research is “concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and self-determination of lived lives” and shows that communities are so much more than just being “broken and conquered” (p. 416).

I position both refusal and desire as supplements to the common denotation of saling-pusa and in my theorization of the term, which makes both concepts part of the core of saling-pusa. Extending refusal to my own teaching methodologies, for instance, could be about me

playing as a saling-pusa student in my own class. I do this by working on my own photovoice and final project with the students and with the aim of being a learner as much as I am a teacher in my own class. An example of saling-pusa supplemented with desire could be how I endeavored to teach a class in the College of Education without having to go through the typical procedures of having a course approved. Instead, my desires led me to a “backdoor”—a saling-pusa teacher within the college—that opened up the possibility of facilitating multiple courses (albeit without financial compensation) over the course of five years. Ang isa pang halimbawa ng pagiging saling-pusa na dinagdagan ng pagtutol (sarili kong salin sa konsepto ng refusal) bilang iskolar ay ang paggamit ko ng aking Inang Wika at ng bekimon para sabihin na kung wiz ninyo maintindihan kung anong sinulatchiwa ko ditech ay sorry na lang sa inyo dahil hindi lahat ng nakasulat dito ay para sa lahat ng mambabasa. I could also say that my desire to be a culturally sustaining and decolonizing educator led me to the examples above.

I expand on the elements and dimensions of saling-pusa in the subsequent sections of this chapter, but first I review extant literature and media on saling-pusa as a concept.

Media and Literature on Saling-Pusa

Antoinette Jadaone’s (2006) short film, *Saling Pusa* (translated as “tag along” in the film’s opening credits), featured a young girl playing a game of cards⁶ with three adult men. The girl loses her spare change and doll in the first two rounds. On the third round, the three men bet a knife, a screwdriver, and a gun. The girl bets the one thing she has left: a flower tucked behind her ear, featured conspicuously as she has standing at eye level of the playing table that the men were sitting around. The scene switches to the girl walking with the knife, screwdriver, gun, and

⁶ They were playing pusoy, which is similar to straight poker where players are dealt a complete hand of five. In pusoy, each player gets 13 cards that they then group into clusters of head, body, and tail, comprised of three, five, and five cards, respectively. Each players simultaneously reveals all their cards to compete with one another.

flower in her hands, walking away from the stunned men. She tosses the weapons onto a refuse pile and keeps the flower, once again tucking it behind her right ear as the scene fades to black. The director's YouTube channel listed the synopsis as follows: Without any money in her pocket, a seemingly innocent girl joins an intense game of gambling with three shady-looking men. Who will win everything? Who will leave with more than nothing? (Jadaone, 2006).

My interpretation of this film as part of my theorization of saling-pusa is that the girl was bound to the same rules of the card game, but not all the rules, and she used this to her advantage. As a saling-pusa, she did not have to bet the same things as the men, who used paper bills and weapons versus the girl's pennies and flower. However, the same hierarchy applied to her cards: straight flush beats four of a kind, which beats a full house, which beats three of a kind, and so on. She therefore still had to play her cards right. That she lost in the first two rounds was not a real surprise, as most of the audience would assume that the girl was at a severe disadvantage from the beginning in terms of strategy, experience, and knowledge necessary to win the game due to her young age. The girl winning at the end hints at the triumph of femininity over (toxic) masculinity in the card game of life, using her own beauty and wits and by rejecting violence, money, and other tools of patriarchy. The girl lost, then won, fair and square. Though one could argue that the value of her antes were less than the men's, one could also argue that her spare change, doll, and flower were things that she held dear and were proportionally as important as the men's antes. The element of refusal in Saling-Pusa the film was reiterated when the girl refused to back down from the card game, when she refused to only bet money (which she didn't have) or tools of masculinity, or when she refused to hold on to such tools and instead kept what was always hers (her spirit, femininity, chutzpah, and/or other interpretations of the flower tucked behind her ear).

As a saling-pusa, the protagonist of the short film willingly participated in a game and played by its rules, although with slight modifications. But the implications of the game for all participants were the same. This high stakes, playing-by-some-of-the-rules concept is something that I employ in my theorization of saling-pusa. For example, when Dalya Perez invited me to co-facilitate Miseducation of the Filipinx, the first version of the Filipinx classes that I participated in, I was accepting the same responsibilities that she had in managing an undergraduate course. However, because I was following her lead, I could defer on some decisions regarding pedagogy and curriculum. I was a saling-pusa course facilitator who willingly engaged in the class and played by the rules necessary for such an engagement, but I did divest from some of the power that both Dalya and I possessed. I had the option of being “on the same level” as Dalya in terms of making curricular and pedagogical decisions, which we could have discussed and agreed on, but instead I deferred to her leadership and the prior work she had put into the class. The short film and my example of being a co-facilitator with Dalya show that being a saling-pusa could allow one to engage in a high-stakes endeavor in the same way as one would conventionally go about doing so but with the capability of skirting established rules.

Another example of playing by some of the rules was Genaro Gojo Cruz’s (2013) children’s book, *Saling Pusa*, where a boy who was not formally enrolled in school goes anyway and participates in all the activities involved with being a student. On one hand, the boy was a full-time grade school student who counted, wrote, sang, prayed, and cultivated good relations with his classmates. On the other hand, the boy was not on the teacher’s student roster, which was the only technicality that precluded the boy from being considered a “regular” (i.e., not a saling-pusa) student. There is no additional context or narrative on why the boy cannot be an

official student except that he is deemed “too young” to be admitted.⁷ The story concludes with the boy making numerous friends and having a great time at school.

This story showed how a saling-pusa student can participate in school activities without being properly enrolled. The saling-pusa did not meet the age requirement, but with the permission of the teacher and the students (who knew of the boy’s saling-pusa status), he participated in the class activities. One could also argue that the desires of all the characters in the story—the teacher, the formally enrolled students, and the saling-pusa student—converged into a common desire for the boy to be engaged in the class. There’s also the probability that the boy’s parents desired for him to be in school despite his younger age; perhaps they both had to work and their other children were also going to school and they couldn’t afford childcare for the boy. Regardless, the parents or guardians of the boy, characters outside of the scope of the story, also desired for him to be in class. Their refusal, which coincided with the teacher’s, was to break the minimum age requirement for students to be at school.

In all the Filipinx courses—Miseducation, Unforgetting, and Filipinx on Indigenous Lands (FIL)—that I’ve facilitated, there was at least one-saling pusa student every quarter. Sometimes there was a saling-pusa facilitator, which is what I considered myself to be when I first co-taught the winter 2017 Miseducation class with Dalya, or two of my students being co-facilitators during the winter 2019 Unforgetting class. Again, refusal and desire are elements in these examples of saling-pusa: I desired to co-teach with another Filipinx scholar-educator, students desired to engage with the Filipinx-themed classes, and we all refused to be bound to the rules of the university in who gets to be student or teacher.

⁷ Schools require that children be at least age 6 to be in kindergarten, considered to be the start of official public schooling in the Philippines.

Having gone over the core elements of desire and refusal in my conception of saling-pusa, I now turn to its dimensions: relationality, fugitivity, and solidarity, and sustenance.

“Pwedeng Sumali?”:⁸ Saling-Pusa as Relationality

At its core, being a saling-pusa is about being in good relations with others. In a group game, a saling-pusa is intentionally included into the group. These intentions could vary, but ultimately the saling-pusa participates or engages with the group in their own way.

The “process” of the saling-pusa’s participation involves the saling-pusa’s desire to be part of the group and the group members’ willingness to include the saling-pusa. For example, if I had a younger sibling whom I was babysitting and I wanted to play with my friends while doing so, I can request my friends to accommodate my younger sibling as a saling-pusa. With modified rules for my sibling, such as immunity from being “it” in a game of tag, we could then proceed to all play together despite physio-developmental differences.

Note that an especially confident saling-pusa could also initiate the process of joining without initiative or an invitation from a member of the group they’re trying to join. In the example above, my precocious younger brother, despite knowing that my friends and I could easily outrun him in a game of tag, could ask to join as saling-pusa. This means that the saling-pusa can invite themselves to a group without prior approval of members. The approval of the group members is ultimately necessary, of course, which reiterates how the concept of saling-pusa is predicated upon establishing and maintaining good relationships.

⁸ May I/we join?

Relationality is my translation for the indigenous Philippine psychology concept of *kapwa*, which Enriquez (1992) defined as “a recognition of shared identity, an inner self shared with others” (p. 5). Desai (2016) expanded on Enriquez’s definition by stating that

Kapwa is also about the way interpersonal relationships function and are maintained within this collective identity. It is about emphasizing community over the individual...kapwa is more than just a folk notion of community, but rather a deep connection and commitment to that community” (pp. 35-36)

Saling-pusa’s commitment to relationality or *kapwa* is through belonging precisely through the negotiation of such belonging. The *saling-pusa* participates in or joins a group by directly asking permission, by being invited, or by one of the group members posing the invitation to the group on behalf of the *saling-pusa*. The creation of the *saling-pusa* occurs the moment that a group’s desires converge with the desires of the *saling-pusa-to-be*. If this convergence is for the would-be-*saling-pusa* to be an equal player (albeit subject to different rules), then the *saling-pusa* is made manifest. Otherwise, the would-be-*saling-pusa* remains a wishful *saling-pusa*, or an outsider to the group.

How does a *saling-pusa* become an equal player if they are subjected to a different set of rules? In the example of a younger kid being a *saling-pusa* to a group of older kids playing tag, my interpretation is that subjecting the younger kid to the same rules would be unfair, as the younger kid’s physical abilities will most likely be inferior to the older kids’.⁹ In this way, *saling-pusa* becomes akin to the concept of equity: meeting people where they’re at, recognizing that we hold different positionalities, and adjusting to account for systemic injustices—or in the

⁹ I am assuming here that physical ability is directly related to a kid’s age. In reality this isn’t always the case, as children have differing developmental rates. My usage of the “younger kid” here is thus as a proxy for an individual whose physical abilities will most likely put them at a disadvantage in a physically-intensive game.

case of younger and older kids, developmental differences. The saling-pusa facilitates the shift from equality to equity as necessary in maintaining good relations.

I want to briefly backtrack to the concept of the saling-pusa as about members of a group meeting the saling-pusa where the latter is. In other words, the group is accepting the saling-pusa “as is” because the members do not expect the saling-pusa to change who they are. This contrasts with a Vygotskian interpretation of saling-pusa as older kids admitting a younger kid to help the latter develop socioemotional skills. A group’s decision to accept a saling-pusa into their midst could potentially be predicated on what the saling-pusa can contribute to the game, but what this “contribution” could be remains unclear until the saling-pusa is granted unofficial membership. I therefore argue that the saling-pusa’s acceptance is not a matter of trying to change the saling-pusa to fit the norms of the original group members. Rather, the group’s rules adapt to accommodate the saling-pusa into the game instead of the group expecting the saling-pusa to conform to pre-established policies. This axiom of the saling-pusa is evident in Jadaone’s (2006) short film and in Cruz’s (2013) children’s book, both of which I referenced earlier. In the former, the three men agreed to the girl offering alternative antes as her “currency” for the card game; in the latter, the boy’s teacher and classmates simply allowed him to be part of the class, where he was then free to participate as he desired.

De Guia (2013) posited that children in Filipino families are raised liberally, where they enjoy many freedoms, learn at their own pace, discover their humanity, and experiment with life as saling-pusa. This experimentation could include, but was not limited to, practices such as bahay-bahayan (playing house), lutu-lutuan (play-cooking), assigning chores from a young age, and other acts that included children in simultaneous insider-outsider roles. De Guia borrowed from Enriquez’s (1992) definition of saling-pusa as “informal group member” and argued that

the concept of allowing children to be included in games of older kids or in adult activities was in line with Filipinos' pursuit of freedom/kalayaan, which people practice through the three core values of kapwa, pakiramdam, and kagandahang-loob.

In Enriquez's (1992) outline of kapwa as a core concept of Filipino psychology,¹⁰ pakiramdam (shared inner perception) and kagandahang-loob (shared inner nobility) constituted the other two cores. I believe that saling-pusa as a relational concept is also undergirded by these other two core concepts of Filipino psychology. Pakiramdam aids in the negotiation process of the saling-pusa and group members through non-verbal communication as well as provides continuous check ins and monitoring for the saling-pusa and the group members to re-negotiate the "special" set of rules for the saling-pusa if necessary (e.g., the saling-pusa deems that they want to try being "it" in a game of tag). Kagandahang-loob presupposes that kindness and generosity are intrinsic human practices. With this core concept, the saling-pusa is expected to play nice even though they are technically cheating based on the original rules of the game. Regardless, the saling-pusa's kagandahang-loob could be manifested as the saling-pusa adding some spice to an otherwise conventional game, and the group members experiencing an altogether different game made possible by the saling-pusa's participation.

I want to maintain that despite the saling-pusa being a breaker of rules, they *will*—or perhaps the saling-pusa *should*—keep to the foundations of being in good relations and practicing kapwa or relationality with others. This, I believe, is the one rule that cannot be broken by the saling-pusa. A malicious saling-pusa who means to harm others will cease to be a saling-pusa (instead becoming an outsider). The heart of the saling-pusa is about breaking rules

¹⁰ Enriquez noted that kapwa is not exclusive to Filipinxs.

for the benefit of the collective, and the presence of a saling-pusa should, at the very least, be harmless. If there is discord within a group because of the presence of a saling-pusa, then there needs to be reexamination of each member's feelings and perspectives: Is the saling-pusa truly not causing harm? Is a group member feeling slighted because of the rules of the game changing for the saling-pusa? Would a group member prefer playing the original game versus a modified version that includes the saling-pusa? The group will have to decide if the desires of its members are in alignment. In sum, the concept of the saling-pusa resonates with the three values of Filipino psychology as these values are all rooted in establishing, building, and maintaining good relations.

In the following sections, I describe in further detail how saling-pusa's relationality dimension applies to macro systems such as higher education, as well as how it interfaces with the dimensions of fugitivity and solidarity.

I Will Play With You, I Won't Play With You: Saling-Pusa as Playful Fugitivity

The saling-pusa is both insider and outsider (Aguila, 2014; Enriquez, 1992) and is inherently fugitive. The saling-pusa bucks convention. The saling-pusa breaks the rules and forms new rules that are amicable to all involved. Or maybe, in the process of forming new rules, the saling-pusa and the group members realize that an entirely new game is created. For instance, going back to the game of tag, a saling-pusa with their perpetual role of being chased (since they can't be "it" and won't be doing any chasing) could somewhat hinder the "it" from catching other players. The saling-pusa could partially block and slow down a player running from the "it." In so doing, the game transforms from being a straightforward chase of one versus the rest of the players to something that requires constant vigilance and avoidance of the saling-pusa. The "it" in this new game simultaneously plays the role of doing the chasing (to catch another

player) and being chased (to avoid the potential interference of the saling-pusa), while the other players who aren't the saling-pusa could strategically position themselves so that the saling-pusa is between them and the "it" (using the saling-pusa as a shield from being tagged, or using the saling-pusa as a pivot point). The rule-breaking nature of the saling-pusa has just created a whole new game with altered dynamics and requiring fresh strategies. Moreover, the refusal of the saling-pusa to maintain the same rules or remain as a player in the original game of tag—with the agreement and participation of the group members, of course—proves to be generative in the same way that Simpson's (2007) refusal posited.

It would seem to us then that the idea of the saling-pusa and its inherent fugitivity is a pivot point for possibilities, including within (and beyond) the context of higher education. An analogue of a saling-pusa student based on Cruz's (2013) children's story could be an "informal" student who audits big introductory courses without ever having to turn in busywork or pay university registration fees. Structural issues in academia prevent it from being the teleologically democratic bastion of free knowledge for the upliftment of the world that it ought to be. As Moten and Harney (2013) wrote in their critique of academia:

It cannot be denied that the university is a place of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that the university is a place of enlightenment. In the face of these conditions one can only sneak into the university and steal what one can. To abuse its hospitality, to spite its mission, to join its refugee colony, its gypsy encampment, to be in but not of—this is the path of the subversive intellectual in the modern university. (p. 26)

The saling-pusa in the university desires to be in it but not of it. Defined this way, there are plenty of saling-pusa academics in universities around the world—those who are toiling to reform the university from within, as well as those who are refusing the university (Grande, 2018). The goal of the saling-pusa is not to decide whether reform or revolution is "better"; the saling-pusa knows that reform vs. revolution is a false binary that limits choice (and thus their

being) and that ambiguity, not certainty, is their reality. One could also argue that there are many saling-pusa students in the American educational system, where students are not full members of their classrooms due to how they are “othered” based on their race, gender, sexual identity, social class, dis/ability, languages spoken, or religion. These faculty and students who may not be aware of their status as saling-pusa are nonetheless academic fugitives who are sub/unconsciously working towards educational possibilities.

Unforgetting and Filipinx on Indigenous Lands as Saling-Pusa Within the College

In this subsection I demonstrate how the classes that I have taught at the University of Washington have been fugitive saling-pusa, both on a college and university level.

I mentioned Dalya Perez and her invitation to co-facilitate the Filipinx-themed class that we later called “Miseducation of the Filipinx.” This invitation happened during prospective students’ day, when I was still undecided about graduate school. Dalya, then a second-year graduate student, recruiting me, emphasized my feeling of being unprepared to teach at the college level despite already having experience doing so at a university in the Philippines. I was anxious to accept because co-facilitating with her was going to be my first time teaching an undergraduate course in the United States, and I felt especially tender about doing so because of my own college experience. I had felt unseen (I was a saling-pusa!) for most of my undergraduate years, felt that my education was merely rote learning without any substance or significance besides the socioeconomic success of my family. The pressures of being a first-generation migrant only compounded these feelings. I dropped out and took a four-year “hiatus”—a period of intense personal and spiritual reflection—before deciding that I wanted to educate myself through mainstream institutions to serve as an educator for other Filipinos. Despite my own college history and massive impostor syndrome, I wholeheartedly accepted

Dalya's invitation. This happened during our first and initial conversation in person, not over text or email. I would say that the moment that led to me saying "I'd love to!" was me being a saling-pusa to my own desires of teaching a class for Filipinx students before such desires were powerful enough to overcome feelings of inadequacy. In other words, a part of me was an outsider to how I wanted to respond, but that outsider was privy to the musings of the other aspects of my decision-making process; I was equivocating on, essentially "faking," my acceptance of Dalya's invitation.

After my agreement to co-facilitate, I learned about the administrative side of the seminars. They were hosted by a center on campus involved with educational equity, and all seminar facilitators were graduate students who had designed their own courses related to the center's goals or took on pre-developed curricula. These seminars were credit/no credit and could not be used to fulfill any major requirements, though ours did satisfy two out of the 20 Individuals & Societies (I&S) general education credits required for graduation. Facilitation of the seminars was on a completely voluntary basis, which meant that there was no monetary compensation. The most Dalya and I received for our work were free T-shirts and parking passes. Further, evaluations for the class were completely optional, and there was no faculty or staff member who reviewed our syllabus to determine whether the class was related to educational equity.

During the fall quarter, when Dalya and I were still preparing revisions to the syllabus for our winter seminar, a saling-pusa student had already contacted us requesting permission to join the class. A graduate student also contacted us asking if they could likewise participate and if they could help facilitate for a couple of sessions to hone their teaching.

Fast forward to the latest iteration of the seminar (Filipinx on Indigenous Lands, or FIL), where I was sharing with my students a recent example of refusal. We had just read Grande's (2018) "Refusing the University," and I was telling the class that a major professional educational organization—where I served as a member of the graduate student committee—had refused to waive the exorbitant registration fees for community activists and artists contributing their expertise for the organization's annual meeting. I pointed out to my students that the graduate student committee's refusal involved rescinding the workshop that we had planned for the conference. I then alluded to how my philosophy on education and educational knowledge has always been that both need to be accessible and without cost. I reiterated my commitment to welcome any saling-pusa students who sought the knowledge and the experiences that our seminar offered. I finished with an acknowledgement that I couldn't care less that I was making such academically critical pronouncements during a class meeting that was being held—and recorded for the purposes of dissertation data collection—over official UW Zoom.

I share these stories about the class and several happenings behind the scenes to show how before the Filipinx classes' inception, even during the process of deciding to co-facilitate with another graduate student, there was already a spirit of saling-pusa infusing my being and the work that I wanted to do. I was a saling-pusa facilitator teaching for the first time in a land where I had newly settled (land of the Duwamish and Coast Salish peoples); the class was a saling-pusa in the College of Education due to the absence of institutional evaluation or oversight (we had peer and student feedback instead); the course was a saling-pusa within the broader university system because of the critiques of the university that we were discussing and spreading using the university's own resources (though we did have to pay to power our own devices and connect to the internet due to remote learning during the pandemic), and almost half the class were students

who have not paid a dollar of tuition to UW (officially enrolled students invited their friends to participate as saling-pusa).

I also share these stories in this section about theorizing the saling-pusa because I believe that it is the stories that I have told myself (including my earliest memories of being the saling-pusa in a game with neighborhood children), that I've been told, and that I carry with me that ultimately animate the saling-pusa theory. I, as a saling-pusa in academia and the world, am committed to fugitivity that reforms and revolutionizes for the People—but mostly for the creation of a present in the future that overthrows the logic of neoliberalism in higher education (Kelley, 2018) and beyond. I believe that the Filipinx-themed courses provide a framework of liberatory education with very few access barriers.¹¹ And all of it was made possible by us playing as saling-pusa—in the college, university, and in our ways of being.

In the section that follows, I expand on my idea of saling-pusa from its applications in higher education to concepts and practices of solidarity.

“May We Join Your Justice Work?”: Saling-Pusa as Solidarity

Saling-pusa lends itself well to solidarity because a saling-pusa requesting to be part of a group's justice movement does not require formal membership into that group. A saling-pusa could therefore readily collaborate with a community towards common goals, even if the saling-pusa doesn't necessarily have official membership, with the caveat that good relations exist between the saling-pusa and the community.

¹¹ All class materials were checked for accessibility and were available online, though a film I assigned for the class required UW affiliation to watch. No official course registration was necessary. Students who wanted the full experience could join the synchronous meetings; there were many who were content to engage with the course materials at their own pace and time.

Because of the saling-pusa's grounding in kapwa/relationality, they cannot/will not impose their desire over the desires of a community. Just as Bishop (1998) considers research as a gift that can be rejected, a saling-pusa wishing to be in solidarity with a community may be rejected for no reason. This refusal from the community is as always a generative place—it could help the rejected saling-pusa to reflect on the motivations for their desire to be in solidarity with the community. A rejection could also offer other, perhaps indirect ways, for the saling-pusa to do solidarity work.

A saling-pusa within solidarity movements could be someone taking on an apprenticeship with a community without the goal of becoming an official member of that community themselves. Oftentimes those who are seeking to be in solidarity with communities where they are outsiders involve a misplaced desire to be of that community. As with the saling-pusa in higher education, the saling-pusa seeking to be in solidarity needs to remember that while they may be in a community, they don't necessarily have to (and most likely don't need to) be part of that community. They could learn with and offer their wisdom and services to the community, but a cross-pollination of work and ideas need not entail fusion. The saling-pusa in solidarity with others thus realizes that while they must ask for permission to join another's quest for freedom, they will also have to keep embarking upon their own quest (which is sometimes internal, a self-reflection on one's values and motivations to be co-conspirator).

Further, working toward justice and liberation needs to be critically intersectional while remaining specific (Alim et al., 2017). Expressed another way, a saling-pusa who joins a

liberation movement outside of their communities contributes to the movement but at the end of the day remembers that they cannot lose themselves¹² in any of them.

The saling-pusa working to be in solidarity is bound to a distinct set of rules relative to the community that they're hoping to work with. For instance, if I were to advocate for Indigenous Filipinos in their struggle for land and sovereignty, I would need to follow protocols around establishing relationships. However, the saling-pusa also needs to remember that their labors must be co-constitutive with the labors of the community. Overall, the saling-pusa must endeavor to align personal with community desires by seeing their own liberation as bound up with the liberation of the community ("Lilla Watson," 2022).

Filipinos as Saling-Pusa Within the U.S. Nation-State

Filipinxs are already informal members of the state through education and assimilation. However, the nature of our proximity to whiteness, of being racialized, also prevents us from being in the same unjust positions of power as white Americans. I argue that this inability to be fully assimilated—this unassimilability of Filipinxs and other people of color—could be turned into liberation efforts with the concept of the saling-pusa.

Filipinxs as saling-pusa need to be reminded that assimilation is not our goal. As our ancestors who have worked for our independence from Spain, the United States, and Japan have fought for sovereignty, so shall we. If our sovereignty in the Americas comes at the expense of Black and Indigenous People's sovereignty, then we must reconsider how we can return to the core concepts of kapwa (relationality, shared identity), pakiramdam (shared inner perception),

¹² My usage of "losing oneself" denotes a dogmatic, all-consuming pursuit of an ideology, belief, or practice that is interpreted as a panacea for oppression (or a path to liberation which recognizes that such a path is not merely the antonym to oppression). We know that there is no singular movement towards liberation except through a multi-pronged, cross-sectional, intersectional approach that will always require multiple participants with varying methodologies, ontologies, axiologies, and epistemologies, among other things.

and kagandahang-loob (shared inner beauty) that dictate that our humanity is shared with that of everyone else around us—and that therefore our work is not complete if we are sovereign but others are not.

We want to be the radical saling-pusa in our work and in who we are, not the saling-pusa who begs for inducements (Grande, 2018) through diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Filipinas as saling-pusa within the U.S. nation-state could work to change how institutions operate. The concept of fugitivity and the scyborg (paperson, 2017) offer possibilities in this regard. A saling-pusa in the form of a naturalized U.S. citizen could use their status to be in institutions (such as government) and enact changes from within. Another saling-pusa could be working as a lawyer arguing for the return of Indigenous lands using settler colonial judicial systems. Still another saling-pusa could be fundraising through capitalist investments to establish land trusts that buy land to be returned to Indigenous communities. Finally, I as a naturalized U.S. citizen working in higher education will keep creating educational spaces and promoting discourse on the ongoing land theft, dispossession, refusals, desires, and resistance of systemically marginalized groups.

In the final section of this chapter, I link up my conception of the saling-pusa with related concepts of the scyborg and the mestiza as well as with culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Sustaining Ourselves: Saling-Pusa and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

In both the film and the children's book I referenced in the *Background Information* section of this chapter, being saling-pusa entailed “punching up” to the system of power—patriarchy for the short film and public schooling for the children's book. Both protagonists refused to be limited by their age, by the denotation of saling-pusa as a younger player with limited power pitifully included in an established institution with older players.

Being saling-pusa requires knowing the *culture of power* (Delpit, 1988) in order to see its cracks, the weaknesses in its armor, and to potentially chip away at or blow up these cracks. In this way, the saling-pusa could be similar to paperson's (2017) concept of the scyborg, "the structural agency of persons who have picked up colonial technologies and reassembled them to decolonizing purposes" (p. xiv). I argue that paperson's examples of Filipino graduates of American universities in the 1920s and 30s, like Victorio Velasco,¹³ Chris Mensalvas, and Trinidad Rojo (who subsequently helped provide a platform for Filipino workers' voices, organize farmworkers, and became president of cannery and farm laborers unions, respectively), were saling-pusa as much as they were scyborgs. These Filipino men used U.S. education, which trained and expected them to be extensions of U.S. colonial management in the Philippines, to arm themselves with the skills and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995) toward decolonial desires in the form of interethnic labor organizing. As saling-pusa, these Filipinos followed the rules to be admitted into universities, attend classes, write papers, and eventually graduate,¹⁴ but their informal membership into the U.S. higher education system was ultimately used for the purposes of subverting colonial nation-state apparatuses. Their saling-pusa status in the U.S. higher education system (and U.S. society in general) was to funnel state resources for the critique of and resistance towards racial capitalism.

The borderlands (Anzaldúa, 2012) of being saling-pusa is a place of reflexivity, reflection, and possibility. The boundaries of these borderlands is made salient by one's systemically marginal status due to certain relations (to lands, to humans and beyond humans) or identities (femme, woman, non-binary, trans, queer, poor, working class, person of color,

¹³ As far as I know, we are not related.

¹⁴ Chris Mensalvas dropped out of law school after three years upon realizing that the U.S. would not allow him to practice law.

disabled, and other marginalized identities). Said another way, saling-pusa also dwell in borderlands because they recognize that their membership and/or belonging is precarious, conditional, unofficial, or abnormal. It is in the realization of this saling-pusa status, an acknowledgement and embrace of dwelling in borderlands, which Anzaldúa calls the *mestiza*:

The *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality...Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (p. 101)

Besides the concept of the saling-pusa being based from Filipinx culture, my point of departure from the *mestiza* is twofold: 1) the saling-pusa's status is not dependent on its identities but on its stance, though often times identities are the basis of belonging and inclusion in communities; and 2) the saling-pusa does not seek to reconcile, unite, or hybridize identities, cultures, and/or lived experiences. It has the option of doing so if it so desires. However, the work of the saling-pusa is based on its versatile, playful, relational nature, and how one taps into this nature is up to them. Like the *mestiza* or the *scyborg*, the saling-pusa is not concerned with "best practices" or the false dichotomy of reform vs. revolution. The saling-pusa is reflexive about its being and ultimately seeks to create without causing harm. We as saling-pusa sustain ourselves and others by critically examining and enacting our roles, responsibilities, and commitments on Indigenous lands.

Therefore, another possible representation of the saling-pusa is the photograph below of a *Phalaenopsis*, or moth orchid, which I currently keep at home. I captured this image as part of my reflective coursework (i.e., photovoice) in the Filipinx undergraduate classes that I've been facilitating and which later became the "container" for this study.

Figure 2*Saling-Pusa as Orchid*

The moth orchid is native to Southeast Asia and Northern Australia but is widely kept as a houseplant around the world (“Moth Orchid,” n.d.). I employ the moth orchid as saling-pusa because of how it naturally grows on trees in the forests of my homelands but is now growing indoors, in a pot with some wood chips and organic matter, in a climate where it was not meant to live. In many ways the orchid represents the Filipinx community in the Americas—we are transplants in a land that we did not deem to be our “home.” The lands on which I write this dissertation have welcomed us in some ways (e.g., interethnic solidarities, social mobility,

community belonging and leadership) while also demonstrating that this isn't our home (e.g., violence, marginalization, and exclusion). Nevertheless, we are on this land. The saling-pusa as orchid denotes that we have the capacity to thrive on this land regardless of whether we assimilate into dominant systems or remain "in the margins." As the orchid can grow on tree branches or indoor pots, the saling-pusa can add beauty to the world without having to be rooted to the ground; nevertheless, the saling-pusa remains grounded. And that is the saling-pusa's greatest strength—to be its beautiful, reflexive self, joined in community with others, without causing harm. I believe that being saling-pusa/orchid as Filipinx on Indigenous lands ought to be our stance, at the very least, for us to be in good relations with our human and beyond human relatives on Turtle Island.

Mapping Out CSP and Saling-Pusa Frameworks

Finally, I review the aims of culturally sustaining pedagogy as outlined by Alim, Paris, and Wong (2020). CSP as a framework can be utilized for Filipinx students and communities in the Americas toward the aims below. With the last dimension of the saling-pusa, sustenance, I as a culturally sustaining educator take on each of these aims and explain how they translate into the framework of the saling-pusa.

The first is to decenter white supremacist, settler, capitalist, cisheteropatriarchal/transmisogynistic/misogynoir, ableist and other hegemonic gazes. The radical saling-pusa willingly and unwillingly joins systems to subvert them. This subversion is part of the fugitive dimension of the saling-pusa in dismantling oppressive regulations. The saling-pusa agrees with Moten and Harney's (2004) admonition that our relationship to the university is a criminal one. I exemplified this relationship by making the Filipinx classes available to all interested community members regardless of their enrollment status.

Second is to recognize culture as complex, intergenerational, constantly shifting and locally situated. Being a saling-pusa culturally means constantly evolving as needed (as member and non-member, or as insider and outsider) and offers new possibilities that follows how we draw from and remake our cultures in our daily lives. As a being that's comfortable in the margins as much as the center, the saling-pusa treats culture as alive as the people that practice and create it. An example is how Filipinos have syncretic religious beliefs that have been adapted to their personal liking. See the chapter on Hiyas for more details on how this has looked for an individual.

Third is to engage in loving critique and critical reflexivity in theory and practice. The saling-pusa as a simultaneous insider and outsider and as neither insider nor outsider can draw from multiple perspectives to inform its beliefs and practices. The saling-pusa practices self-awareness by checking in with members and non-members alike, by practicing relationality. At the same time, the saling-pusa is comfortable with self-reflection and with community reflection practices. The saling-pusa draws from play as practice for present and future actions, much like how baby animals engage in play as training for hunting, socializing, and other practices. In the class, we practiced this aim by using photovoice for our reflections and sharing and discussing them with our peers.

Fourth is to foster, revitalize and teach toward socially just, pluralistic societies. The saling-pusa's dimension of relationality is about inclusion, nourishment, and mentorship of the younger generation. The examples of including younger, less mobile players into a game is about caring for others, especially those who have been displaced to the margins. The relational saling-pusa seeks membership but is not confined to the formalities of membership, shifting to the needs of the community to which it seeks belonging while at the same time asking what this

belonging or inclusion is into (Paris & Alim, 2017). The saling-pusa works toward active engagement and participation of community members toward mutually agreed upon goals. In many ways, the saling-pusa works towards equity, where folks can join as themselves without needing to conform to the group's norms. As much as we engaged in discussion topics that sought to question the infallibility of the United States and the Philippines as nation-states, my students and I focused on building community and sacred truth spaces (San Pedro, 2017) where participants could engage with each other unapologetically.

Fifth is to practice a desire-based (Tuck, 2009) approach to teaching and learning that takes up joy alongside pain and offers a deeper love of ourselves and our young people. Because the saling-pusa is rooted in play, it is inherently a desire-based framework. Children who engage in play are children who practice desire. A child who may not be included in play can be invited to join as saling-pusa, and this encouragement, this invitation to participate, could be adapted as an approach to teaching and learning. In the Filipinx courses that I facilitated, I similarly invited students to take up their own learning as they saw fit for themselves and their desires. Some students committed to engaging with the class materials and participating more actively in discussion while others took a more supportive role of supplementing responses in chat and offering virtual kudos to their peers. Taking up joy alongside pain has meant me and my students holding space for each other. I named this as part of our *kasunduan*, or commitment to one another, in my course syllabi.

Lastly, sustain the lives and “revive” the souls of young people and communities who face what Love (2019) calls “spirit murder” in compulsory schooling contexts. Corollary to the previous point, pursuing play and other desires leads to breathing life into ourselves and our communities. The saling-pusa sustains by practicing and passing on relational knowledge

practices such as kapwa/shared humanity. The saling-pusa practices accessibility and acceptance for all and allows them to be their full self. In this way, the saling-pusa also builds community capacity by drawing from every member of the community. The saling-pusa further builds across generations, for example, by including younger children who would normally be excluded from certain activities such as cooking and cleaning or in community rituals and ceremonies. Once again, drawing from the experiences of the alums of the Filipinx undergrad courses, students have remarked how their time in the class has made them feel seen, valid, and whole. Many students have described the class as “healing” and have shared resources and topics with family members and friends. The class as saling-pusa—straddling multiple academic disciplines, open to all majors and non-matriculated students, and employing pedagogical and curricular practices of sustenance—made these instances of sustenance and revival possible.

In summary, I proposed a conceptual framework of the saling-pusa for understanding being and teaching Filipinxs on Indigenous lands. I provided two visual representations of the saling-pusa. I then detailed how the core elements of the saling-pusa are refusal and desire and how its dimensions are relationality, fugitivity, solidarity, and sustenance.

In the next chapter, I lay out the methods of the study in concert with stories from myself and my friend and co-researcher, Ashley.

Chapter 3

Saling-Pusa as Method

Co-Authored with Ashley Mocerro Powell

I think that what I'm trying to express to you is that this process still feels constrained to me. And that's not your fault. It's just I think that's part of the research thing that to me, I'm thinking dance. Someone's like, "I need this feeling in this section of the dance, it's feeling flat," and then they have people move through a space. I don't get to do that with what we're doing right now. I want to feel that in what we're doing. And I'm saying the class felt more like the dance class than it does with what... I think that's where our relationality, the stuff that I said, it's like, I don't want it to just be us doing charts and figuring out what we want to talk about.

—Ashley, March 22, 2022 conversation

In this chapter, we put forth our narratives of being Filipinx as researchers and educators, and also as graduate student (Kriya) and biologist and environmental justice advocate (Ashley).

We intentionally diverge from the sterilized format of the dissertation chapter—to the extent that Kriya's dissertation committee will approve—but more so because we wanted to preserve the feeling of dancing, the organic movement, thinking, crying, laughing, and being that we experienced within and beyond our time together in the Filipinx-themed classes at the university.

Some of the content in this chapter might be undecipherable to some. We recognize this risk and acknowledge that it is our refusal of the academy's unquenchable thirst to deconstruct, clarify, and lay bare.

We believe that this chapter contributes to the central question of the dissertation—What does it mean to be Filipinx on Indigenous lands?—albeit in a manner that may be deemed “unconventional.” Our primary goal in this chapter is to share and create knowledge in a way that sustains both of us.

Ang Simula ng Lahat: How We Met

It is week nine of autumn quarter 2016, the first quarter of my graduate schooling at the university. I’m on my way to the student center cafeteria to meet with Dalya Perez (she/her), a PhD student in the College of Education who has invited me to co-teach a Filipinx American histories class for the upcoming winter quarter. We were also supposed to meet up with Ashley (siya/she) and Sam (she/her), two students who expressed interest in contributing to the class when they saw it offered on the time schedule. The atmosphere in the cafeteria was of hushed busyness—week nine is when the end of the quarter is in sight but also the time when final papers and exams are looming and the grayness of the Pacific Northwest makes its presence felt.

Two weeks prior, Ashley sent us an email:

Hello Dayla Perez & Kriya Velasco,

I came across your course offering through FASA¹⁵ UW weekly newsletter. I wanted to ask you about the potential of being a teaching assistant or peer teaching assistant for the course. Is this a possibility for Winter term?

I third generation Filipino-American and a (super) senior currently at UW in the Department of Biology and College of Built Environments. I recently attended the UniPro Summit in Seattle a few weeks ago, where I had the opportunity to speak to Third Andresen there and other UW FilAms focused on environment, education, and community organizing. They challenged me to find a way in my last year to connect more with my heritage and utilize the strong UW community.

Due to my financial aid and scheduling restrictions mandated by the UW, I am unable to register for this class as a "student". I am looking for other opportunities to connect

¹⁵ FASA or Filipino American Student Association is the biggest and oldest Filipinx student organization at the University of Washington.

with others interested in learning about the Filipino diaspora and further develop my own understanding. If this is not a possibility I welcome your advice and feedback.

Thank you,
Ashley

Sam reached out in a similar fashion, though she didn't share as much detail as Ashley. I appreciated that more than a month before Dalya and I were supposed to teach this class for the first time together, we already had multiple people contact us wanting to get involved! I was excited to meet more Filipinos on campus and was entertaining the numerous possibilities of collaboration in my head.

I look around the cafeteria for Dalya and spot her with her computer towards the southwestern corner. I'm glad that she got us a good, bright spot, as I could use all the sun exposure I could get. I walk over and give her a hug. We start chatting about what's been going on. I briefly mention how I've been studying for a multiple-choice exam, something that I didn't think I would need to do in graduate school. Dalya chuckles at my predicament. A few minutes later, we start working on the class syllabus, knowing that our two guests would be arriving soon. Dalya had already emailed them earlier: "I'm sitting at a round table back by the big windows on the south side of the building. I realize I don't know what either of you look like, Sam and Ashley! I'm in a black coat and have long curly hair with a top knot today, and glasses."

Sam is the first to arrive. She is tall, with long black hair and a wide smile. Ashley comes a few minutes later, a little out of breath. I notice kanyang brown hair and sporty outfit and kanyang ling-ling-o necklace, an Indigenous symbol used in the Philippine islands (before they were called the Philippines) for fertility and protection.

We get to talking and sharing about ourselves. I describe briefly how Dalya and I met at a diversity event welcoming students to campus and how we mutually decided that we'd love to

work together when we found out that our research trajectories had a lot of overlap. This happened at the beginning of the quarter, and here we were, planning the class with two more people who wanted to be involved beyond student roles. Sam is adopted and found out that her family of origin was Filipino. After her study abroad trip to the Philippines last summer, she felt that she wanted to learn more about her roots. Ashley, who had just come from a weekend seminar organized by some Filipinos, wanted to join us because they were similarly wanting to find out more about their Filipino side.

Unsurprisingly, we didn't get much done in terms of "work," though we knew we finished what we needed to do. Ashley said they'd only stay for an hour but ended up hanging out with me and Dalya for almost two. Towards the end of our meeting, Ashley and Sam expressed that they'd probably benefit most from the class as students/observers, where they had access to class materials and were free to participate in discussions without the need to turn in homework. From my perspective, I imagined their involvement in the class to be beneficial: we'd get richer discussions from two additional perspectives, and there wouldn't be any additional grading to do. We parted ways shortly after noon, exchanging numbers and wishing each other a relaxing winter break.

Kriya: So this was the beginning of the original chapter that I had written last fall, the first of the findings chapters for the dissertation. It was my recollection of a partially sunny day in December of my first quarter of graduate school, when the pale rays of light barely broke through the weeks of dreary gray that I had begun to resent. I felt my energy levels wane with the fall season, and yet the demands of the academy were only just ramping up. Only nine weeks in and already I was feeling tired from mountains of readings (I had not yet learned the art of skimming), writing

papers, and starting a new job at the community engagement center on campus, not to mention my efforts to nurture a social life in a new city.

I do remember feeling grateful that I had met Dalya at a mixer for minoritized students, and I was very much looking forward to co-planning the Filipinx class that we'd be facilitating the following quarter. Teaching generally energizes me. I was excited to see how the UW undergrads would be like!

The email from Ashley came unexpectedly for both me and Dalya. I think we both held a philosophy of educational access for everyone, so we welcomed the possibility of having another student and co-collaborator be part of the class. And so me, Dalya, and Ashley all met, along with Sam, another collaborator during the winter 2017 class that we unfortunately lost touch with, during that sorta sunny December day. I would say it was at that meeting where *Miseducation of the Filipinx*, one of the early iterations of a collaboratively designed class for Filipinx undergraduate students, started to take shape and have life. The first class became one of many seminars that I co-/facilitated, and it also served as the nexus of my research with Filipinx students, something that I have lots of gratitude for.

To me, it felt serendipitous that Ashley requesting to be a *saling-pusa* in the class was the beginning of our relationship! From the beginning we were communicating and relating to each other from the margins.

Ang Sayaw ng Filipinx Undergraduate Classes

This dissertation study would not exist without my co-researchers, the students who have opted to sign up for a class that could not satisfy graduation requirements. Nevertheless, these *chosen spaces* (Moore & Paris, 2021) that we filled with stories of Filipinxs, photographs of our

daily navigations of the world, and reflections on our thoughts, emotions, and lived experiences served as a nest for many of us. That so many students would spend time with each other for little to no academic reward (i.e., the educational institution that most of us were part of did not reward us for being in the class) was both an act of refusal and a move towards fulfilling our own desires. Our desires included being among kindred folk who yearned to examine our people's histories, sometimes for the first time. We learned Tagalog through music and proverbs, wrote poetry, engaged in theater, drew from myths and folktales to make sense of our being and becoming, and shared metaphorical and literal food with one another.

In a conversation snippet below, Ashley and I discuss what drew students to the class and the institutional structures (including the Carlson Center, now called the Community Engagement and Leadership Education [CELE] Center and Riverways Educational Partnerships, formerly called the Pipeline Project) that Dalya and I utilized for its creation. We go over Tuck and Yang's (2018) editorial entitled "Building Things Not to Last Forever" that was recommended to Ashley by Max Liboiron and Jessica Hernandez during a webinar.

Ashley: And that was another theme that Max and Jessica brought up, and there was a paper that... I don't know if you've read it. It's also by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang that's called Building Things Not to Last. I haven't read it yet, but they recommended it to us to read it for those of us that were in academia because Max was very specific that they think this idea that everything has to be in perpetuity and last forever is nonsense.

Kriya: Building things not to last forever. I mean, I've also been a huge advocate of this. I mentioned this in my work with the Carlson Center, former Carlson Center, now Community Engagement and Leadership Education Center about how that center should not exist in 100 years. Right? Ideally in the future, if things were to get better, the university would not need a liaison between itself and the community. Right? Academics, researchers, students would have vested interests in the university and the community that it's part of, and not have to outsource that labor to a center that was staffed by like two people.

(We proceed to talk about my work at the Carlson, now CELE Center, along with Ashley's experiences of institutional marginalization at UW. Ashley had been called upon to share kanyang experiences in inequitable, often exhausting, ways. The conversation meandered in many different places and led us to talking about the Filipinx class and how Ashley was initially drawn to it.)

Ashley: I think that what came to mind when you were sharing that was just like thinking about how people self-elected into the class from the beginning. And my reflection about it was... I don't remember exactly what I was looking for. I really honestly want to say I was looking for the Tagalog classes and just saw that I couldn't take those. And so I started looking at keyword searches because there's like the Southeast Asian seminars and stuff. And so I was kind of looking to see what fisheries does. Like their fishery seminar, they bring in guest talkers and I love this pandemic where I can go

and fly into Cornell and listen to Cornell Southeast Asian studies, like seminars or whatever. But I think that's how I stumbled upon the class initially. I think I also was on... I had always wanted to be... I forget what it's called, the Pipeline STEM spring break or something. I always was-

Kriya: Alternative spring break.

Ashley: Yeah. I was attracted to the alternative spring breaks as I was looking for experience to bolster my academic background and also find community, or maybe get away from home, to be honest, like all of the above. And I was interviewed for, I think the one where they go to Yakima, but it was like NASA-oriented and I don't really think it worked out.

So technically I wasn't qualified to go. And so it's like, I don't know, somehow in the midst of looking up language classes, looking at STEM teaching and communities, I felt more reflected or maybe were slightly adjacent to where I had gone to school, like low income communities of color or something like that, where I might be able to make a difference in community by being representative and sharing my gifts with them in that way, and also getting away from home that I came across your guys' class and knowing that I wasn't going credit and that I wasn't going because you guys were paying me, and yet I stay involved, I really just think kind of as like I'm curious if in any of the

interviews, if you did interviews with other students, if they shared about how they found the class and/or what kept them coming.

Because I know there was always when we started every single year, there was always a couple people that started, and then that maybe after the first two or three classes, they might leave. And it was for different reasons. It wasn't because they didn't like the content. Sometimes they were just overwhelmed with other things in their major or family stuff, or they got a job, I think. I don't know if I remember some different stories over the years, but I'm kind of just curious if you've had any of that shared about what allowed people. Because in that regard, I feel like that is maybe a distinction of some of the universities that you were talking about, where the white privileged kids come and do service-learning. And then the POCs compete for the paid jobs so they can get like their lived experiences valued in some way, plus they're getting credit maybe. I don't know if they can do both, but they get some sort of benefit.

Kriya: Yeah, they do get credit.

Ashley: So they get benefited. Like they get their lived experience, honored through credit and pay, and then they're getting to go make a difference out in a community that's very

different than theirs. I'm not going to assume that all the POC kids have a poor privileged background. You know what I mean? Because that's not been my experience with UW students. So I'm just talking about that. Like how does that come up for you?

Kriya: I've invited students personally, and from the ones that weren't invited by me, or they saw me advertise at a FASA meeting, they are taking the class because of word of mouth. So again, it's by relationality. Because alums of the class are like, "Oh yeah, take Kriya's class. Kriya's and Dalya's class." And then the latest one, well, the last one, like the Filipinx on Indigenous Lands class was basically the sorority of Filipinx. A couple of sorority students just invited the hell out of everybody and there was like eight of their members in there. Nena was also with the sorority when she was at UW. So like 80% of the class, the ones that I've taught without Dalya, have been from either FASA or the sorority. And again, proves what we already know about-

Ashley: What do you think that says about FASA though?

Kriya: I mean, they have overlap. FASA...

Ashley: Well, that's true. But I just mean, like everybody always with sorority, but what do you think? Like there was like a miss within FASA?

Kriya: FASA has their own thing and we've... I mean, the largest class that we ever had was spring 2018 when it was still me and Dalya, like close to 30 people. And most of those folks came from FASA. I think that was a one off though. Because again, the class is just credit, no credit, basically students self-elect because they don't...

The credits can't be used for graduation. (We discuss the location of the classes and Ashley's involvement in most of them.)

People joined because they heard somebody took it or their friends were taking it and they wanted to check it out. I've also had people who have taken the class because they took another class of mine, particularly the one I teach with Jondou.

Ashley: I think there's also, I don't know if you mentioned this in your dissertation either, but I think there's a form of reciprocity within that. So there's the relationality where the referrals come in, but then it was like both you and Dalya... There was like the caveats of what the Carlson Center required that you guys had to fulfill in order for people.... Unless there were rogues like me, you have to do this many things, show up this many times. But if they were matriculated students that were looking for the credit portion. Like the things that they're like, "You have to check the boxes on these in order for us to work."

But otherwise, they were like if you needed to leave early for something because of another class lab or something, you guys would record or you would meet with them during office hours or you would... There was this kind of buddy up. There was this kind of culture of care that I feel like that was there that you don't receive in other classes that made it where... It's not we were prioritizing the success, but we were

prioritizing everybody's individual success as best as we could. And regards to either them giving the option to co-teach and build their professional speaking skills or explore a topic of interest or do that service learning portion where they got out on campus and they got to go to OneWorld or Denny... Was that Rainier? Where did we go? What school was that?

Kriya: Garfield. (We discuss the schools and venues that the Filipinx class visited in spring 2017.)

Ashley: So there was this reciprocity of people getting a flavor depending on what they were wanting. And then if it was strictly for credit, but like community space, there was the food, there was art. So it was kind of like this sanctioned kind of FASA-ish feel where we were getting and providing something where they could maybe de-stress. And then there was like these other opportunities for the people that wanted to come back, like me, what was the other thing? Were they like, "Hey, I want to co-facilitate too," or...What happened there? How did that happen?

Kriya: The repeat folks?

Ashley: Yeah. Like the people that, like Nena, like kind of came back and co-facilitate. They grew from just being a participant to being a facilitator too.

Kriya: I wrote about it in one of the chapters. Basically Amihan and Nena, they... I was on the way to the College of Education from Mary Gates [Hall] and I bumped into Nena, and then Amihan was passing through and they just started talking and asked me if they could be TAs. So basically Nena was recruiting Amihan to be TAs together for the class because Amihan had already graduated and they were working for Riverways as their AmeriCorps intern. And for Amihan to be able to be part of the class, they couldn't be a student anymore, really. I mean, they could have been, I guess. But they just, again, self-elected and asked me right there, like, "Can we TA for you?" And I was like, "Why not?"

Ashley: But this desire to stay in community after it ended technically.

Kriya: So I invited Val who is now associate director at the Q Center spring 2019 to co-facilitate. And then you and I and Kayla co-facilitated winter 2020, or spring 2020. I think it was spring 2020.

Ashley: Yeah.

Kriya: But yeah, it was also about something that was... I just made room for them to be able to do what they wanted and build skills and maintain community relationships, like you said. But it was very impromptu.

Ashley: But yeah, but basically what I'm hearing, that's analogous to community organizing in the class is that word of mouth is spread, people show up, the community relationships are built, people are learning something new, we're giving them some sort of either social capital, some sort of something that

they're leaving with that makes them feel a certain way, even if it's that, like what Max talks about, not meant to last, maybe it's just that one time, but then there are other people who maybe are in proximity geographically that want to stay involved, but maybe their way of showing up is like sharing that word of mouth or sharing the flyer when we would email them or coming back for an interview. But then the other people that self-elected that had the time or knew that they were going to be on campus, but they were never... Their status had changed. Maybe like I dropped out, Amihan had graduated but was going to be working at Carlson/CELE, like wanting to have this form of community, but maybe how that would've been weird to continue going to FASA events because they were no longer a student.

So there's kind of like this intermediary space where we basically reached out to the heads of the class. What I'm calling the heads of the class are like the Carlson Center liaisons. Like you, Kayla, whoever that kind of had that social capital within these university institutions, we said, "Hey, I want to do this thing or I want to be part of this thing." And then you all would figure that piece out and then bring us back all together. Right? That's very analogous to the work that I do, like just on a regular basis with environmental justice. Like I hear what [my colleague] wants. I hear what [my friend] needs.

I hear whatever, and I keep my eyes out. Or if I'm in a space where that can happen, I bring it back. (Ashley shares examples of acting as a bridge for friends and community members, connecting people to each other to build capacity, educate, and sustain.)

Kriya: Yeah. I do see the parallels. And also, like in your case, you're the one with all the connections. And in my case, it's the students who have all the connections, and I'm sort of, I'm reaching-

Ashley: But you're also giving them the credit.

Kriya: Well, yeah. Yeah. Because I never really want to take credit for myself in most things.

Ashley: No, but I mean credit, like you're giving them-

Kriya: Oh, credit. Credit.

Ashley: ... the academic credits.

Kriya: I am, but really everybody gets credit. You know? If I could have given you credit, you would've gotten credit. The credits were almost... What's the term? Non-consequential.

Ashley: Like everybody. Yeah. That's how what's his face... One of the forestry teachers I had, he was just like, "Turn in your end of the year paper and go on the field trips, and I'm going to give you all 4.0s, basically." He just was like, "I want you to go see the forest and listen to me talk. As long as you tell me what you've got out of it, I'll give you a 4.0."

Kriya: Yeah. I made clear to the students in one of my vignettes, I think this was Espie's chapter, that they're worth more than a grade, that I hope that, at least in the class, that they felt that they could be who they were without having to... Like it wasn't a performance. Their self-worth wasn't based on their grade. Because also that's one of my own stories too, was deriving my self-worth from academic performance, which obviously has arbitrary guidelines and parameters to it.

Ashley: [What I mostly do] was more of just putting them up in the places where I knew... It was more like I'm matchmaking. You know? It was the only thing that I did have is that I'm utilizing my relationships to bring people into that space. And it's not always students. I even do it for professors.

Or like [this program]. Like I've been introducing their director to groups that I'm a part of just because I've been a volunteer. I'll be like, "Yo, you should reach out to this group and see if we can do a tour there," and it's because I want to go. I'm like, "Invite me when you go and look at the pinto abalones, and bring Ashley because Ashley got you that connection." And then I get to go learn about this otherwise closed science space. Right? And it's because I'm tagging along with the directors, right? Part of it is always selfish interest, you know? But anyway, I think we de-curtailed a little bit, but I think we were talking similarly about the same thing. It's just like-

Kriya: Utilizing resources, connections, relationships for the upliftment of ourselves and our communities.

Ashley: Yeah. And I think the thing that sucks is that even though we want it to be the same, it's not always the same for every person that we're interacting with, if that makes sense. Which is where I guess my privilege comes in. Right? Like it's what I'm talking about. My privilege, I don't want to say it's all like that I earned all this privilege, but it's like I work so hard and spend a dedicated amount of time in communities building and establishing trust-based relationships and maintaining a lot of them. You know what I mean? And it drains me sometimes, but they do come in handy when I need to call on people for things.

In the passage above we discussed how the class had become a community-sustaining space through the actions of people with social capital (Kriya, Ashley, Dalya, Kayla, and other facilitators) and the desires of students to know more about Filipinxness. We were all essentially using resources (our own and the university's), our connections, and our relationships with another for sustenance.

While I (Kriya) could provide an additional narrative about different elements of the class, such as pedagogical and curricular elements and their justifications for Filipinx cultural sustenance, or the many reasons why Filipinx students kept coming back into our classes, I pause here to think about boundaries. As a saling-pusa educator, I try to practice generative refusal when I can as much as I am an open book for most of my teaching practice. I have only shared

the syllabus of the Filipinx classes with people I know and trust. I feel protective of the class because it represents not just my own efforts but also that of my colleagues and collaborators, and most especially the students who have been involved.

When two people asked me at a public event for the class syllabus, I realized that my prior decision to share it openly was too generous. In the past I have shared resources that have been co-opted and misappropriated, and I realized that this was one of the realities of being a researcher and academic (e.g., in various school settings across the United States, there are numerous misunderstandings and mis-applications of culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, funds of knowledge, and other strengths-based approaches to education). With the Filipinx classes, however, the possibility of someone—especially an educator who’s only interested in “diversifying” their reading list—benefiting without having good relations with me, my co-facilitators, or my students, nor providing any form of compensation, was real. I ended up providing a barebones version of the syllabus to one of the requesters; I never heard from them ever again. For the other person, I scheduled a one-on-one virtual meeting and from there determined that I had enough trust to provide them a copy of the whole syllabus (they promised that they would only use it for their own education).

I wonder what can be generated by my refusal to share the syllabus then and now. Who will reach out to me upon reading this chapter, intrigued at my/our pedagogy and curriculum? What connections with fellow scholars, educators, and researchers could form out of this absence of “methodological evidence”? What creative educational practices will be born from those searching, unable to find what they were looking for, and instead drawing upon their own rich histories, languages, beliefs, and practices?

I also think about how, instead of providing his own analyses, San Pedro (2021) resisted reviewers' feedback that asked him to center scholarship within the stories he co-authored with Indigenous mothers and their children. He cited hooks' (1990) discussion of this phenomenon in research of "taking stories, shapeshifting and altering them into something unrecognizable by those who initially shared their stories" (p. 17). In his resistance, San Pedro offered questions to readers as a way to decenter himself from his co-authors' stories, ultimately seeing his role as story stitcher and supporter who took care with the stories with which he was given/gifted and who was in dialogic, answerable, and co-constructive relationships with the mothers and their children.

I do not claim that I have been as successful in being a story stitcher and supporter as San Pedro, but I nevertheless believe that I have done my best in this dissertation. Part of my methods is to keep being reflective and reflexive about how I can ultimately make my research work, including writing and publication, beneficial to the Filipinx community.

Mga Pagninilay-Nilay sa Research and Writing

Ashley and I have had plenty of talks about academia and research. As individuals who navigate institutions—I (Kriya) as an aspiring professor and Ashley as a saling-pusa researcher and decolonial educator for programs associated with the UW—we are aware of when we've had to conform to the academy as well as when we've pushed back and resisted. I (Kriya) would argue that these "conformations" are often performative, a means to a greater goal of justice and liberation for our communities (justice and liberation that we're also defining and locating for ourselves and our loved ones).

For instance, this dissertation is a supposed "solo" project. My name and my name alone is required to be on the title page of the dissertation even though so much of the labor involved in

finishing this degree has been shared by my family, my community, and especially the people whose names I have concealed (or, as in Ashley's case, unconcealed) in this monograph. If even five people from the Filipinx community reads this and gain something out of it, I think I'll feel as if I've made an impact. Nevertheless, I can't overstate how the beneficiary of this project is myself. Yes, I've assembled most of the text, but that's primarily because I have not been trained in collaborative writing (I don't know of any PhD in education who has). My graduate school training has taught me little on how to write in a reciprocal, mutually beneficial, caring way with people outside of (formal) academia. As Nagar (2013) said

When the structure of knowledge production largely disallows research subjects from interrogating, evaluating, or dislodging the knowledge produced by the academic expert, the status of academic researcher as the 'true intellectual thinker' remains undisturbed, along with the hierarchies that elevate theory, research, and academic knowledge production to a higher plane than method, community-based dialog, and non-conventional academic writing. (p. 2)

This chapter is thus an attempt to simultaneously push at what academic writing could look like and to develop new methods of collaboration—in both research and its “packaging.” This is the *saling-pusa Kriya* and Ashley in action.

When I finished the draft of the first findings chapter—a supposed case study of how Ashley has navigated higher education and how they've been working in concert with Indigenous communities—I sent it to my advisor. At that point, I had fallen behind on my writing deadlines and felt desperate to show a draft of a chapter. I held off on sending the chapter to Ashley because in my mind, I didn't want them to have to look at a wall of text over the winter holidays. I did tell Ashley that I had shared the chapter to my advisor and that I was happy to share it with them to elicit their feedback. Ashley got back to me shortly thereafter. They said that reading the chapter made them feel “drained” and that it did not feel like an accurate

representation of their experiences. My initial reaction was something like, “Oh, shit. Did I just write a terrible chapter?” I remember feeling heavy in my heart. After my initial reaction of guilt, anxiety emerged. I was afraid that I had just wasted weeks of writing time and that I would be unable to recover from this “setback.”

After allowing space for these feelings, validating them and their source (most likely the capitalist pressures of having to be “productive” all the time), I tried to calm myself down and considered the situation. Ashley later revealed to me that I shouldn’t have shared the draft with my advisor first. Siya was hurt that my advisor saw kanyang life, kanyang stories, before siya did. I apologized and made a mental note that I shouldn’t be relying on anonymity—even with a name change, it was still Ashley’s stories I was writing about—as a means of dismissing the importance and sensitivity of someone’s lived experiences. Moreover, even if I trusted my advisor to maintain confidentiality, the bottom line was that Ashley did not consent to their stories being shared without reviewing them. My consent forms indicated that any generated “data” and publications will be co-owned: “It is also possible for our work to be published eventually. The data will be co-owned by all co-researchers, and we will decide what to do with it along the way. I will consult with you and other co-researchers about the future steps of analysis and publication, if necessary” (see Appendix). I had forgotten this promise of co-ownership in my rush to get a draft finished and submitted.

I knew that even if I approached my research and the writing process with the best of intentions, it’s still possible that the impacts would be different. I also reminded myself that my ethos of relationship-building, of practicing kapwa or shared humanity, was central in my work. My commitment to maintaining good relations with all the people involved in my research work remained unwavering. Wilson (2008) called this “relational accountability” (p. 99). Through text

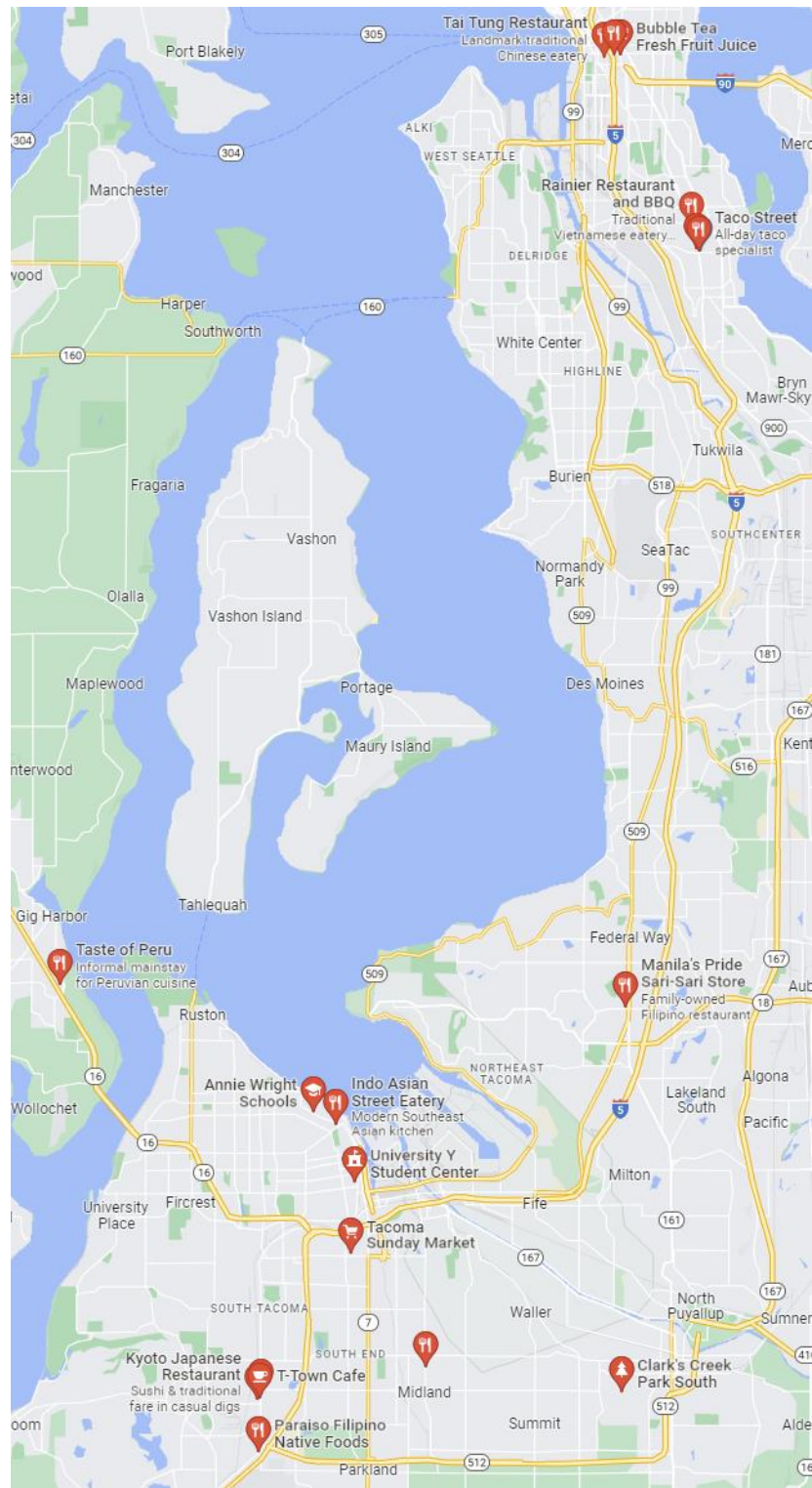
messages, and face-to-face conversations, Ashley and I dialogued about how we could move forward. They had sent me a question: “How open are you to omitting my chapter if we cannot come to an agreement on my reflection and presence in your PhD?” I remember saying that our relationship meant more to me than the chapter and that we could keep talking about what a “successful” chapter meant for both of us, even if that potentially meant canning the draft altogether. Ultimately, we agreed and committed to co-authoring this chapter. The vignette at the beginning of this chapter was the only portion of the original draft that Ashley and I were comfortable “saving.”

My initial impressions of co-authorship were me providing an online document link to the chapter, Ashley providing comments, and me making revisions. What ended up happening was a semi-structured series of hangouts, phone calls, Zoom meetings, and food adventures punctuated by coding of transcripts, brainstorming, doodling, and co-learning.

Below is a map of some of the places we’ve been to in our research-relationality process in the past eight months.

Figure 3

Ashley and Kriya's Filipinx Research Adventures



These locations are on Coast Salish lands. There's a general clustering of places on the lands of the Duwamish, Suquamish, Tulalip, Muckleshoot, and Puyallup Tribe of Indians (South Seattle), where I live, as well as on the lands of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians, where Ashley resides (*Nation to Nation: Treaties between the United States and American Indian Nations*, 2016; *Treaty of Point Elliott, 1855*, n.d.). There are many more places we've visited that aren't indicated above. Ashley and I have gone as far south on Cowlitz, Clackamas, Grand Ronde, and Siletz Indian lands (Portland, OR). In the north, we've traveled to Stillaguamish, Duwamish, and Coast Salish lands (Bothell, WA)¹⁶. We share these places with you as part of our stance on honoring our connections to the lands and the communities therein. We mostly did this by being intentional about the businesses that we supported, prioritizing POC-owned, local, non-franchise venues and events.

We also went to several "natural" spaces—parks, hiking trails, and scenic vistas—that aren't included in the photo above. Also not visible are the many other restaurants, homes, and events that we've been to in the last five years where we've talked about being Filipinx. One of our stops was the Tacoma Chinese Garden and Reconciliation Park, where Ashley took photographs of a dead seagull to send to seabird monitoring organizations at the university before ceremoniously placing the bird back into the water. We went to the Tacoma Market to check out and support small business owners of color. Another time we just sat down and did our individual work at the UW Tacoma YMCA.

I argue that our intentions for our research was to immerse ourselves in the process of spending time together, being ourselves, supporting community, and especially sharing food.

¹⁶ I (Kriya) apologize for any inaccuracies in the naming of tribes, nations, and bands and their lands.

Sometimes, I would ask if I could record our conversations. Most often we did not; alternatively I took some notes and memos (Charmaz, 2014) after our meetings. My relationships with my co-researchers in the other chapters share the same ethos. Our research was through and within the building of our relationship, a refusal of colonial, transactional, and extractive methodologies (L. T. Smith, 2012).

Storying and Refusal, o Pagkukuwento at ang Hindi Pagkukuwento

Ashley and I also discussed how much we want or don't want to reveal to the academy. This conversation was similarly influenced by the webinar (with Indigenous scholars Jessica Hernandez and Max Liboiron) that Ashley recently participated in.

Kriya: What do you feel like you want? Because the chapter is going to involve us talking about ourselves, right? Sometimes even our families.

Ashley: I think that's why I wanted you to watch this panel. Keep going.

Kriya: I've been talking about myself. In the introduction, I talked about my family history and my great-grandfather, learning about him during grad school and how in my family it's been four generations of people moving in and out of the U.S. but never really staying. And it seems like that's probably going to be the same way for me. Right?

Ashley: Go get what you need and then go back eventually?

Kriya: That sounds extractive, but...

Ashley: I mean, it's the U.S. Whatever. The U.S. project. Take it or leave it.

Kriya: I see it more as like I'm going to do what I can here, and then once I feel good about it, I'm going to go back. So what I'm trying to tell you is that my story is baked into this dissertation because this is also about... The central question of this dissertation is still the same. Like what does it mean to be Filipinx on indigenous lands? And that's something that I'm still trying to answer and that the students are also trying to answer. Right? I'm just writing about the students' stories from my own perspective. And with our chapter, I don't know... There's a lot of stories, your stories that you can share about how you want to respond to that question, but also, that doesn't have to be what the chapter is about.

Ashley: Yeah. I think that's... Oh, go ahead.

Kriya: The baseline is we're going to have to tell stories.

Ashley: I don't think we have to. I think that's what I learned from that panel. That's what I appreciated about going to it actually before this session is I think there's knowing that it's written for an academic audience and that you've shared, oh, it may be academics that like other Filipinx scholars that might read it, right? At most, that's what our goal is, right? Is that hopefully other Filipinx scholars... But if not, it's going to be maybe other people of color.

Max [in the webinar] really was very clear that they are aware that they're working within academia, and they are very aware that they have a very solid way in which they work and navigate within academia that honors their personal boundaries.

But also is like there's like these gates for the communities that Max has been invited into. And I just really appreciated that because basically what that actually allowed me to do is after that webinar, I met with my colleague Kevin who I got a grant with. I basically wrote the grant, but because Kevin is involved with two organizations that have nonprofit status and the [program] was going under, I don't have that social capital in regards to moving this money to a space.

And so Kevin and I wanted to work on some things that are adjacent and similar, but I think Kevin had this impression that he was just going to ride on the coattails of the communities that I'm working in and get to come with me. And I originally, I thought maybe that would be okay, but as we got further along in this process, I was realizing positionality that, and also just things in which Kevin, I think pedagogically thinks about the world in regards to education and stuff, it's not bad, it's just not how I show up in community. And I wasn't feeling comfortable about bringing him into a place where he hasn't spent significant time building relationships, like me, and how that could put my life on the line in regards to those relationships if things went bad.

And so I had to have that conversation with him. I said, "Hey, look, we wrote out these grants, I've talked to you about

the budget and how I want them to be set. I'm going to be very clear about this. You can do whatever you want with [place X]. If you want my, help call me, I'm happy to go pick up plastic cups for you. Whatever. If you want to do some workshops with the kids, if you want to run it on your own and hire your own people around you within the budget that we've talked about for your group, cool. But I can't invite you to the [Place Y] work and I can't invite you to the [Place Z] work." I was like, "I'm dating somebody who is someone I care about that works there and that's his community, and I'm not going to give you access into that space where it could potentially put me and my relationship that I have with that person on the line..."

I felt empowered to do that after hearing Max and Jessica. And I think that's kind of what I'm saying with this. I think we can give them learnings, but I don't have to tell them my personal life if I don't want to.

Kriya: Yeah, for sure.

Ashley: So I'm thinking like... I guess that's kind of what I'm trying to figure out was like with some of the stuff that's on this methods chapter and that we talked about, like what makes... I don't know. I don't want to get there yet. What I just shared or that we just kind of talked about, how does that resonate?

Kriya: That's perfectly fine. My approach to academia is very different and it doesn't... I don't think the two are mutually exclusive. My approach is to be open with my stories because that's what I'm bringing to the space, and it's the thing of like if academia doesn't accept this part of me, well, sorry to be academia.

Ashley: Yeah. So I think for me, I think the pieces that I decide with you through this... I think we're talking about it right now. It's just like our negotiation of what we feel... You've learned from X people that sharing stories is part of it, and this is what you feel comfortable with. I'm not quite there yet. And I think it's because of my position as well of how I have been tokenized in STEM and academia for my different gifts that I have to bring in a number of different spaces that I've been in... And I think for me, it's more about me just making sure that I'm protecting myself...

Kriya: For sure.

Ashley: ...in this space. And I don't want to leave drained because I feel like I have left a lot of spaces either without the things that I came in there for, like not that I needed it, but even just like attribution, proper attribution for what I had provided for research projects.

We negotiated what we were willing to share in the chapter. Despite our different approaches and experiences with academic writing and research, Ashley and I were on the same

page with regards to only sharing what we desired (Tuck, 2009). We both wanted the process of research and its subsequent writing to be sustaining for us.

Did we succeed in that endeavor? I've felt that writing, though laborious, has given me some life. I appreciate seeing what we've done summarized on an electronic screen. There's also an emotional aspect to looking back at our conversations and feeling reaffirmed in our process and purpose. I have enjoyed/enjoy writing about ourselves.

Ang mga Pinaggagawa Namin: Methods That Need to be Named

I answered the questions of “What does it mean to be Filipinx on Indigenous lands” and “How do we navigate the world as Filipinx” with three of my former students/co-researchers throughout multiple undergraduate courses that I co-/facilitated. I used purposeful sampling (Patton, 1980, as cited in Merriam, 1988) based on the strength of my relationships and narrowed down the co-researchers to three. I drew from case study research in education in selecting “samples” within each “case” (Merriam, 1988) that pertained to the research questions. I employed Projects in Humanization (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017), with storytelling as theoretical and methodological anchor, and a relational approach to research (Wilson, 2008) in the classroom spaces and beyond-classroom spaces where data was collaboratively generated.

My co-researchers and I framed our time together as essential to our being Filipinx. Building relationships was/is a way for us to engage in a dialogic spiral (San Pedro, 2013 as quoted in San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017), a process of cultivating our relationships with one another while co-constructing knowledge in our shared identities as Filipinx on Indigenous land. In foregrounding relationships (Potts & Brown, 2015), the researcher/researched dichotomy was dissolved, and the othering nature of imperialistic research (L. T. Smith, 2012) was mitigated. Within the dialogic spiral, “we impact and are impacted by various places and people,

and we emphasize this impact because it contributes to how we story and re-story our interactions” (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017, p. 381S). The centrality of relationships in this process served to humanize co-researchers in the act of co-constructing knowledge through storytelling, listening, and knowledge exchange and production.

Another important aspect of PiH were their twofold approaches of working together toward social justice and liberation as determined by the co-researchers—who came up with our research questions—and underlining such work in the co-researchers’ professional and personal lives (i.e., being scholar-activists at home, at school, at work, and in their communities). The twofold approach provided us co-researchers opportunities to bring our whole selves into our classes and our engagements with each other as we worked towards knowledge co-construction and the co-theorization of our lives. This resonates with the paradigms embodied in San Pedro’s (2017) sacred truth spaces and in culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2017).

Our data involved dialogues, Zoom class recordings, coursework (e.g., photovoice submissions, reflections, poetry), correspondence (e.g., texts, emails) with co-researchers, and my field notes.

I coded data using an inductive, grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994) approach. I did preliminary analysis by rewatching class recordings, looking through coursework “artifacts,” and listening to recorded dialogues. I then noted emerging themes. Before beginning to write, I constructed outlines based on these developing themes for each co-researcher; some of these outline topics had to be omitted for brevity or for their tenuous connections to the *saling-pusa* framework. I then used writing as a secondary form of analysis to obtain “further insights and create more ideas” as well as to see “clearer connections between categories and draw implications from them” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 154). The combination of

putting descriptive passages and analysis onto a page led to seeing new ideas and relationships between topics, which was followed with further revisions (Merriam, 1988).

In the middle of writing the third “findings” chapter, the conceptual framework of the saling-pusa emerged from the themes formerly identified. I used the conceptual framework to revise the findings chapters (Chapters 3-5) and eventually wrote the theory chapter (Chapter 2). I made the findings chapters available to my co-researchers for feedback and made necessary revisions.

This Chapter Is a Saling-Pusa

Through its “atypical” aesthetic and substance, this chapter is arguably a saling-pusa to the dissertation. It is essential to the overall structure of the monograph; at the same time it’s intentionally bucking traditions of academic content and style. As the only chapter co-authored with a co-researcher, these differences were to be expected.

The methods we’ve engaged in to perform our research, whether with Ashley or my other co-researchers, are saling-pusa methods themselves—they are legitimate and require no changing, but they may look unfamiliar to the qualitative research canon. This chapter therefore describes research methodologies, including the publication of such research, while simultaneously exhorting to improve them towards the sustenance of our communities.

The next two chapters provide further examples of saling-pusa in being and teaching Filipinx on Indigenous lands through two other co-researchers, “Hiyas” and “Espie.” Among other things, these two succeeding chapters illustrate the depth and growth of Hiyas’ and Espie’s understandings of what it means to be Filipinx on Indigenous lands. It is important to note that I have known and been in relationship with Hiyas and Espie since 2018 and 2019, respectively, and that they have been involved in their own education and political actions in their own

communities independent of our classes and other time spent together that have developed their criticality. Therefore, the next two chapters are but a glimpse of who they are, their actions, and their thoughts on Filipinxness rooted in our Filipinx-themed classes.

Chapter 4

Hiyas:¹⁷ Saling-Pusa Brilliance

I found these bobby pins between the cushions of a chair in my apartment. I thought about the jokes about always losing these and how you can find them everywhere. I felt that this was very reflective of the Filipino diaspora. It reminded me of something Prof. Bonus said, “I was in the middle of nowhere, and I still found a Filipino.” My people have traveled and settled everywhere in the world and many of us have not been able to return home or are unaccounted for. Like these bobby pins.

—Hiyas, spring 2018 photovoice entry

Hindi ko alam pero ngayon ako ay handa nang matuto. I don't know, but now I am ready to learn.

—Hiyas, winter 2019 final project recording

I think this class really grounds me. When I think about that class and I'm like, “Am I even doing anything?” I'm like, “No, you are. Calm down...” I have to remind myself that the instant gratification that I want is not within teaching, but that doesn't mean that teaching is not my path.

—Hiyas, September 18, 2021 dialogue

Prelude

It's March 13, 2019, the last day of our Unforgetting¹⁸ class. The seminar was the fourth time I had facilitated the course, albeit the first time I was doing it solo. The students and I have

¹⁷ “Hiyas” is Tagalog for “gemstone.”

¹⁸ Unless otherwise specified, I use “Unforgetting” to denote the winter 2019 iteration of the courses I've been facilitating.

had a wonderful quarter of unearthing and creating knowledge, holding space for each other, reflecting, poetry, and even a bit of theater.

The last day of class was potluck day! Students signed up, as they were able and willing, to bring small dishes for sharing. I tried to emphasize to students that I didn't expect them to spend much, if any, time or money for our final celebration. Some signed up to bring plastic utensils and tissue (that I later learned they got from the student union building for free—I love my students); others had more capacity and brought a dish they prepared. The night before, I had made some pork adobo. I always make the dry version, where that salty, peppery, vinegary sauce is seared into the protein. And dry is how they make it in Cagayan, where my brothers and I vacationed during the summer. Somehow our time there always coincided with a town fiesta. Our uncles/aunties/cousins/relatives would slaughter a pig and cook it 50 different ways, with nothing ever wasted (snout and feet and the pig's curly tail included). Dry adobo was always one of the dishes. Since then, I knew that dry adobo was the way to go.

Even though it took me until midnight to finish cooking, I got some time to think about what else I wanted to share with the students. I wanted to fill their bellies as much as I wanted to leave them with lasting words—much like how I imagined our ancestors making their own version of adobo to take with them on their journeys. So I made adobo in a form that the students could eat and adobo in a form that they could keep or take with them:

Adobo Pedagogy

Lay yourself flat, cold
 Raw
 On a chopping block.
 Slice your flesh open.
 Let the stories spill forth,
 Their essence to sizzle on a hot grill
 of pride, of Gabriela and Bonifacio,

of diwata, nuno, ninuno
Seemingly erased by the heat of colonialism

Sear the memories of resistance
Passed down amidst centuries
Of foreign conquests until
Proteins are denatured.
(You've lost your way...)

Join the diaspora of meat
Where fellow Pinoy warriors venture.
And on the land that you've left
Sow some garlic to keep
The aswang at bay

Combine islands, ancestors, lifeways
Asin at paminta, toyo't suka
Only then can you retreat to your inner sanctuary.
Cover your own vessel with introspection
And allow time to work its magic,
On you and your Unforgetting

And in the meantime, make some rice!

Be patient...
The mingling of flavors cannot be hurried.
Neither can healing.
Stir the pot with your creativity
Really stir it, get the juices flowing.
And you will feel your brownness come to life
It will cling to you after years of rejection
You welcome your own skin
And feel comfort sitting in your own sauce
Bask in your refusals
Turned sweet-ish by the gentle ministrations
Of fellow Filipinxs

Worry not, kababayan, kapwa ko
Missing a step probably won't hurt (konti lang!)
There are seven thousand one hundred
ways to make adobo,
And even more ways
To be you

We started late because the adobo took more than 10 minutes to heat up in the microwave. I gotta remember that for next time we hold a gathering. The students devoured it though! Out of six pounds of pork and brown sauce, I didn't even have enough to eat for dinner later. That made me proud of my cooking.

We also had veggies (Espie), tofu kelaguen (Hiyas), gyoza (Alvin), and fresh white rice (courtesy of Alon, who brought a rice cooker along). I couldn't be more grateful to my students. While we were eating, I made some announcements about wrapping up the class for the quarter, staying in touch, and potential letters of recommendation. I also advertised the class happening next quarter, then thanked the students for being their wonderful selves. I told them that I hope they keep building their communities within and beyond the university.

The students' final projects continue to surprise me every quarter. This time around, the focus was poetry. A couple of observations: Alvin's cheek was quivering while he was reading his introduction and his poem (on love!) while showing us a mosaic that he assembled from 1,000 images. He mentioned how the class taught him to love himself. He barely looked up from his notes, and I felt that he had a lot of emotions under the surface (he was trying to keep it together). Marilyn and Sheena talked about being queer (I love that there were so many of us in the class!); a couple of folks created their presentations for their moms (I wonder if the mothers got to see what their daughters made for them?). Espie did a shortened pacha kucha style presentation with images from their photovoice. They spoke about their complex relationship with their father, who's also an immigrant, just like their mom. He, however, is from Europe, and Espie realized how much of a difference that makes despite their parents' shared migrant experience. I was a little underwhelmed by Ina's slideshow on Filipino food. I suppose it

couldn't be avoided when the course is credit/no credit. Reyna's short poems incisively talked about the schisms of Filipinx/American identities and the dangers of chismis.

I wish we had more time so I at least can give brief comments about each person presenting! Time seems to never be on our side.

At the end, I handed back the students their letters from week six. I also gave them envelopes and mentioned that they ought to put "I love you" or "Mahal kita" at the end of their letters if they haven't already to give themselves some love. With letters sealed, I asked that they write "Don't open until March 13, 2024," the day of our final celebration five years forward. The class had a very vocal reaction to this—they couldn't quite fathom where they would be in five years, much less think about who they would be as people then. I joked that I would email them in five years and check in. I thought that this letter to oneself and then keeping it for five years (at least I hope they keep the letters) was a nice way for the students to remember the class and to take some stored love with them for the future.

I recited the poem above in lieu of a speech (I thanked students in the beginning for participating in and bringing their whole selves to the class). I couldn't pay attention to students while I was reading it, but I think it had an effect on them. They may have even liked it. Regardless, that wasn't my point. It was to demonstrate that I was doing the work with them throughout our time together. I think they sensed that, too. Many students shared genuine appreciation of the class and smilingly thanked me as they stepped out of the classroom.

Introduction

I begin this chapter with an excerpt of my reflections on our last Unforgetting class in the spring quarter of 2019. In the seventh week of class, we had a guest workshop from a phenomenal educator friend of mine. She led us through a poetry workshop that heavily

influenced (in a good way) me and my students to keep writing poems until the end of the quarter. The poem on adobo above was therefore an indirect result of this collaboration/guest workshopping, combined with my desire to keep doing the same work my students were engaged in. This vignette hopefully provides another glimpse into the many shared moments of joy in our Filipinxness.

Hiyas (she/her), whom I mentioned briefly in the prelude and is the focus of this chapter, was part of Unforgetting. Hyias had previously taken the class a year prior when I co-taught it with Dalya Perez. In our first writing exercise, which I prompted on the first day of Unforgetting class in winter 2019, Hyias expressed, “I want to learn more about my personal process of decolonization¹⁹ and grow with this new group of students. I loved last year’s class and the experience and connections I made. I hope to gain a better understanding of myself and others.” Hyias has done all of the above, and more. Though she doesn’t hold the record number of seminars taken with me, she has always been a consistently strong presence in all of the three classes in which she participated. She says it’s because she’s a capricorn, the ambitious zodiac sign (Hiyas used both “ambitious” and “capricorn” to describe herself during our poetry workshop week). Hyias also articulated that she is Filipino, specifically Kapampangan and Ilocano; that she’s a woman; and that she was born on Guam.

In spring of 2021, Hyias, who had already graduated from UW, heard that I was facilitating Filipinx on Indigenous Lands (FIL) and decided to participate as a saling-pusa. In this

¹⁹ I add a hyphen to Hyias’ mention of “decolonization” to indicate that our knowledge and usage of the term has evolved throughout the many iterations of our Filipinx-themed classes. Initially, we borrowed the language of Strobel (2015) and Laenui (2000) to describe “decolonization” as something akin to freeing our minds from the historical and lingering effects of colonialism. In our efforts towards Land Back and solidarity with Indigenous peoples, the students and I want to make a distinction between *decolonization* as the return of lands and sovereignty to Native peoples and *de-colonization* as a process of developing criticality through an examination of our histories and positionalities.

chapter, I draw upon the concept of saling-pusa as a theorization of Hiyas' participation in the class and in her life beyond the classroom. I organize this chapter with Hiyas as saling-pusa in the Unforgetting and FIL classes and in other instances of her life, particularly on Guam.

Saling-Pusa: Play as Relationship Building and Rule Breaking

The closest translation to saling-pusa that I offer is “hitchhiker,” if we presumed that the class was represented as a bus driving to some liberatory destination. Saling-pusa literally means “a cat who joins,” which is used in the context of play when a usually younger child, or someone who may not be as mobile as their peers due to a disability or illness, joins a group game like hide-and-seek. The group extends an invitation to the “cat” to be included in the game, though the saling-pusa may not be subject to the same rules. For instance, in a round of hide-and-seek, the saling-pusa can hide like everyone else besides the “it,” but the former will not have to play as “it.” Being able to participate in the game while also not being bound by its rules is, I argue, an extension of the Filipino concept of kapwa. The group ensures that the saling-pusa experiences belonging but that they don't impose the same responsibilities of playing the game onto the saling-pusa. In this way, practicing saling-pusa is a means of providing sustenance. I use saling-pusa instead of hitchhiker because of the class's intentionality on building relationships in the (physical or virtual) classroom, something that I don't think is represented well by a hitchhiker getting a ride from a stranger. I briefly review some existing literature on saling-pusa below.

There are several theorizations of saling-pusa as part of the Indigenous Filipino psychology core concept of kapwa, which I described above as living and imagining one's wellbeing as intrinsically tied with the wellbeing of others. Enriquez (1986) employed the

concept of saling-pusa to negotiate belonging, referring to it as “informal member”²⁰ (p. 12).

Recall that Enriquez (1992) described kapwa as “shared identity,” though he has asserted that Filipinos are more concerned with pakikipagkapwa, or treating another person as a fellow human being, instead of maintaining smooth interpersonal relationships—what Enriquez considered as a surface value as opposed to a core value. At kapwa’s core, therefore, is relationality as much as shared identity. Saling-pusa as informal group member navigating the boundaries of belonging is part of this relationality, where the informal group membership is more about active participation in the activity more than being concerned with the rules of the game. Participation naturally leads to the cultivation of relationships.

Enriquez (1992) further explained how saling-pusa functions:

The idea of inclusion vs. exclusion or membership vs. nonmembership is not unknown to the Filipino. He just draws the line in a more flexible manner.... In another culture, the concept of membership could be a matter of black or white with no intermediate gray. The Filipino can accommodate a non-member just as if he were a member.... The saling-pusa (informal member) is allowed to break some rules expected to be strictly followed by members... The Filipino concept of saling-pusa may be ‘playful’ in tone and may not be found in other cultures, but it is nonetheless significant. It indicates the value attached to the feelings of kapwa so hypocrisy in social interaction is avoided. (p. 55)

Saling-pusa is thus a refusal to follow by the formal rules but is undergirded with the “feelings of kapwa” so that everyone in the group (saling-pusa included) can be who they are, bringing their full selves without the need to put on a façade of overestimated abilities. The saling-pusa can participate in the game without worrying whether they have abilities equivalent to their peers. Moreover, for the saling-pusa, the implicit rule is that they can break the rules; ultimately, rule-breaking becomes part of the rules to foster good relationships.

²⁰ In this dissertation, I use saling-pusa as either noun or adjective. Here are two examples: a saling-pusa (adjective) student is someone who’s not officially enrolled in the class but is still a participant; the Unforgetting class is a saling-pusa (noun) in the college because it is a credit/no credit course that cannot fulfill any undergraduate major requirements.

Saling-pusa has also been discussed by Aguila (2014) as being “both insider and outsider” in her Facebook ethnographic study of diasporic Filipino youth in Edmonton, where she used a separate research account to recruit study participants. Though invited to be part of a Filipinx youth group, Aguila politely refused because she felt too old and too much of a researcher to be a formal member of a youth group. She was, however, respectful of her honorary membership in the group as saling-pusa and enjoyed the privileges of being an unofficial member.

In Sayoc’s (2016) study of Philippine youth councils, she explained saling-pusa as

A Filipino term to describe younger kids who tag along in a game with older kids. A token position granted by the older ones to the young ones to give an impression of inclusion – so that the young ones will not be upset and cry. They are part of the game, but not as full-fledged players. (p. 36)

Sayoc’s concept of saling-pusa was similar to Tayo’s (2002), who expressed the concept as “a person who tags along” (p. 14). Sayoc further stated:

I remember my older siblings letting me and other younger kids join their game as saling pusa.²¹ This means that we were allowed to play with them but we could not be the “it” because we were too young and therefore at a disadvantage to play such a primary role in the game. Being a saling pusa is like being a player and yet not really being part of the game. (p. 14)

While similar to my initial definition of saling-pusa, I want to emphasize a distinction between Enriquez’s, Aguila’s, Sayoc’s, and Tayo’s usage of the term and my own. These four scholars consider being saling-pusa as straddling boundaries of membership and belonging, but to them, the saling-pusa is limited in capabilities. They describe the saling-pusa as not having the same agency as “formal” group members. My theorization of saling-pusa which invokes Simpson’s (2007) concept of refusal transforms this informal, unofficial group membership from a

²¹ Saling-pusa, saling pusa, and salimpusa are interchangeable. For consistency, I use the first variation throughout this dissertation except in verbatim citations.

weakness to a strength. To me, because the saling-pusa is not and cannot be a full-fledged group member, they are not bound to the same rules as those within the group and are therefore afforded greater flexibility in what they can do. For instance, going back to the game of hide-and-seek, the saling-pusa may ally themselves with the “it” and subversively help expose players by hiding with them and making some noise. This is typically done in good faith and is only meant to add fun to the game. On the other hand, if the saling-pusa doesn’t like the “it,” then they can collaborate with the other players in locating a good hiding spot that the “official” players may not have previously considered. A more extensive theorization of saling-pusa and its applications as a framework for settler Filipinxs and education for liberation in a university, among others, is available in the chapter named “Theorizing Saling-Pusa.”

Hiyas as Saling-Pusa Within and Beyond the Classroom

Hiyas came to the 2019 class by both intention and coincidence. Because she had already taken it the year prior, I was not confident that she would benefit from taking the class again. Many of the themes and resources for the course were carried over from its previous iteration. However, I neglected to consider how the class would be educationally unique regardless of how many times a student had taken it. I was teaching it by myself instead of co-facilitating with another graduate student, the students taking it this time around would be different, and the experiences and stories that everyone was bringing into the class would be fresh.

Moreover, Hyias’ roommate, who had taken the class back in 2016, decided to serve as a saling-pusa TA for the class. Hyias soon followed suit, in a story that went something like this:

One day as I’m power walking to my office, I run into Hyias. We catch up on each other’s lives—classes, roommates, graduations that are too far—and reminisce about the 2018 class. As

we're chatting, we see Ligaya approaching from around the corner. Hiyas and Ligaya greet each other, and I am soon witness to a conversation between the two good friends.

"Hi, Ligaya!"

"Hey, Hiyas!"

"I'm gonna take Kriya's seminar next quarter. Are you gonna take it?" Hiyas asks.

"I dunno. I'm working with Bridges²² now...But wait—it is a Bridges seminar, and since I work for them, I can count it for my AmeriCorps hours. Therefore, there's really no reason why I shouldn't do this. Yup. I'm in." Ligaya beams.

"Since you already graduated, how about if we TA? Kriya, can we be your TAs?"

I think for a split second, then respond enthusiastically, "Why not?"

And just like that, Unforgetting had two TAs.

Did the Unforgetting class need TAs? In a pedagogical and curricular sense, no, especially because I know that I work better by myself and that the class size is manageable with one person doing the work. Would I deny Unforgetting alums the chance to be part of the class once again? Absolutely not, as I'd always be delighted to spend time with them. When Ligaya and Hiyas decided that they wanted to TA the seminar, the first thought that came to my mind was that I'd get more people in the class, which meant having a greater diversity of experiences, backgrounds, identities, and opinions. There was also plenty of space in the class, so it wasn't like they were going to be taking seats of formally registered students.

Getting Ligaya and Hiyas as simultaneous teaching assistants and students presented challenges. Two returning students who have read the articles from their past versions of the

²² I use a pseudonym for the university center through which I facilitated the Filipinx-themed seminars (e.g., Unforgetting and Filipinx on Indigenous Lands [FIL]).

class would need new material to deepen their learning. I did not want the alums to get bored, or worse, assume that they had already mastered the material. From personal experience, re-reading the foundational literature of the class—Constantino (1982) and Ocampo (2016), for example—would always result in new insights. I also know that students would always glean different elements of the articles and interpret them differently, adding a fresh take and new discussion questions to ponder. Hiyas corroborated the continued usefulness of the “recycled” readings during our mid-quarter check-in, stating that the texts “took [them] way back, but very differently from the first time.” Ultimately, we decided to stick with the foundational texts, counting on their re-readability and the analyses offered by the new batch of students. I also got to delegate some responsibility for managing the class, which I enjoyed as a short respite. That chance encounter with Hiyas and Ligaya proved uplifting for all of us: we strengthened the Filipinx community at UW and polished the curriculum and pedagogy for the Unforgetting course, and I got to spend extra time with two phenomenal Filipinx individuals. I loathe to think what would’ve happened if I allowed my perpetually exhausted graduate student self to “avoid” chatting and building community that day, worried that I’d be taking away time from my administrative job, the chapters I had to read, or the papers I needed to produce.

In this way, the “accidental” involvement of Hiyas and Ligaya in Unforgetting was a form of refusal. Here, I draw from Simpson’s (2007) theorization of ethnographic refusal, which she describes as a “calculus ethnography of what you need to know and what [she] refuse[s] to write in” (p. 72). Simpson drew from her examples as a researcher with the people of Kahnawake who had refused the authority of the Canadian state, among other instances. She then extended this refusal to the Kahnawakero:non’s (people of Kahnawake) everyday encounters. Simpson likens these acts of refusals as a triple, even quadruple consciousness, “an endless play”

of Kahnawakero:non saying that they are this and that all at once: “I am me, I am what you think I am and I am who this person to the right of me thinks I am and you are full of shit and then maybe I will tell you to your face” (p. 74).

My refusal to be just a graduate student—someone doing the reading, writing, and necessary teaching—resulted in Hiyas’ and Ligaya’s participation in Unforgetting 2019. Their refusals to be just undergraduate students—reading, writing, taking exams, and generally being “good” students—also resulted in their engagement with the course. In other words, through building relationships, of seeing our wellbeing as tied with the wellbeing of our community (kapwa), we were refusing the imperatives of an academic institution that only evaluates and rewards its constituents in ways that do not involve relationality.

In the subsections that follow, I illustrate how Hiyas exemplified being a refusal-informed saling-pusa in the time that we spent together in and out of class.

Hiyas as Saling-Pusa Facilitator

Hiyas was officially registered for her first Unforgetting class in spring 2018. The story above indicated that she had officially signed up once again as a student for the class’s 2019 iteration as well as a “TA,” which I consider to be a saling-pusa facilitator.

As a saling-pusa facilitators, Hiyas (and Ligaya) debriefed every class session with me. We discussed how effective a particular activity or piece of content was and brainstormed ways to improve them in future class iterations. Because she had the perspectives of a student sitting with her peers while I facilitated, as well as the perspectives of a co-facilitator who discussed the curricular and pedagogical elements of the class, Hiyas was straddling membership and non-membership in her facilitator role. This “hybrid” role in the class allowed Hiyas (and me, by extension) to be innovative and resourceful. For example, during the fifth week of Unforgetting,

when I realized that there weren't enough remaining class meetings for everyone to get to share their photovoice/weekly reflections to the class, Hiyas suggested that we switch up the activities at the beginning of each class. Our norm was to have students share altar items (objects that they valued and that they connected to the weekly topic) and photovoices. Instead of sharing photovoices, where one or two students got to disclose what was going on in their lives, we opted to have students respond to an icebreaker so that everyone was able to participate and check in. Students still shared their photovoice links through Canvas for their peers to check out.

I believe that being a saling-pusa facilitator in Unforgetting afforded Hiyas some unique opportunities that differ from serving as TA for most undergraduate courses. For instance, I asked her if she wanted to facilitate or co-facilitate sessions with me; we decided that she would take lead on a couple of sessions. I acknowledge that there was still a power differential between me and Hiyas—I was still the main facilitator who had prepared for teaching the class with my own agendas, which included the class being the pilot study for my dissertation. However, by allowing Hiyas to be a saling-pusa facilitator, I was divesting from full control of the course. My intentions for doing so were twofold: I wanted the perspectives and experiences of class alums to inform the direction of the course, and I wanted students who were “repeating” the seminar to have greater control of their own experiences in the class. With the former intention, Hiyas got to share her experiences as a two-time student, something that I would have never had access to as a facilitator. With the latter intention, we as co-facilitators were working towards a radical education for ourselves, similar to Espie's descriptions of activist self-study or ARAK in the succeeding chapter. Overall, both of these intentions were for the sustenance of myself and the students and co-facilitators in our ever-moving exploration of our Filipinxness.

Hiyas' Photovoice as Salang-Pusa

Besides being a saling-pusa facilitator, Hiyas was a matriculated student in Unforgetting. She participated in our discussions and submitted assignments. As part of the flexibility I provide to students in their weekly photovoice reflections, Hiyas sometimes opted to do a short podcast instead of the captioned photos that served as the baseline of the photovoice. Sometimes she submitted captioned photos supplemented with a podcast. Hiyas mentioned in consulting with me prior to starting these podcasts that she liked to talk through things and that she would benefit from reflecting through “word vomit.” I tried to reframe this as speaking our thoughts out loud to bring life into the world, which has been the function of ceremonies and rituals in many communities around the world. By not abiding by the rules of what a photovoice typically looked like, Hiyas’ weekly reflections were therefore a saling-pusa photovoice. I was intentional with offering students a wide range of acceptable submissions for their photovoice to validate their creative expressions, which I believed to be a validation of their various knowledges, cultural practices, and lived experiences. This is in line with practicing a desire-based (Tuck, 2009) approach to learning and works towards sustaining the lives and souls of students, both precepts of culturally sustaining pedagogies (Alim et al., 2020). I draw from Hiyas’ “verbal processing” throughout this chapter.

Hiyas as Saling-Pusa Catholic

Within Hiyas’ photovoice and coursework as well as in our conversations, there were plenty of examples of how she navigated identities and relationships as a saling-pusa. The first one I want to highlight is her Catholicism and its influences on her relationship with herself, her family, and her education.

Hiyas was born and raised on Guam, an island where over 85% of the population is Roman Catholic (*Guam Churches*, 2022). The dominance of Catholicism on the island is a result

of Spanish colonization, similar to the Philippines, where 80% of the population is Roman Catholic (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2017). As with many Filipinos, diasporic or in the homeland, Hiyas and her family are Catholic. However, the way that Hiyas has discussed her Catholicism has been as a *saling-pusa* of sorts—she is Catholic, but also not really.

Recall that during week seven of *Unforgetting*, we had a poetry workshop in class. The week prior, I assigned no readings and instead tasked the students with sharing their playlists with one another and creating their photovoice entries as a response to the music of their peers. I intended this two-week span to be recuperative, as we had been discussing heavy topics like colonial mentality, language and education, histories of colonialism and Filipinx migration, Filipinx racializations, and de-colonizing earlier in the quarter. In my mind, the two weeks of music and poetry served as breathing room as well as space for the students to reflect further.

Hiyas chose to write a poem that explored her Filipinanness, gender, and sexuality contextualized within a poem-story of being at church:

Ode to My First Crush at Church

I sat in mass
 on the pew next to my parents
 and sister, the first time
 I was allowed at the edge
 I sat next to a stranger
 five years old, looking up at
 the girl sitting next to me
 she had blue eyes
 wore a blue dress
 contrasted by the blue walls
 of the church
 Stand, kneel, sit, stand
 The our father prayer began
 And I was just excited
 to get to hold her hand
 (Poetry workshop, February 20, 2019)

The title indicates that the poem was a story of Hiyas' first crush, which she experienced when she was five. Being allowed to be "at the edge" for the first time tells us that Hiyas was in a new "spot," that her parents had allowed her to be in contact with other churchgoers (as opposed to, for instance, Hiyas sitting between her two parents), at least from one direction. Coincidentally, this opening also presented itself as an opportunity to be next to her first crush, a blue-eyed girl wearing a blue dress. The crux of this poem, however, was not about the parents letting Hiyas sit on the edge of the pew, nor her crush being a blue-eyed girl; it's about five-year-old Hiyas wanting to hold another girl's hand. In other words, this poem was all about Hiyas queerness against the backdrop of her and her family's religious beliefs and practices.

Hiyas came out as queer to the class during week five, when we had our mid-quarter check ins. The idea for this check in came from my desire to be intentional about building relationships in the class. At that point in the quarter, I was aware that most of our limited class time was being devoted to weekly requirements, readings, and other labors related to getting course credit. I wanted to change how we were spending our time together to focus more on creating community and getting to know each other, especially in the thick of winter. I started by asking the students a two-pronged question: Within the time frame of this quarter, what is the most difficult thing you've done? What is something that has brought you joy? Hiyas got teary-eyed during our check in. She shared that it was difficult to be taking 18 credits while holding a job and being involved in organizations and other extracurricular activities. She further said how the readings have reminded her of how much she doesn't know about her family, and how it felt that she hasn't been paying enough attention to them because of all her other commitments. For the second part of the check in question, Hiyas responded that her mom, whom she considered her best friend, visited the past weekend and brought her joy. Hiyas conveyed that she and her

mom used to drive to school and back every day and “vent to each other.” Recently, according to Hiyas, she has only seen her mom once a month since November 2018. I found out from Hiyas’ poetry worksheet two weeks later that she was not out to her family, which paints a complex relationship between her and her family members.

Hiyas’ podcast reflection during poetry week added nuance to this familial dynamic. We read a poem by Hernandez (2000) entitled “Chismis,” Tagalog for gossip. In the poem, two unnamed characters are talking about Nita and her family at a party hosted by Nita’s mother. The gossipers go through a gamut of fat shaming, anti-Blackness, classism, and comportment norms, among other themes, by deriding Nita’s daughter. Hiyas noted how the poem hit home for her on different levels:

It reminded me a lot of my own aunties and my grand aunties and how I would hear a lot of that rhetoric from my own family, so I’m going to read some lines:

“So smart, sayang naman, such an intelligent girl with her life wasting away, stopping her schooling.”

“Sayang ang pag-aaral niya. Is she going back to school?”

“Did she quit? She’s too wild, naman.”

“Just like her mother. I bet that Nita lets her daughter stay out late. That’s where the trouble begins, you know.”

“All the women in that family are too strong-willed. That girl probably inherited it.”²³

So I was always the daughter...I’m the bunso. I’m the youngest. I have an older sister, and so I’ve actually heard some of this type of rhetoric around my sister before we were very open with our family about her diagnosis...When we sent her out to the Philippines, there was a lot of gossip from my family that lives there, like “Why’s she going out to the Philippines? Is she sick? What’s happening?” And then they would see me and they would always compare me to her. There were a lot of things in this article too about like “She’s getting fat.” Those are the normal things you hear, or the “Is she pregnant?” And so this chismis culture really hit home...specifically the part about “Oh, she’s so smart, such an intelligent girl. Why did she stop schooling?” I kind of think about my mom not because my mom didn’t finish school but because right after school, like right after graduation, my mom got pregnant with my sister. They didn’t tell me his story until later down the line, but my grandma actually kicked my mom out because of all the drama that

²³ I copy Hernandez’s quotation marks and line breaks from the original poem. I use italics to denote that Hiyas was reading parts of the poem and that these weren’t her own words.

would have been caused because my mom still wasn't married and she was pregnant. That was part of the reason my mom was kind of pushed into marriage at 23 because she was pregnant right after college. That mentality of saving face was something that really...what would other people think. I think that really hit home and made me think about my mom.

(Photovoice, February 19, 2019)

Note how Hiyas discussed family history around using marriage to save face. Many Catholics in my life, my mom and other family members included, are subject to the beliefs that child-bearing can only happen within the institution of marriage. Systemically, the Philippine government considers children who aren't born of married parents as "illegitimate," language that is still used in governmental paperwork and websites (Philippine Consulate Los Angeles, 2022; Philippine Statistics Authority, 2022). One of the ways to save face in many Filipinx communities is thus to not incur shame from bearing "illegitimate" children, which is what Hiyas described above.²⁴

Hiyas also recognized that Filipinx do gossip about other people, though this behavior isn't exclusive to our community. Mentioning the comparisons between her and her older sister and the relatives who make assumptions and ask inappropriate questions indicate that the poem resonated with Hiyas in such a way that it reminded her of her relationships with family. Hiyas was considering how other people's comments, including those of her relatives, impacted her sister and mother. In the same photovoice entry as the podcast, Hiyas shared a photograph of her dressed to the nines at what appeared to be some formal social event. She titled this entry with one of the lines from Hernandez's poem, "What is that? Lipstick?" Through this photo and the accompanying text, Hiyas extended how chismis not only affected her mom and sister but also Hiyas herself. The caption read

²⁴ There are many instances from my own family about saving face and maintaining familial honor as exhorted by Catholicism. My maternal grandmother called our family "broken" because my mom was separated from her first husband, the dad of my older siblings. My mom and my dad were never married which means that the Philippine government considers me an illegitimate child. Both my parents and all my grandparents were raised Catholic.

I am often criticized by the Filipina women at my church for wearing lipstick or heels to mass. I am shamed for being bigger and showing either leg or cleavage. I am not allowed to claim ownership of my body, but I must stand the objectification when I am told, “Just lose some weight and you can be Miss Universe.”

(Photovoice, winter 2019)

It is apparent that Hiyas did not want to accept the misogynistic Catholic beliefs of propriety and modesty at church. By being proud of her body and dressing up in the way that she wanted to, she was demonstrating that she was claiming ownership of her body despite the hegemonic gaze of Catholicism as practiced by its devotees. Hiyas also named the veiled criticism of being Miss Universe—a competition that many Filipinos watch but has yet to have larger bodied contestants (Crotty, 2016)—only if she adhered to conventional, Eurocentric beauty standards. The photo of Hiyas wearing a wide smile, showing plenty of skin, and wearing deep red lipstick was an objection to this comment.

To end the entry, Hiyas quoted another line from Hernandez’s poem that followed the words from the title: “It’s Sunday pa naman. Thick and red, too. Walang hiya!”²⁵ Again, juxtaposing these lines with the proud image of herself in a formal dress was a clear resistance to the objectification and admonitions towards “modesty” that she has experienced, which are inextricably linked to Catholic teachings. That Hiyas chose a photo of herself wearing red lipstick while she was quoting lines from the poem that was shaming someone for doing the same thing spoke volumes about her own stance: I’m going to do what I want with my body in spite of what people say. To me, this was Hiyas being *saling-pusa*—rule-breaker, questioning, and reflexive—in her own Filipinx Catholic beliefs and practices.

²⁵ Hiya means shame in Tagalog. In *kapwa* psychology, Enriquez has asserted that many scholars (and Filipinos in general) have captured only the external aspect of hiya/shame and have neglected the internal aspect that’s about maintaining good relations with others through a “sense of propriety” or “dignity.” Hiya therefore could also be a way of behaving appropriately and accordingly depending on the situation. “Hiya” has no connection to “hiyas” or gemstone, which is also used as a Tagalog name.

Another photovoice entry, this time from the week on Filipinx American identity (week four of winter quarter 2019), corroborates Hiyas' qualities as a *saling-pusa* Catholic. This class was devoted to a chapter from *The Latinos of Asia* (Ocampo, 2016). Because of the prevalence of Catholicism in Central and South America from Spanish and Portuguese colonization, the book argues that cultural similarities abound between Filipinx and Latinxs. Hiyas alluded to how her identity is tied to being Catholic:

Since I have begun to de-colonize²⁶ myself, I have also begun to look more closely at my religion. I'm not as devout of a Catholic as I was before moving to Seattle and learning about the colonial roots of the religion. I placed my notebook next to this cross because of my two favorite stickers. One states "product of immigrants" and the other is from the womxn's action commission. Sometimes my personal identity conflicts with my Catholic one, especially my identity as a womxn who wants change and equal rights. I see how religion has been used as a tool for oppression and I am slowly unpacking the harmful ideas that have been ingrained in me through religion.
(Photovoice, winter 2019)

Hiyas' ongoing process of self-reflection as part of the Unforgetting class made her acknowledge her criticality around her religion. She recognized the colonial roots of Catholicism as the primary reason that she and her family have been exposed to it. Hiyas also stated that she was no longer as "devout" as she was before moving to Seattle for college, where she majored in American ethnic studies and took classes such as Critical Filipino American Histories and Unforgetting. Hiyas' education could be epitomized by the notebook that she photographed right next to a decorative standing cross and a figurine of the Virgin Mary. Her devotion (or lack thereof) to the faith was now informed by the community work she has been involved in, as well as an examination of her family's histories, particularly migration, and how they're entangled with Hiyas' religion and gender.

²⁶ See note #16 regarding my addition of a hyphen ("decolonize" to "de-colonize").

Figure 4

Mama Mary, Jesus, and Notebook: Hiyas' Week 4 Photovoice Entry



The three elements of the Virgin Mary, Christ on the cross, and the notebook with stickers that read “product of immigrants” and “womxn’s action commission” could also demonstrate syncretic practices and beliefs in the Catholic faith. Hiyas keeping the first two items as decorations in her living space denotes that she still holds a strong affinity to the religion. She is not shy nor afraid to have outward displays being Catholic. As with this and her previous photovoice entries, however, it is clear that she also maintains critiques of the religion by “unpacking the harmful ideas that have been ingrained in [her].” Unpacking the misogyny in Catholicism (e.g., women unable to serve in church leadership, shaming sexually active women who are unmarried, brides asking to submit to the will of their husbands during marriage, God considered as a man, etc.) could mean that Hiyas still identifies as Catholic while adhering to her personal actions and beliefs that women are on the same playing field as men. Hiyas noted that

her Catholic identity sometimes conflicts with her personal identity, particularly “as a womxn who wants change and equal rights.” I believe that this conflict is present in her attempts to reconcile histories of colonialism that have brought the Catholic faith to her and her family, her diasporic nature as someone who was born on Guam and then went on to attend college on Duwamish and Coast Salish lands, and her gender and sexuality. I argue that this process is part of Hiyas being a saling-pusa Catholic—navigating multiple conflicting identities, histories, and beliefs, and being okay with doing so.

Hiyas provides us with another glimpse of these entanglements and how she has been navigating them more than two years after posting her final photovoice entry from Unforgetting. In our final Filipinx on Indigenous Lands meeting, Hiyas signed up to share an altar item—something that is significant to a student that they connect to the weekly course theme and that relates to why they’re continuing to educate themselves. Hiyas chose the rosary that she wears around her neck as her altar item. She said:

My altar item, I think for most things, whenever I'm asked to share something, has always been this necklace, and this is a new iteration. I think the last time I've shown it, it was silver, and it was gifted from my godmother.

This iteration's from my mom but it's always the medal of St. Benedict, and for me in particular, I'm not very Catholic anymore but it's that feeling of comfort from specific items from Catholicism, like some people still wear rosaries even though they're not practicing, so for me, the medal of St. Benedict is a protection medal, so specifically it's supposed to ward off paranoia and it's also... Like, it literally translates the words that are on it to "Stay back, Satan." So I'm always very paranoid, or I'm always very aware of people around me, right, like how I'm affecting others or even just I feel like people are watching, and so my godmother gave me a medal and now since then, my family continues to give me medals.

So, this is particularly important to me because the pendant's from my mom, and this is the chain of my grandma and it was the first purchase she ever made in the United States. So, with her paycheck from being a teacher, she gave me her necklace. I don't take it off.

(Class recording, June 1, 2021)

Hiyas has shared her necklace as an altar item in a previous class. In the FIL class, however, she wanted to tell us of the necklace's "new iteration." Hiyas' necklace is comprised of two main physical components: the chain from her grandmother and the medal of St. Benedict as its pendant. The former has remained the same since Hiyas last talked about the necklace while the pendant has been updated.

The first thing that I want to highlight from Hiyas' altar share was that she wears the necklace as a way of reminding and cherishing her relationships with her mother and grandmother. The chain was her grandmother's first ever purchase in the United States as a teacher, a rather symbolic token for Hiyas and her family. In class, I responded to Hiyas by sharing how I donated most of my first paycheck to my mother. The first paycheck, my first ever job in a new land, was significant for me and my family because it was one of the first milestones of our collective success as a diasporic Filipino family. I imagine that Hiyas shared similar sentiments with her grandmother bestowing the fruits of her first paycheck to Hiyas. That Hiyas wears the symbol of her grandmother's first paycheck around her neck at all times indicates that it holds way more than just material value for her. Moreover, Hiyas receiving this chain from her grandmother is most likely a demonstration that Hiyas' family was intentional with the recipient.

Just as the necklace's chain reminds Hiyas of her grandmother, the medal of St. Benedict must remind her of her mother. Hiyas said that the pendant on her current necklace is from her mom, with previous pendants coming from her godmother and other members of her family. As mentioned during our mid-quarter check in during the Unforgetting class, Hiyas considers her mother to be her best friend. Because of their closeness, it is not surprising that Hiyas wears something from her mother, something that she never takes off.

The second thing that I want to highlight is that Hiyas considers the necklace as a source of comfort and protection. Hiyas reiterated that she is not “very Catholic anymore” but that she derives feeling of comfort from items related to Catholicism, presumably including the figurines of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ that Hiyas wrote about in week four of Unforgetting (Figure 4). Pendants as protective objects abound in Philippine histories, including the revolutionary mass movement the Katipunan, which fought for the country’s independence from Spain. Members of the Katipunan believed that keeping their hearts pure and their visions of liberation free from malice would grant them righteous protection. Symbols of this protection were typically in the form of necklaces called anting-anting (Chua, 2014). Though Hiyas does not use the language of anting-anting, I posit that her custom of using the medal of St. Benedict for protection is analogous to the syncretic practices of the Katipunan and many Filipinxs, diasporic or otherwise, who continue to wear protection talismans. Hiyas’ acknowledgement of herself no longer identifying strongly with Catholicism belies how she is nonetheless still drawing upon religious pendants for her own purposes.

The final detail that I want to include in Hiyas’ nuanced religious beliefs and practices came from our conversation after the FIL class was over. While talking about identifying as a Filipinx American, Hiyas clarified that it is because she wants to continue acknowledging her privileges that she identifies with both terms. While explaining this, she draws a parallel between her Filipino Americanness and her identification with Catholicism:

Hiyas: I identify as American because it's ingrained. And there's a lot of privilege. That's also part of the reason why I usually default to Catholic, for example. Because although I don't agree with religion anymore—I'm whispering now because my mom—she's like, "Father wants to talk to you." And I'm like, "No."

Kriya: The priest?

Hiyas: Yeah. Because I don't take communion when I go to church at all, and it's been like a year. And she's like, "Oh, Father wants to speak to you about that." And I'm like,

"Don't you think he should be proud of the fact that I know that taking communion and I'm a sinner is not a good thing." Like out of respect of religion, I don't do it. I don't participate. But then, the optics of it, right?

During our Zoom chat, Hiyas turned to talk to her mom a couple of times. I assume that Hiyas whispering during our conversation above (while using her normal voice for the rest of our two-hour chat) denotes that she would rather not let her mom know about her feelings and opinions toward the church. Further, Hiyas “defaults” to being Catholic for optics, which suggests that she wants others to continue to perceive her as a member of the church. However, she draws boundaries in terms of how often she goes to mass (seldom) and about taking communion (not at all). In this way, Hiyas is able to appease her mom, the priest, and most likely her Catholic community on Guam. Lastly, Hiyas stated that she wasn’t taking communion “out of respect of religion.” I interpret this as her own way of validating that she was no longer a devout Catholic but a Catholic nonetheless. She was labeling herself as a “sinner,” someone who was no longer part of the church’s inner circle. In doing so, Hiyas was making a distinction between her own version of Catholicism and likely the more traditional practitioners of the faith. Hiyas is thus a saling-pusa member of the Catholic church who defined her own terms of participation—how she wants to play—within the religion.

Based on photovoice entries, verbal reflections, and class sharings, it is clear that Hiyas has been increasingly eschewing Catholic beliefs and practices that no longer serve her. I attribute this to her being a saling-pusa Catholic—being Catholic, but not really. She may go to church to show respect and deference to her mother, or perhaps to maintain relationships with other churchgoers with whom she’s spent a lot of time. However, she is aware and critical of how Catholicism—especially as a tool of colonization that was used in both the Philippines and Guam—has been perpetuating misogyny, homophobia, and other hegemonic stances around the

world. Despite some progressive moves by the Catholic Church, like Pope Francis endorsing same-sex civil unions recently (Winfield, 2020), Hiyas as a *saling-pusa* Catholic means that while she may be keeping crucifixes and figurines of the Virgin Mary at home as well as a pendant of protection around her neck, her beliefs and devotion to the faith are far from conventional. Given the colonial histories of Catholicism and the systems of oppression that the church has been perpetuating, Hiyas must have considered leaving the religion completely. But she is choosing not to. The combination of religious criticality (especially around concepts of gender and sexuality) with a self-adapted practice of the faith has resulted in her being comfortable with how her conceptions of self—including being a Guam-born-and-raised Filipinx, being a woman, and being queer—and her familial relationships are entangled with being Catholic.

Hiyas as Saling-Pusa in the American/Guamanian²⁷ Dream

From discussing Hiyas' unique religiosity as viewed through the lens of her participation in multiple classes and our conversations, I now pivot to her views on social class and the “American Dream,”²⁸ both of which emerged as related themes in my analysis.

In racializations week of the Filipinx on Indigenous Lands (FIL) class, we discussed the documentary *The Learning*, which tells the story of four Filipinx women who were recruited to teach in Baltimore. These women, products of an American-founded educational system, were heeding the call of higher pay (from earning \$4,000 a year to almost \$50,000) amidst a backdrop of leaving the homeland and their families behind. During our discussion on who bears the

²⁷ I differentiate Chamorro/Chamorro/CHamoru and Guamanian here, with the former representing the Indigenous peoples on the island (and their varying politics) and the latter as proxy for all Indigenous and non-indigenous people on Guam.

²⁸ I use quotation marks only for the first mention of this phrase. If it hasn't been obvious already, rest assured that I remain critical and questioning of such a dream throughout the dissertation!

responsibility of caring/educating whose children, the differences in the racialization of the Filipina teachers versus their predominantly Black students, and the ongoing legacies of colonial schooling on opposite sides of the globe, the discussion naturally veered towards the notion of the American Dream. The class recognized that along with the Filipino teachers featured in the film, practically everyone in the class, including myself, have been socialized to pursue it (and are most likely actively doing so). I asked the class to share what they thought they knew about the American Dream. Though Hiyas was a *saling-pusa* in the seminar (i.e., she had already graduated from UW and was not officially matriculated), she volunteered a response:

I can define it. Let's refresh my AES major [chuckles]. The American dream is generally referring to the idea of pulling oneself up by the bootstraps. So imagine, you're wearing boots and you're pulling yourself up. It's that idea of upward mobility by chasing this American Dream you'll be uplifting your family for that generation either financially or within status. Chasing the American Dream—I see the white picket fence—it's the middle class dream. Whatever your picture of the middle class in white suburbia, that's the ideal setup for America that is pushed on...whether you're in a lower income bracket, it's pushed on you to strive towards that...or generally around the world, for colonized places, to push forward towards being that middle class...is the American dream. I just remembered Bonus' "boots with the fur," [laughs] if you've ever taken a Bonus class. (Class recording, April 20, 2021)

I found Hiyas' definition to be especially incisive because of how she covers social mobility, whiteness, and colonialism in one go. She clearly remembered the material from her American ethnic studies classes, probably with the help of a memorable image of furry boots leading to a white picket fence. During her explanation, I posted a question in the chat that I had prepared the night before and that the class had started to discuss as a group: Is chasing the American Dream "wrong"? (Are there viable alternatives?). I asked the class whether the option to work overseas was truly a "choice." My argument was that practically anybody who is given the opportunity to make 12 times more than what they were making while doing the same type of work would not hesitate to take it—for their own sake and for their family's—and that therefore such an

opportunity stopped becoming a matter of choice but a matter of necessity. After sharing her initial thoughts on the American Dream, Hiyas responded to my query:

I also have another thing to add on about your question in the chat about “Is chasing the American Dream wrong”? I don’t like the binary of it being right or wrong. It would always depend on what people are prioritizing in that moment. If you’re prioritizing your survival, is chasing the American Dream really wrong in that sense? And then it’ll always look wrong to someone else because in chasing that dream, are you hurting others? There’s always going to be someone technically in the wrong [air quotes gesture] and technically in the right. I just don’t like that binary.
(Class recording, April 20, 2021)

In my ask, I purposefully used quotation marks to signal that I did not want the students to respond using a binary scale. Immediately after I posted the question in the chat, I knew that I had framed it in such a way that failed to present the various interlocking systems that comprised the thing we call the American Dream. Hiyas responded by pointing out this false binary. She also asked a crucial follow up question (“If you’re prioritizing your survival, is chasing the American Dream really wrong?”) and then pointed out how there will always be people on either side of right and wrong. None of us believed that the four Filipinx teachers featured in the documentary did anything wrong. The challenge was in imagining the alternatives to reaching for the American Dream while assessing how our migration impacted other communities, particularly Native tribes and nations, who are continually marginalized by the nation-state with which we have allied ourselves.

What Hiyas is hinting at above is a proposition that we see beyond the rightness/wrongness of the American Dream. I contend that Hiyas (and Filipinxs in general) playing as *saling-pusa* in the American Dream entails both a complicity to the belief system with an awareness that such complicity needs to be constantly interrupted. I see this interruption as happening simultaneously with our complicity, something that Hiyas has demonstrated in her

views and practice of Catholicism, until the point where the complicity is no longer required. This also means that as Filipinx who subscribe to the notion of migrating to other lands for social mobility, we need to recognize that we must build alternatives to success pathways for the diasporic Filipinx community. I say this while acknowledging that many diasporic Filipinx do not always succeed in their quest for the American Dream. There are also plenty of Filipinos in the homelands who are still trying to survive amidst state apparatuses that continue to exploit, kill, or oppress Indigenous communities, poor and working class people, disabled people, genderqueer and trans folx, among others. As saling-pusa to the American Dream, if we must subscribe to it, we will, but only to eventually be free of it; the American Dream is not our telos.

Hiyas and I had more conversations about social class, social mobility, and the American Dream after FIL concluded. In these dialogues, Hyias mentioned that she was planning on attending graduate school in Italy, as her mom had applied for and accepted a new job there. Hyias was torn because she wanted to go with her mom, but there were so many factors at play. She was feeling that if she didn't leave Guam soon, she would never leave the island. Joining her mom in Italy could thus be a new beginning for Hyias. However, she either needed to find a job there or continue her schooling. With a double major in American ethnic studies and law, societies, and justice, Hyias felt that her graduate schooling options were more viable. She briefly revealed that she had considered procuring a position in the military that would allow her to teach at a base in Italy, but the process was extremely competitive. It would have involved getting into the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) on Guam, then petitioning for a transfer to Italy. Getting into DoDEA would've also required Hyias to pass a Praxis²⁹ exam,

²⁹ A set of tests that measure reading, writing, and math as core academic skills for educators. Some Praxis tests also assess principles of learning and teaching for various grade levels (ETS, 2022).

which is non-transferrable and suitable only for the location in which she would be teaching; she would need to study for and take the exam multiple times.

Because of the challenges in securing employment to go with her mom to Italy, Hiyas also looked into graduate programs. Most programs weren't as competitive as trying to get a military job. Hiyas thought that the most transferable degree from an Italian institution would be legal and labor studies; her other choices were education (she could just get a teacher's license in New York instead) and social work ("very specific to the United States"). However, the cost of attendance in Italy would have been around \$60,000 per year. Though Hiyas mentioned that there's a possibility that she and her family can afford that cost, she was wary about feeling regretful of the bill afterwards. The calculus of pursuing an expensive Italian degree that wouldn't provide a competitive edge in the job market upon returning to Guam seemed unfavorable to Hiyas.

Additionally, Hiyas revealed that she wasn't making much as a private school teacher on Guam and that health insurance through her employer was too expensive. Nevertheless, she had started the application process for a mortgage so that she and her mom can purchase property instead of being subject to "exploitative rent" (her words). Hiyas said that they had sold her childhood home to buy a condominium that would be under her and her mom's name. Part of the reason for doing so was because Hiyas' grandparents' house was most likely to be inherited by her mom's other siblings: "There's too many kids; we're not inheriting it," she said. The condo, in Hiyas' opinion, would serve as a good investment as they can rent it out to family or to a member of the military to pay for the mortgage even in the case that Hiyas and her mom move to Italy. Having property would also mean that Hiyas and her family have a home on Guam.

The various elements of schooling costs, job market competencies, property ownership, and education as financial investment demonstrate Hiyas' fluency with knowledge essential to economic success on Guam.³⁰ She has named directly and indirectly that she wants job security in a field that she cares about, a home that she and her family won't have to rent, and a way to maintain close relations with her family (whether that's by living together or having the means to visit them regularly if living apart). These named desires are shared by many other Filipinxs in the diaspora, me included, and most likely even by non-Filipinos. Hiyas articulated her professional desires vis-à-vis what she wants for her students and herself (and her family by extension) in one of our post-class conversations:

To quote the youth, "I do not dream of labor." It's very interesting because I think there's a divide between what I want to do and what I know makes money. I don't want to go back to academia. I need academia to get a stable job. I don't want to work all my life. That's how American system is set up. So I'm like, "Hmm." What I want for myself is actually to teach, but I want control over what I teach. The fact that the three subjects that I teach are American government, American US history, or like AP US History, senior seminar. Senior seminar, as much as I'm like, "Yes, instill the youth with the values of how to navigate this world." I focus on professionalism, money, so tax, like I teach them how to work their money, and college. So in general, all these institutions that I'm against, I'm still teaching them how to navigate that because that's how we survive. (Interview, September 18, 2021)

Hiyas said that she is interested in education and academia but only as much as securing a stable job. She recognized that what she wants to do is different from what will provide money for her and her family, and yet she is willing to participate in the education system as a pathway to economic security despite such a pathway not aligning completely with her desires. Hiyas' comment of wanting control over what she teaches while being confined within the American

³⁰ I am simplistically assuming that being on Guam is part of the American Dream, realizing that this may flatten many factors like differences in cost of living and wages and the varied contexts between Guam versus the Americas. Though Guam is considered a U.S. territory and the island is part of U.S. settler colonial "jurisdiction," however, I want to emphasize that the American Dream, as well as justice and liberation on Guam, require considerations (e.g., geopolitical, historical, cultural) that are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

educational system was punctuated by her revelation that she was teaching her students about the *culture of power* (Delpit, 1988)—not just in the classroom but also in U.S. society—in the form of professionalism and financial management. In Hiyas’ own words, she was doing so to “instill the youth with the values of how to navigate this world.” I argue, therefore, that Hiyas’ desires for success are being mirrored through her desires for her students to also be successful. One way of achieving these undoubtedly varying notions of success is by knowing “how to work their money” or by going to college. The fact that she was teaching her students how to navigate systems of money and higher education despite her being anti-institution is indicative of her understanding of the necessity of these navigational skills based on her own experiences, such as co-signing for a mortgage and considering the return on investment of an international graduate degree. Hiyas is passing these skills to her students because she wants them to succeed. She knows that she and her students will have to keep navigating social institutions for survival (at minimum) and success (at best). Hiyas expressed this succinctly in our Zoom class chat during racializations week (week four of FIL), when we deliberated on the American Dream: “Major in what makes money, minor in what you love.”

With Hiyas teaching one of her current classes, AP U.S. History, she further demonstrated how she was balancing institutional demands (e.g., students needing a good score in their AP exam to be awarded college credit) with her desires to lay bare the culture of power to her students:

So I teach American history and the formation of American society, and like what the idea of American is. And that entire course also brushes over the... Like in terms of the breakdown of the course, that already in itself. I remind my students all the time, "I cannot do justice to the institutions of slavery. I cannot do justice to the atrocities of colonization, like the initial colonization, because I also have to prepare for this test that you're spending money on."
(Interview, September 18, 2021)

Hiyas knew that she has to teach content knowledge that will be part of the AP U.S. history test. At the same time, she recognized the irony of teaching Guamanian students most likely non-critical narratives of the formation of the United States as a society as well as the many parts that the course and exam most likely brush over. The expansiveness of the course, which spans nine periods from 1491 to the present, denotes that it is much more about breadth than depth and that it is impossible to do justice to topics like Native American genocide, slavery, and the Spanish-American War (wherein Spain “ceded” Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines to the United States for 20 million dollars under the Treaty of Paris³¹).

Nevertheless, Hiyas articulated that she will prepare students for their exam while acknowledging the shortcomings of the class to them. I interpret this as Hiyas wanting to make sure that her students can develop critical consciousness around not just U.S. history but also education in general. Hiyas was scaffolding survival for her students by telling them that exams need to be passed. She was also implying that massive historical topics that continue to have contemporary effects on Guam³² and the Americas need a deeper, more critical treatment.

Hiyas’ practice of attending simultaneously to her students’ survival and critical consciousness was not an isolated incident. Hiyas told me over dim sum in June 2021 that even when she was teaching high school chemistry in the previous academic year, she would often attend to students’ needs over the constant pressure to cover the required class material. There were several other instances of how Hiyas disrupts institutions in her teaching on Guam:

³¹ I’ve memorized this information since I was in second grade as part of Philippine public schooling. For further reading, consider looking at Shaw and Francia (2002) and Thompson (2010).

³² Military operations take up 2/3 of Guam. The island also has the highest number of veterans per capita, and there are a number of environmental justice issues, particularly radiation and chemical contamination, due to ongoing military activities (Estes, 2021).

In terms of my current relationships, it's the way I'm disrupting. I am teaching them the cultural capital of navigating these systems. But when it gets too much for me, I make sure that I ground it in other topics that I know will disrupt. So for example, I'm very informal with my students. They still have to call me miss, right? But in general, they know me. I'm not as cut and dry professional. I'm strict about deadlines to an extent. Some of them already know if you email me beforehand, I'll give you an extension and it's not late. But if you're saying sorry after, I'm like, "No, get in the practice of advocating before the problem happens." So, in the way I teach, I'm very informal...

I think in the way that I teach, because I'm not formally trained as a teacher, which on the other hand causes a lot of imposterism. But I know that they can relate to me and the content in a way that is digestible for them. But also, I don't uphold everything within the system in that way, right? And so, they look at me as an example of navigating those systems and maintaining some sort of identity that is against those systems. So, I've had conversation with my students about the "I don't dream of labor." Or like, "Miss, what's the point of going to college?" And I'm like, "Go to it if you need to, but you can also do other things in your life."

(Interview, September 18, 2021)

Through informality and relating to her students as human beings, Hiyas creates a relational atmosphere in her classes. She does this while once again making sure that students are aware of the culture of power by “teaching them the cultural capital of navigating these systems,” like asking for an extension ahead of the deadline. Hiyas also acknowledged that this informality, which she relayed as her lack of formal teacher training making her feel like she’s not doing her job well, also helps the students relate to her. This same informality is how Hiyas does not “uphold everything within the system.” Though Hiyas didn’t say it above, our previous dialogues have led me to believe that she draws from her personal experiences to impart wisdom beyond course content to her students. Hiyas answers her students’ important questions about work, college, and life outside of the classroom. I imagine that her presence in the classroom, where she wears not just the teaching hat, facilitates her students’ understanding of how her stories connect to systems of power that they are/will be navigating.

Hiyas continued sharing how she was disrupting educational spaces:

If your goal is to advance your family through money, you don't necessarily have to go to school. But if you know you want to be in those spaces, and you can go through the sacrifice of putting yourself through those spaces, go. I also know [chuckles]...A lot of my students, I had one student and she was like, "Miss I'm a first generation. What does that mean?" You know you'll hear the rhetoric of, "Oh, first generation, the first to drop out." I have to remind her too, "You being in this classroom, you taking this class, you knowing people is your cultural capital, regardless of if your parents didn't or weren't able to complete their education, you have access to people who have." And so being that point of access for these students that's accessible, I think is one way that I'm disrupting that kind of space.

(Interview, September 18, 2021)

What I especially appreciated about Hiyas' sharing above was that she highlighted how college isn't the only way for a family to be upwardly mobile socioeconomically. She stated how she's allowing her students to evaluate for themselves whether the "sacrifice of putting [themselves] thorough those spaces" is worthwhile. Further, Hiyas was purposeful about countering deficits-based narratives around first-generation college students. Hiyas essentially said that she was serving as her students' point of access to higher education, and she undoubtedly would answer their questions, provide them with resources, and even assist in their college applications

(personal communications, June 28, 2021). I told Hiyas that her students were fortunate to have her. We chuckled together, then Hiyas continued:

Also, empowering the students that are very passionate about their Indigenous roots. Because they also have talked to me about the...How do I talk about that? And supporting the independent Guahan movement when my family is military? Right? So, also recognizing that space.

(Interview, September 18, 2021)

Military and tourism operations dominate Guam. Not surprisingly, as I mentioned earlier, Hiyas' mother works as an engineer for the military; her dad works in tourism. Hiyas knows that the jobs of her parents are the most destructive and extractive on the island, and it is these jobs that have given Hiyas the social mobility to attend college in Seattle and to go back to Guam as a teacher. In her statement above, she was thus acknowledging the complex positionality that she

holds in the classroom as a middle-class person who has benefited from the Guamanian/American dream and the military-industrial complex of the United States. Hiyas supports the Independent Guåhan (the CHamoru-language pronunciation of Guam) movement, which advocates for “Independence as the best future political option for Guam.”³³ To her, this support for a decolonized Guam is not mutually exclusive with her mom working for the military. I surmise that Hiyas draws from her family members’ varied career paths to develop critical consciousness that she shares with her students. Her support for her Indigenous students who are pro-independence requires knowing what the movement is about. Hiyas added during our conversation that she supports Independent Guåhan because “this is their land.” At the same time, she can adeptly pivot to support her students whose families are in the military:

Oftentimes, there's strong identification with "This is my country." And that's across the board, whether they're Filipino or Chamorro. Because Filipinos also were able to get to Guam by joining the military. So they're military legacies on the Indigenous people, like people who identify as indigenous to Guam and also Filipinos that have moved to Guam. They're strong, very strong. Part of the reason like the way I teach has to be mindful of that is like I also don't want to get fired. But these kids are very sensitive to that. They have family members they've lost in different wars, or they have family members currently deployed. So, how do you grapple with, "I hate the military." That's these kids' lives, and their plan is to go to the military.
(Interview, September 18, 2021)

While supporting her Chamorro students in the previous quote, Hiyas was also recognizing in her statement above that the legacies of militarization on Guam have translated into her students and their families relying on participation in the military for survival. Some of Hiyas’ students are Indigenous and are pro-military/pro-U.S., and she knows this. By not alienating her students with military families and/or dreams, Hiyas gets to keep her job. More than not getting fired,

³³ The Facebook group for Independent Guåhan says that Independence (their capitalization) is a chance for the people of Guam to truly determine their own destiny and to no longer be stunted as a U.S. colony (Independent Guåhan, n.d.)

however, Hiyas also wants to respect and be supportive of her students regardless of their ethnicity, aspirations, and politics. To me, this is clearly being a *saling-pusa* in both her job as teacher and in her understanding of the Guamanian/American Dream. Below is another example that demonstrates Hiyas' deft navigation of the complexities of socioeconomics and politics:

I have a lot of coworkers...who are cops, who are former cops, who are retired military or currently in the guard. So, it's also navigating a space of... I respect their decisions in that regard, but I know that their presence also influences the students to pursue that path because it is a really good option for them. And I can't discourage it because I know their options, right? Not everyone can go to a university. Not everyone is cut out to even just go to the University of Guam because that's still expensive if you don't like school. And so reminding them too, if all they want to do is work on the family farm, that's also valid. Protect the land that you have, right? So, that's part of the way that I think. Or I can say that I'm using relationships to ensure that I'm disrupting settler systems, is that I can identify the students and what they need. And so some students really need that upward mobility of navigating these systems of whiteness. And I'm like, "Okay, let me show you how to do that, and still validate your feelings of why it's so frustrating."
(Interview, September 18, 2021)

Again, Hiyas emphasized how Guam's overwhelming military presence, which includes her coworkers, was influencing her students' career paths. Instead of admonishing her students not to join the military, Hiyas was purposeful about presenting her students with all the options that were available to them. Hiyas was not letting her own politics—anti-war, anti-military, and pro-Guahan Independence—occlude her students' realities. As a *saling-pusa* in the American/Guamanian Dream herself, Hiyas maintains good relations with her students through recognition of their different contexts and perceived career paths as she encourages them in their pursuit of their own dreams. Many of her students will probably enlist, and Hiyas would be completely supportive of them doing so. Moreover, Hiyas was also being wary of blindly endorsing higher education as the key to success. She was underscoring the legitimacy of her students' options, whether they were wanting to join the armed forces, go to college, or work on the family farm. Hiyas named that through her relationships with her students, she is able to

identify what they need and then shows them how to pursue their dreams. She does all of this while validating her students' feelings of frustration with "navigating these systems of whiteness."

To me, Hiyas' treatment of her students is a direct mirror of her own experiences and what I have discussed in the earlier portions of this chapter. Recall that Hiyas was feeling unsure about going abroad to study in Italy, where her mom had just gotten a new job, because of the associated costs and the lackluster job prospects afterwards. She was weighing her options while acknowledging that she desires to keep teaching but that she also wants higher pay and greater control over her classes. Hiyas is formally within the institution of education, but as *saling-pusa* she teaches her students about critical consciousness (by delineating the culture of power) as she is navigating/has navigated the systems herself—towards her and her students' collective success. Hiyas does all this while being aware of contradictions (e.g., being anti-military and being pro-Guahan Independence) and entanglements (e.g., not wanting to go back to academia but needing academia to get a stable job). Hiyas is an adroit capricorn whose criticality reveals how dominant systems work and who will use these systems to her and her family's fulfillment of their dreams, all while teaching her students the same and keeping her sights and desires on decolonization.

Conclusion

In this chapter thus far, I have shown how Hiyas' participation in the class revealed how she was negotiating her Catholicism. I have also established how Hiyas has been navigating her life as a Filipinx on Guam, including her takes on the American Dream and social class (e.g., balancing survival with passions and navigating cultures of power) and her teaching practices on Guam (e.g., teaching her students toward critical consciousness while informing them of their

options, including joining the military). I conclude by sharing Hiyas' dreams and aspirations for Filipinxs and for Guam. This is an especially long quote, but I wanted to preserve Hiyas' voice (she described herself as "loud" once and has told me she wants to start her own podcast with another verbose person) without segmenting her words as dictated by dominant research:

So in terms of my own dreams, I just want to exist freely with... If I could... I do know I need money, but I never want to make so much money that it's excessive. So, I've never dreamt of like... I dream of being comfortable, which is why I'm always like, "I'm just going to marry money." That was my main goal in life, just marry money. I know I couldn't. Just from the thought that that's very extractive. Like how they make their money should also be of concern to me.

Inherited money makes me mad. Like there's so many emotions tied with that. So I'm just kind of like... As much as like the ambitious side of me that wants to fit in within this system is like, I want to continue my education. I want to be the traditional sense of successful, grapples with the part of me that's like, "I hate these systems." They're not set up for people to succeed. They're set up for the rich to stay rich. And then for people to be co-opted into that so they can continue to justify that system.

So in regard to my dreams, I'm like... I don't know. We're still fluctuating between I really want to be rich so I'm comfortable. But I'm like, "Why can't I be comfortable with the current money I have?" And then, it's like, I want to stay in teaching and stuff like this where I'm impacting lives directly. But I'm operating within systems that I hate. So I'm like, "Nuh-uh." There's no winning situations in terms of like my dreams.

But in terms of like what I could imagine, if nothing changes, I see the community remaining the way it is, especially if I'm looking at the community on Guam. If nothing major happens in terms of like American culture shifting, which it is. But it also, we have a pattern of shifting and then backlash or frontlash. I've forgotten those terms since I started teaching. Like we'll go close and then immediately back to what these systems were set up to be.

So with that, I can still see the Filipino community remaining in the... Or holding on to the customs and the things that we associate with trying to maintain culture. Like pageants are a big thing. Like all those different things that we associate with how Filipino Americans or Filipinos in America or the Americas have tried to survive by relations with each other. I see those same patterns remaining on Guam. Especially because here...the population here is largely the OFW.³⁴ The overseas Filipino worker moving here, remitting money back to their family. The ultimate goal is always to go back to the homeland. But the circumstances rarely allow for them to go back to the homeland because they'll be workers forever.

³⁴ Overseas Filipino Workers. An official classification of Filipinxs who work in other lands, sending money to their families in the homelands. Because of exploitative labor practices globally, many OFWs eventually return to the Philippines after their labor contracts conclude; their residency outside of the Philippines is tied to their ability to work. Some, however, will settle in new lands through marriage or other means, at which point they lose their OFW status.

So in the pessimistic mindset of like, if nothing changes, that's what I see for the future. In a more radical mindset, the Filipino community here, I hope in the future, a hundred years from now, there's more support for the Indigenous, instead of that idea like the Filipinos having like a crab mentality. I'm hoping that instead there's more support for the Indigenous people of Guam, Guahan, taking back their land from the institution of the United States, specifically the United States military.
(Interview, September 18, 2021)

Hiyas pragmatism shows through here. She admitted to needing financial security, but only if it's not inherited and only enough to be comfortable (not excessive). She said that wants to continue her education to achieve her financial goals and to be traditionally successful. Hiyas felt uncertain about her own dreams because she believes that she needs to reassess her notion of financial "enough" as well as the contributions that she's making as an educator even though she dislikes academia. She expressed that "there's no winning situation" in terms of her dreams and left it at that. In Hiyas' imagination, however, she stated a possibility for change, despite frequent vacillations back to the status quo. Hiyas also envisioned the Filipino community sustaining itself through relationships (and pageants) and through maintaining the structure set up for overseas Filipinx workers, who will keep sending money back to the Philippines. Lastly, Hiyas shared her hopes for Filipino support of decolonization and demilitarization on Guam.

Implications

In terms of Hiyas being a saling-pusa co-facilitator, we are led to a primary question: How are we allowing undergraduate students to be co-facilitators in their own classrooms and giving them power to chart out their own education? Hiyas' case study demonstrates how students could benefit from having increased agency and leadership in their own classes, whether or not they choose to become future educators. Hiyas volunteered to be a saling-pusa co-facilitator of Unforgetting, one of many instances of students "stepping up" to have greater say in their learning (and in turn, the learning of their peers). Espie, in the chapter after this one, calls

this “radical self-study.” As educators, we need to continue to divest from holding sole power over curriculum and pedagogy. We could construct courses that scaffold student leadership and feedback throughout the class’s duration. At the most basic level of flexibility, we could offer multiple or supplemental readings that adhere to the course’s themes.

Another way of allowing greater flexibility is not just in course materials but in the coursework that we require students to turn in. We could allow our students to be *salang-pusa* in works that we assess for academic legibility and recognition. We could be encouraging multiple forms of reflections, assignments, potentially even discussions, to validate students’ ways of expressing themselves. We could design rubrics that meet broader educational goals instead of imposing rules that play into academic hegemonies. The photovoice is already a step away from the dominance of text. How else can we decenter the text-heavy nature of education? How can we allow students to explore the best ways to express themselves beyond writing? Hiyas’ podcasts as part of her photovoice have proven to be a valuable way of reflection for her; she described being able to verbally process as helping her understand course concepts as well as her own stories and positionalities. How else can we help students explore their creativity while covering course content, recognizing the culture of power, and developing criticality?

In terms of Hiyas being a *salang-pusa* Catholic, another question arises: How do we bring in our students’ religions into the classrooms with a loving critique? How are we considering religion as it intersects with gender and sexuality? This chapter has demonstrated how sometimes, a student’s faith is inexorably linked with how they see themselves and how they live in the world. For example, Hiyas recognized how her Catholic beliefs are rooted in colonialism and have influenced her gender identity; she has been critical of the misogyny in the church. At the same time, Hiyas still identifies with the religion as a way of providing herself with comfort

and protection, as well as to maintain familial and community relationships. As CSP suggests, we need to validate students' cultures, including religions, while critiquing how such cultures perpetuate systems of oppression. We need to aid students in developing the critical consciousness necessary for such critique and the concomitant change in beliefs and/or actions, as they determine for themselves.

Lastly, in terms of Hiyas being a saling-pusa to the American Dream, educators are faced with a crucial question: How are we holding space for multiple realities, contradictions, and ironies with regard to how our students envision success? As culturally sustaining pedagogues, how are we acknowledging or encouraging "conservative" pathways to wholeness and wellness, including joining the military and other institutions of power that perpetuate harm on systemically marginalized communities? Is it our job to merely present all valid options to our students without the impetus to dictate to them what is "right," what is "better"? Are we attending to the needs of our students while also creating a more just, decolonized world? Hiyas as a critical educator has shown us that bringing our politics into the classroom is essential in helping our students see multiple possibilities while also validating that whichever path our students take is for them to decide.

According to Ladson-Billings (1995), the three essential elements of culturally relevant pedagogy are the following: "(a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order" (p. 160). Extending this list from a schooling context to a societal one formulates the following questions: How are we providing students the skills to be academically and socioeconomically successful? How are we developing and maintaining cultural competence towards multilingual, pluralistic

societies? How are we developing students' critical consciousnesses that challenge the status quo (of capitalism, white supremacy, settler colonialism, ableism, cisheteropatriarchy, and other systems of oppression)? These questions are also worthwhile to ask vis-à-vis the main inquiry of this dissertation: What does it mean to be Filipinx on Indigenous lands? Is being Filipinx about academic and socioeconomic successes, maintaining cultural lifeways, and developing critical consciousness towards Land Back and justice for systemically marginalized communities? I believe that Hiyas' case study as a saling-pusa in the Filipinx undergraduate seminars, in her Catholicism, in her critical pursuit of the American Dream, and in her teaching practices on Guam all point to the affirmative.

In terms of Filipinxness, Hiyas' chapter shows that criticality in terms of religion and the culture of power (again, within and beyond schooling contexts) is not only possible but essential. As Filipinxs on Indigenous lands, working towards decolonization supposes that we are part of the settler colonial nation-state that we must seek to change/dismantle/reform. We (Filipinxs) are in the state but not of it; we (educators, scholars, researchers) are in academia but not of it. Being saling-pusa to the United States and to the American Dream—working toward success for ourselves and others while navigating and working to subvert dominant systems—can also be part of being on Indigenous lands and enacting justice. Hiyas teaches us the possibilities of being saling-pusa to systems of education as teacher and student, of working toward “success” for herself and family while working to disrupt and resist the culture of power by validating state apparatuses (e.g., military, education) as legitimate (and sometimes the only) entryways into participation while maintaining an overarching vision of decolonization. Hiyas also offers us several questions: How is our participation in religion, academia, and other systems about

effecting change? How can we be participants in a settler colonial state while working to not be of it? How are we playing the role of saling-pusa in academia as educators and researchers?

Chapter 5

“Charmander³⁵ Is Shaking”: Espie as Fire-Breathing Saling-Pusa

You are Filipino. Yes, you may already “know” that, but do you really know what it means?

—Espie, February 13, 2019 letter to self

When I think about all this, political leanings and stuff, political parties, I’m like, “Burn them all! [chuckles] Burn it all! Get rid of all of it!”

—Espie, May 11, 2021 class

I think what nourishes me the most as a Filipino and a person, it's like, just community, you know? And I know...I feel that's so...I was like, "Is this basic?" But also, that's so real.

—Espie, June 1, 2021 class

Prelude

It is March 6, 2019, a day for teacher-mandated office hours. I wanted to meet with my students to make sure that they were making progress on their final projects. There’s only another week left before they have to turn it in!

I lay out the butiki³⁶ cloth from Palawan, put my laptop on it, and the peanut butter cookies that I made the night before on the side.

I have two or three students come in at a time. I ask each student about their life. Most are nervous, anxious, and stressed about their finals; a few had smiles and didn't feel as

³⁵ Charmander is a character from the Pokémon animated series and is classified as a “fire lizard.” A flame on the tip of its tail continues to burn as long as it is alive. Charmander can breathe fire. See Charmander (2022).

³⁶ The common house gecko, *hemidactylus frenatus*. I got the butiki print while on vacation in Palawan, Philippines in 2012 and subsequently used it as a tablecloth for altar items. See the “ARAK” section in this chapter for a brief description of the altar in our classes.

pressured. I am made aware of the importance of listening to folks and to what they're bringing, whatever that may be. Sometimes I think that the students think that they have to be all in one piece when being in the classroom with me. Sierra couldn't even come in to class today because she was not doing well mentally. I of course told her that it was fine to video chat instead.

I am reminded of the toxicity of higher education, of how we are all expected to perform at a certain level without any regard for students as human beings. And yet, we continue with the work, we reside in the belly of the beasts hoping that somehow (as microbes, perhaps?), we change its constitution and transform it from within. Why is education so stressful for everyone? Why is this supposed training for the real world so mentally, psychologically, and emotionally traumatizing? I try to validate each student's humanity, so to speak, in our meetings today. It's the least I can do in this general environment that has rendered them unseen and forsaken their wholeness.

I tell the students that I made the cookies with all my heart so that they at least have something, hopefully, to carry them through their finals.

I convey to the students that the final project is not something that I'm asking from them so that I can give them credit. Rather, it is for them to take their work outside of the classroom. The final project ought to be a continuation of the reflecting and growing we've done, a part of the process that extends itself to other parts of their lives.

I ask the students: How much of your schoolwork have you shared with your family members? Many responded that nothing from their college courses have mattered to their families. Why is higher education such an individualized project, of demonstrating that one person has the potential to get their diploma without little output to share with their friends and loved ones? What kind of education is that and how is this class disrupting that paradigm?

I really wish that the students can see that they are more than their GPAs, more than their exam results, more than their final papers. We have eschewed traditional forms of academic "products" not just because I want to highlight parts of them that schooling has dimmed (or deemed as unimportant), but also to help them realize that education can be fun again, can include safe spaces and community building, can illustrate the limitless potential of being. It can be humanizing and relational. Education can attend to and validate their humanity.

The biggest lesson that I learned today, however, was not just about the shortcomings of higher education. Espie does not like peanut butter! I had assumed that everyone would like my cookies. I need to think more about what I will feed the students for our final class celebration.

Introduction

I begin this chapter with three quotes from Espie (they/them). The first is from a class activity where we wrote love letters to our younger selves. At that time, Espie was at the beginning of their exploration of what it means to be Filipino. The second and third are from the more recent class I facilitated, Filipinx on Indigenous Lands (FIL), where we connected our Filipinxness to ideas of abolition (of police, military, and the carceral state) and Indigenous futures (including decolonization, Land Back, and Indigenous Sovereignties), among other notions of liberation. These three quotes sum how I've seen, known, and been in relation with Espie for the last three years: as someone interrogating their own Filipinoness—starting with their relationship to themselves and their family, and later on diving into Filipinx abolitionist futures and Filipinx-Indigenous solidarities through their community organizing work. I structure this chapter to loosely follow this arc.

In the prelude above, I share some of my thoughts during the winter quarter of 2019, around the time when I first met Espie. My facilitation of the seminar was part of my

commitment to the Filipinx community at UW as a volunteer graduate student facilitator. At the same time, the winter 2019 seminar became my research project for a qualitative methods graduate course and eventually was approved to be included in my dissertation study. My reasons for starting with these musings are twofold: first, to provide a glimpse into some of the culturally sustaining foundations of the class—seeing students as whole human beings and maintaining awareness of the ongoing impacts of colonial schooling; and second, to represent the small factoid of Espie’s dislike for peanut butter and their laconism in the 2019 seminar as red herrings for my initial impression of Espie. I believe these initial impressions are important because they color how I’ve grown to understand Espie. They were quiet and reserved, qualities that belied their deep, ongoing introspection; and they did not care for gluten-free homemade peanut butter cookies. As I know them more recently, however, and as this chapter will show, Espie is so much more.

First Impressions

Espie joined the winter 2019 class, *Unforgetting: (Re)Creating Filipinx American Educational Narratives*, as a second-year undergrad. They had heard about it when Dalya (former co-facilitator) and I made an announcement at FASA, the Filipino student organization on campus. The *Unforgetting* class was the first time I had facilitated without Dalya, who had to take a leave from teaching to focus on her qualifying exams.

I remember seeing Espie on the first day of class—petite, dark brown hair, and with a smile that I felt concealed an inner fire. I find out a short while later during our introductions that they were majoring in business. One of the first things Espie mentioned was that they were “half

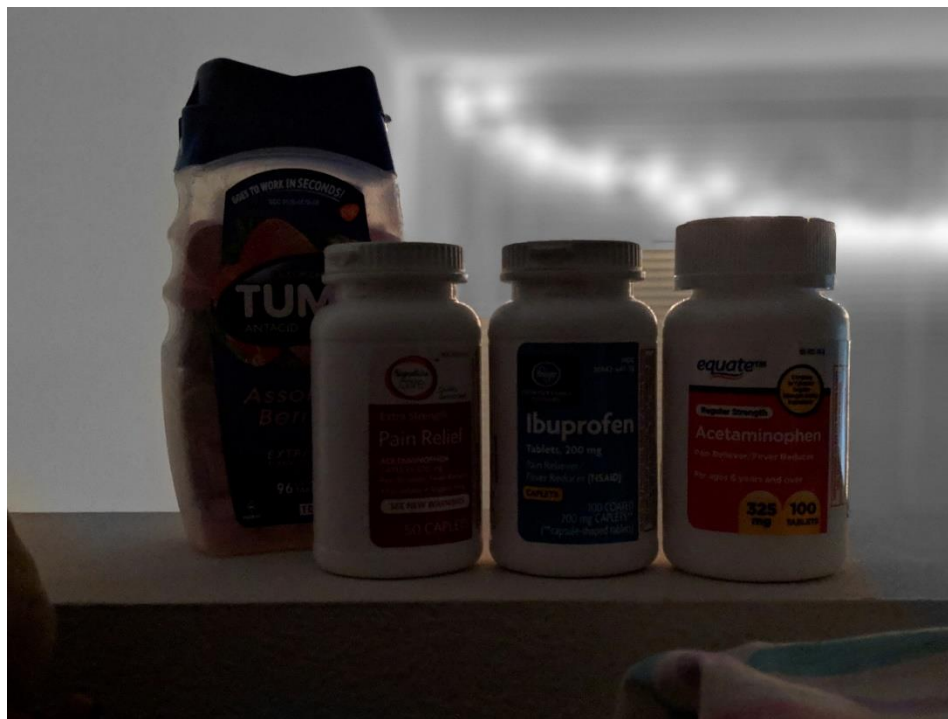
European³⁷ and half Filipina” (Field notes, January 9, 2019). I also learned that they had grown in a predominantly White neighborhood in Pierce County. Espie described their family as working class: their mom is a certified nurse assistant (CNA) and their dad is a bus driver. They are the middle child and have three siblings.

A week after our introduction, Espie submitted their first photovoice assignment. Recall that we use photovoice in the course as a way of reflecting both verbally and non-verbally. Students engage with the class materials for the week, then take photos of everyday objects, scenes, people, or other representation of their understanding of the material. These photos typically demonstrate the connections between the class resources and the students’ own narratives and lived experiences, which are also contextualized within the families and communities of which they are part. I create my own photovoice along with the students, and we add entries every week until the end of the quarter.

³⁷ In this chapter, I use “European” instead of a more specific European ethnic group to preserve ’s anonymity.

Figure 5

Shadowy Bottles as Bridges: Espie's First Photovoice Entry



Espie named this first entry the “The bridging of past, present, and future,” which followed the title for their entire photovoice, “Tulay:³⁸ From one beginning to another.” I believe they chose the language of bridging as their way of connecting stories from their life (past and present) with their aspirations (future). Moreover, they’re relating histories of colonial education and foreign influences (past) and their contemporary effects (present), which then influence the path they are seeking for themselves (future). The resource for the week was Constantino’s (1982) essay, “Miseducation of the Filipino,” which discussed how the use of English as medium for instruction in the Philippines has stymied the self-perception and critical thinking of Filipinos. For their caption, Espie wrote:

³⁸ Tagalog for “bridge.”

Like these pills, looming over me. Dictating my needs, my wants, my choices— to feel better about a hurt, a pain within. I depend solely on the drugs that will easily end my pain, yet this is only temporary. Rather than the herbs that heal, it seems my first go-to would be the modernistic bottle of Ibuprofen or Tylenol – such a routine is so arbitrary, and what I was born into. The bottles that loom over my bedside, much like foreign powers looming over the Philippines. Much like that of the Philippine people, who have grown into a society so used to depending on foreign nations to temporarily relieve the pain and the hurt. Yet, as all things temporary, it never prompts the full healing process and instead tricks the mind and body into feeling well. Instead there lies a greater, deeper issue that must be resolved solely with the Philippine people, for the people (Photovoice, winter 2019)

Espie likens U.S. influence on the Philippines—first through the establishment of public education, and post-WWII policies that have maintained Philippine dependence on foreign aid (Lichauco, 1973)—to their many bottles of painkillers. They liken “bottles that loom over [their] bedside” to foreign powers looming over the Philippines, with foreign aid serving merely as a stopgap measure that does not afford economic development nor healing from painful colonial histories. This healing of the Filipino people is also something that Espie desires. In saying that there’s a “greater, deeper issue that must be resolved solely with the Philippine people,” they are framing the pain that they’ve experienced, physical or otherwise, as part of the collective pain of the Filipino people. Espie’s familiarity with the feeling of physical pain and its alleviation through drugs, as they have utilized so routinely and without thought, is consequently an entry point into their awareness of a much deeper hurt that needs to be addressed within themselves and the people of the Philippines. There is no easy drug that will end this pain, this deeper issue.

The bottles “looming” and wielding some sort of power over Espie—they were born into automatically utilizing pain relievers—while also providing quick relief to their aches communicates an ambivalent relationship towards “foreign nations.” Their phrasing here is most likely alluding to the United States, given the reading for the week was critiquing the American-founded public education system in the Philippines and its many ill effects.

From Shadowy Medicine Bottles to Bright Orchids: Espie as Saling-Pusa Filipinx

As a Filipinx person born, raised, and living in the U.S., Espie's first photovoice was beginning to examine their positionalities and relationships with the U.S. nation-state. Espie mentioned in our first conversation that they had been questioning what it meant to hold their different identities even before stepping foot into our classroom:

I was finishing up my business pre-reqs, but I wanted to do something more focused on culture or something personal because all the classes I've taken were academic. So I was looking for something different, and I heard that Ate Hiyas was gonna be in [the class], and so I was kind of inspired in that way, and that it would be a space where I'd feel more comfortable because I knew that there'd be someone there with me. Because talking about my identity and that kind of thing, while I really want to do it, scares me because...I don't know...I guess the whole narrative, like if I'm Filipino or not, that kind of thing, the whole identity thing—being half.

I didn't have much Filipino culture influence 'cause it was more of like my dad, and my mom was always working and stuff, and my dad was always home. My mom's the Filipino one. And so... yeah, I guess it was just like pushing myself to interrogate my identity and find out those things that I wasn't sure that I would find.
(Interview, May 8, 2019)

Through Espie expressing interest in the class as a result of wanting to be part of an academic offering where they could explore their cultural heritage more than just using and being tested on their mental faculties, they had therefore started their own process of exploring their Filipinxness before officially participating in the Unforgetting course. Their first photovoice entry further confirms that this examination of their Filipinxness had already been ongoing. Espie joined the class because they had heard it advertised during a meeting of the Filipino American Student Association (FASA)—a well-established, 101-year old Filipinx American registered student organization at the University of Washington—but they were already looking for such a class before they even knew of its existence.

Espie identified as a second-generation Filipinx American³⁹. In our initial post-Unforgetting class discussion, they revealed that ethnically, they identify as Filipinx and European—their mother is a first-generation migrant from Cebu, Philippines, and their father is similarly a first-generation migrant from Europe. When they first started talking about their different ethnic backgrounds on the first day of the quarter, they used the term “half Filipino and half White” to describe themselves. During our conversation, when asked why they used such language, Espie alluded to a public Facebook Group called “Subtle Halfie Traits” where their identity has been ascribed to them by others:

Someone mentioned [racial identity denoted in fractions] and I was just like... ‘cause I guess I’m just used to calling myself that, ‘cause it’s like Facebook people will be like, “Oh, so you’re half.” And I’d be like, “Yeah.” I think that’s what happened the first time. But usually I’d be like, “Oh, I’m part Filipino, part European.” I used to say that, but now, I would just be like, “Oh yeah, I’m a halfie.” But then I started thinking about it and I was like, “I don’t think I’m a fraction of anything. I think I’m like...” Oh, but it’s still a thing going through my head too.
(Interview, May 8, 2019)

Espie’s understanding of their racialization is a dynamic, evolving concept. They started to learn the language they could use to identify themselves through different sources, including social media, the Unforgetting class, Chicano studies classes, and Dr. Rick Bonus’ American Ethnic Studies classes. That they have no clear articulation of how they want to identify racially demonstrates an ongoing critical examination of what it means to be a “halfie,” or part Filipino and part European, or half Filipino and half White. As they describe race as a “thing still going through [their] head,” Espie reveals the inadequacy of current racial language to describe and name who they feel they are.

³⁹ This changes later on, which is why I’m using the past tense “identified” here.

Over time and with additional knowledge and reflection, Espie's racial and ethnic self-identification grew more nuanced. During identity week in our Unforgetting class, we read a chapter in Ocampo's (2016) *The Latinos of Asia*, an ethnography of Filipinx in Southern California. Ocampo argues that a similar legacy of Spanish colonialism means that many Filipinx and Filipinx Americans share cultural characteristics with Latinxs, enabling Filipinx Americans to identify more as Latinx than as Asian. However, Espie's photovoice response for the week's readings, which had a captioned selfie, expressed the opposite sentiment:

Reading this excerpt felt like I was rehashing the memories of the last few years of high school, where identity became a huge obstacle for me. I always questioned whether I was Asian, Pacific Islander, or both. There wasn't a high population of Filipinx at my high school, so I wasn't sure where I fit in. Since I had always admired Eastern Asian culture, I guess I leaned more towards them. Therefore, I was proud to check off 'Asian' whenever we had those in testing or applications. My closest friends were either Korean or Chinese and I felt like I belonged to some degree. However, people would always be shocked to hear I consider myself 'Asian,' and to hear half of me was actually part Chinese and Filipino (mostly Filipino). Everyone thought I was Hispanic or Mexican, and man, did I hate being misjudged in that way. My father always painted this sort of vile, judgmental picture—much like the 'gangster' type that is explained in the reading—that before I realized how wrong it was, I honestly hated being mistaken for Hispanic or Mexican. Now, I can only be ashamed for feeling this way towards another race, that of which I always knew shared some similarities with my Filipinx culture one way or another. (Photovoice, winter 2019)

Espie did not identify with being a “Latinx of Asia” because of the negative association that their father's descriptions of Latinos as gangsters had engendered. Their own Filipino-Chinese ancestry, though not readily apparent to outsiders and only revealed in a later photovoice entry, allowed them to freely claim their own Asianness. The passage above also shows how Espie had constructed a racial hierarchy, augmented by the racial identities of those in their social circles, that put East Asians above Hispanics or Mexicans and therefore made Espie feel more affinity with the “Asian” racial category. Finally, reading Ocampo (2016) invited Espie to interrogate the undercurrents of why they despised “being mistaken for Hispanic or Mexican.”

Part of Espie's interrogation of the concept of race—and what it meant to be herself—was therefore a reflection on the strong emotions associated with being racially misidentified, which then led to feelings of shame. This shame, however, was not entirely negative, as Espie progressed from being vehemently opposed to being called Hispanic or Mexican, to associating such feelings to their dad's pronouncements about the group, to recognizing the cultural connections that they shared with Latinxs. Espie's idea of the different racial and ethnic categories that they embodied in their own lived experiences—Filipinx, White, Chinese—and later acknowledging connections between Filipinx and Latinx cultures, adds depth to the facile boxes of race that many Filipinx American students check off as part of their educational experience. There were no right boxes to check for Espie. At the same time, their understanding of their own identities—that being Asian was being better than being Hispanic or Mexican—as well as the awareness of how “wrong it was” to harbor negative emotions from being associated with a racial group, were hinting at the social construction of race and its numerous incompatibilities as they applied to Espie's experience.

At the end of our initial one-on-one conversation, Espie stated that they were happy with their Filipino and European identities. Their expressed joy also denoted that navigating their life as a mixed race individual at UW did not cease at the close of our Unforgetting class nor at the culmination of our insightful discussion on how they had been racialized:

Yeah, I feel grateful that I'm like...I have this unique, like, mix. I guess it's like unique about me and that I can explore both. Um, but like, I guess more towards my Filipino identity, I'm really grateful that I have this community on campus, and just like through my sisterhood, especially. I like participating in my growth as an individual, and like, through culture. Going through this process of “What is my identity,” and like finding out there's a place for me because, um, I think, like, I can't imagine myself anywhere else. I feel thankful that I can be welcomed to these spaces.

(Interview, May 8, 2019)

What Espie once considered as a difficult choice—having to choose if they had to identify between European or Filipino, or between White and Filipino—had become a source of gratitude. I argue that this gratitude amidst, and perhaps because of, being multiracial, is Espie being a *saling-pusa*; they were feeling more than just comfortable in the margins of their ethnic and racial identifications. They acknowledged the opportunity of exploring different facets of their mixed race heritage and specified how they have felt welcomed in many spaces on campus, including their Filipinx sorority. Additionally, Espie expressed feeling a sense of belonging in several UW spaces, which were all of outside of the classroom, despite uncertainties around their own race, how they could confidently claim belonging in such spaces, and how people may perceive them. The shadow of uncertainty around who they are was perhaps more manageable in their continued linguistic development on racialization, racial identity, and the systems of power that influence them.

To conclude their winter 2019 photovoice, Espie used the image of a well-lit *Phalaenopsis*, a common household orchid endemic to the Philippines and Southeast Asia. Our readings for that week were on stories from peoples in the homeland. One was a story on the goddess of rainbows, Bighari, who was banished by her father because she was late for their family dinner. The banishment continues until now, according to the story, and while awaiting the forgiveness of her father, the rainbow goddess continues to tend to her garden, allowing her optimism and patience to spread throughout the earth. Rainbows are thus a reminder not only of the goddess' banishment from home but also of the work that she keeps doing while her father remains unflinching. Espie wrote that the story of Bighari's banishment reminded them of bright flowers. They admired Bighari remaining true to herself and making good use of her

circumstances. Espie shared that the story reminded her that we ought to not be controlled by circumstances beyond our power, and that family always forgives.

Preceding this entry was an image of Espie's shadow. The shadow was reaching out and set against the backdrop of a white wall. The entry referenced the story of Langit and Alunsina, which the class also covered that week. Langit is the god of the sky, who scolds his wife Alunsina because of her vanity. She leaves tearfully, and he realizes shortly thereafter that he behaved poorly. Alunsina does not come back. Langit, in hopes of guiding Alunsina back home, hangs her comb and earrings in the night sky, which then become the moon and the stars. Espie connected Langit and Alunsina's story to their recent breakup. They wrote:

The shadow of myself, reaching out. Shadows symbolize darkness, forlorn, melancholy, which is what Langit feels at the end of his story, and forever on in his lonely life. I recently broke up with my S.O., and for some reason I picture my S.O. as Langit, and I am Alunsina although the situations vastly differ. I would always reach out to him, for him to grow, but it feels as though I was some shadow lingering over him, to his dismay. It seems Langit regrets his choice, rightfully so because it was extreme and rash, and so now he lives on like a shadow.
(Photovoice, winter 2019)

I bring up Espie's final winter 2019 photovoice entries to underscore the ongoing theme of shadow and light, brightness and darkness, in their reflections. This intentionality around light and shadow continues onto Espie's photovoice in their spring 2021 photovoice as part of their participation in the latest iteration of my class, *Filipinx on Indigenous Lands*. I will elaborate on the themes of relationships referenced above in a later part of this chapter. For now, I will focus on Espie's use of lighting as metaphor.

Figure 6

A Shadow Reaching Out: Espie's Penultimate Photovoice Entry



Figure 7

Bright Flowers: Espie's Final Photovoice Entry



Recall that Espie's first photovoice entry was of bottles of pain medication in shadows. In our conversation after the close of class, I asked Espie whether their choice of starting and beginning their photovoice entries with shadow-filled images was intentional. They laughed, slightly amused and partially surprised at their own realization, when I brought it up: "Oh! I did! [gasps] Full circle! Oh my god. Basically" (Interview, May 8, 2019). Perhaps it wasn't fully intentional, but Espie's recurring use of lighting hints at how they are intentional about these choices. In Figure 6, for instance, Espie sees themselves as both the shadow reaching out to their significant other, with whom they had just broken up. However, Espie also wrote how Langit, who continues to search for his wife, represented their former partner, denoting that the shadow is both themselves and their partner. In doing so, Espie considers the shadow and darkness as ambiguous. They are sometimes the shadow and the darkness, and sometimes it is a loved one (or former loved one). Earlier, they used the motif of shadows to represent medicine bottles as looming foreign powers while also acknowledging that it has been the pills from these bottles that have eased their pain. Espie recognized that who they are is therefore inherently contradictory—both light and shadow. They are going beyond the binary of light (typically regarded as good) and shadow (typically regarded as bad) and understand that they are more than each respective component.

From Photographic Lighting to Skin Color: Light and Shadow Continue their Dance in the Margins

After the Unforgetting class concluded in March 2019, Espie and I stayed in touch. My perception of the interplay of their internal processing of their "light and shadow" continued to deepen. We had several email correspondences and Zoom check-ins. In one of our virtual meetings in September 2020, Espie had shared with me that they had started a new job

mentoring minoritized students in Pierce County through the Upward Bound program and that they had been more active in a Filipino grassroots organizing group. I asked how their work and community engagement was teaching them more about their Filipinxness, and they responded that working with and in community has helped them shift the focus on personal Filipino identity to a collective one. This shift, I believe, was a widening of Espie's perception of their Filipinx identity. Initially, their photovoice entries were about who they were in terms of ethnic and racial categories—knowledge that they were able to glean from our Unforgetting class and other resources. Around a year and a half later, they were seeing themselves as an active member of the community, and the relationships they were building had started to become their framework to help them figure out what being Filipinx meant for them. Below is the message Espie sent me a few weeks after our catch up Zoom meeting:

I hope you've been well. I know it's been several weeks since we checked in, but I wanted to say thank you again for your time and sorry it was cut so short and sudden! I've also been thinking and reflecting a lot on what you said when we were talking about my practice of decentering myself in Filipinx narratives. When we talked about it, it was hard for me to grasp what you meant and I wanted to ask more about it.

An article I read by One Down Media once again made me think about the color of my skin, my privileges, and sort of reflecting on the Filipinx community as a whole, which was really good and I wanted to share it with you! I wondered about my place because I do have whiteness and light-skin. It's so complex and something I need to explore more – exploring how I can build on my community organizing for the Filipinx community and not subconsciously feel the need to downplay my own existence as a Filipinx in the work I do either. I did not even realize that I was doing that, and I think that was what you were trying to tell me (correct me if I'm wrong though!!).
(Email, October 23, 2020)

In addition to lights and shadows of their self-perception, Espie was now articulating how they have both Whiteness (through their dad's European background) and proximity to it (through their light skin). They acknowledged, as they did during our meeting, that they were feeling conflicted about their "place" in the movement as a light-skinned Filipina. To inform this

acknowledgement, Espie referenced the One Down (Gan, 2020) article. Gan problematized the concept of “brownness” and who was qualified to use or speak on behalf of it. Gan then argued that the multitude of Filipinx experiences could not be simply equated with a monolithic idea of brownness and that as Filipinos, “we do not need to call ourselves brown to understand that there is a shared oppression among all people of color in America” (para. 19). Connected to this acknowledgement of their Whiteness and light skin color was Espie’s continued exploration of how they can interrogate their positionality through their community organizing work. In other words, Espie found it important to keep exploring concepts of Filipinxness and Whiteness because of, and through, their work with community. Though they termed this as “decentering [one]self,” I posit that Espie’s community activism was in fact focusing on themselves too—just this time it was probably done subconsciously, in conjunction with the relationships they were building in the Filipinx community. I attempt to mirror this simultaneous process of growing one’s awareness of self and community through organizing to Espie in my email response:

I enjoy talking with you and exchanging stories! I think what I was communicating last time was that decentering yourself was ultimately a way for you to find yourself. I think I remember sharing that "zooming out" to see where you're located amidst the land/sea of other community members was a way of gaining a deeper, more expansive context of yourself--a self that is interconnected with others. Because you want to find out more about what it means to be Filipinx by engaging in community, I would argue that you are indirectly discovering parts of who you are within the Filipinx community (and other communities you're part of). Identity can't be created in a vacuum anyway, right? I also think that this is a beautiful example of "kapwa," a Filipino concept that you may have already encountered. At its core, kapwa denotes that oneself is indivisible from one's community. And thus, your involvement in the Filipinx community is, in many ways, also an exploration of who you are!

Regarding your comment on downplaying your own existence, I may have also mentioned in our previous conversation that there's no need to do that. I believe I expressed that you being Filipinx (and finding out more about what that means) isn't mutually exclusive with working/organizing with the community.

[Regarding Gan’s article]...the point is not to decide who's brown or who's not. I think the conversation should be more around what is lost, what is gained, how justice may be dreamed/achieved if labels such as "brown" existed or were erased. In my time

reading Indigenous scholars' work, I've learned that trying to define indigeneity is only a trap that prevents us from working towards justice/liberation/happy lives. So, what work needs to be done outside of identifying/not identifying as brown? I'm sure you're doing that already. :) Would love to talk more about this further, hopefully not over email. (Email, October 25, 2020)

I wanted to validate Espie's process of self and community discovery. I shared with them the concept of *kapwa*, which Filipino psychologist Enriquez (1990) argued was a core value of Filipino psychology, is essentially about seeing oneself in the other and seeing one's personhood and wellbeing as tied with their community's. Desai (2016) phrases this as "a deep connection with and commitment to community" (p. 37). I also offered some resistance against positivist notions of who counts or doesn't count as "brown," as I believe that many communities—including Filipinx communities—sometimes get caught up in defining group membership, belonging, and validity (e.g., statements implying that Filipina Americans aren't "real" Filipinos) that detracts from the community work that needs to be done. I did not/do not want to imply that questioning brownness was/is unnecessary. Rather, I wanted to suggest that both questioning how we identify and doing work with the community need to happen in tandem. The former does not need to be a strict prerequisite to do the latter. This ideology follows a critically engaged version of transformative action through education, where conscientization, resistance, and praxis are represented as cyclical (G. Smith, 2009). I contend that Espie was once again being a *salang-pusa* by expanding the definitions of Filipinxness beyond notions of brownness. Instead of being bogged down by who counts as brown or the need to identify/disidentify with being brown, Espie continued to reflect on these tensions and kept on doing their work in the community.

Unfortunately, the email thread stopped there. However, over the last three years that I've known Espie and the many conversations we've had—many of which included Filipinxness,

race, Duterte, the United States, Indigenous lands, and community organizing—I’ve learned that their racial identity, among other aspects of themselves, is an ongoing “linguistic process of becoming” (Kaplan, 2007, para. 9). Espie’s language around describing their identity and Filipinxness evolved over time through the Unforgetting and FIL classes, their professional responsibilities and community organizing work, and the numerous conversations that we’ve had in person and online. The development of the language they used (e.g., “halfie,” Filipinx, European, Chinese, White, brown, light-skinned, among others)—corresponded with Espie’s expanded involvement in their communities. They started a new job mentoring high school students of color, and they have also been involved in grassroots community organizing in the Seattle-Tacoma area. Espie’s process of becoming then was more than linguistic; it was also a community-based, relational practice. One of these communities was in our Filipinx on Indigenous Lands class, which I facilitated in the spring quarter of 2021.

Filipinx on Indigenous Lands (FIL)

Before diving into the many things that transpired in and out of the FIL class, I want to review the arc of the seminars I have facilitated since starting my graduate studies at UW. As a master’s student in September 2016, I met Dalya Perez, then a Ph.D. student in the College of Education. We found out that our research interests were similar, and she invited me to co-facilitate a Filipinx studies class with her. She had previously led a seminar focused on the histories of Filipinx American community organizing in Seattle, and she wanted to expand the scope of the class to include beyond-Seattle Filipinx and Filipinx American experiences. We co-taught a two-quarter class series we called “Miseducation of the Filipinx: History, Decolonization, and Action” in winter and spring 2017. The first quarter was an examination of critical Filipinx histories with reflections on the meaning of Filipinanness which culminated in the

students' creation of educational workshops; the second quarter, Dalya and I utilized our community connections to conduct these student-led workshops at educational institutions in the Puget Sound area. Though fruitful, effective, and impactful, I felt that our ideas of Filipinxness could be expanded to include justice and liberation not just for the Filipino community but also for other systemically marginalized communities. Winter quarter 2017 was when I first read Tuck and Yang's "Decolonization is not a metaphor" and when I first felt that examining Filipinoness within the context of an irrefutable U.S. nation-state could be shifted into thinking about Filipinxness as potentially commensurate with decolonization.

This idea didn't materialize until a few years later. Along the way, Dalya and I modified the curriculum of the Filipinx seminar to include more issues in the homeland. This manifested as "Unforgetting: (Re)Creating Filipinx American Educational Narratives" in spring 2018. The following year, winter 2019, I facilitated the seminar solo and with more themes tied to decolonization and liberation for Indigenous Filipinos and Native Americans alike. In spring of 2020, I co-facilitated the seminar with two other Filipinx scholar-researchers; our theme was conceptualizing Filipinxs in the U.S. and our status as settlers. Finally, in the spring quarter 2021, I taught the class in its latest iteration: Filipinx on Indigenous Lands (FIL), which focused not just on our status as settlers but in thinking about, dreaming, and enacting Filipinxness as tied with the liberation of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island, Hawai'i, and the Philippines.

FIL was the second time that Espie took the seminar (the first time was the Unforgetting class during the winter quarter of 2019). I have always welcomed students to join the seminar multiple times, as each version is unique and builds upon its predecessors, and those who take me up on my offer have expressed their gratitude for the change in content from one course to the next. I had told Espie that the focus of the class had shifted since the last time they took it,

and they seemed eager to explore what the class had to offer. Because of our earlier conversation in September and October 2020, Espie planned their spring schedule around FIL. Adding to their commitment to taking the class and following my suggestion that they advertise the class in their own circles, they invited two of their Filipinx sorority friends to also register for the seminar. This not only ensured that Espie had people they knew in class, making the environment more conducive to themselves and their friends, but also demonstrated their trust with the course content as challenging and rewarding for themselves and their friends. Said another way, Espie would not have signed up nor invited their friends to participate in FIL if they didn't think that the class was worthy of their and their friends' time, especially as the pandemic had forced classes to adopt a virtual format.

From their initial indifference to peanut butter and reticence to speak, Espie participation in FIL was much more engaged. They spoke with greater confidence during class in both volume (they were willing to take up more space), humility (they admitted the challenges of considering the roles of U.S.-based Filipinx as allies in Indigenous liberation movements), and depth (they made global and personal connections). Their personal aesthetic also changed from below-shoulder length dark hair to a cropped platinum blond; they later shared with me that the buzzed head was for a fundraiser for one of their many organizations.

During the third week, the class read Saranillio's (2008) book chapter on rethinking Filipinx "empowerment" in Hawai'i. Saranillio contends that Filipinos have been complicit in the reification of the U.S.-nation state on the islands as settlers but that there have been examples of Filipina activists who have worked toward Native Hawaiian justice. The discussion turned to comments on how we can better position ourselves as allies and/or leaders in such movements, and Espie shared some powerful words:

When I think about it, like some folks have mentioned, depending on the space that you're in, like if I'm coming into a space with Indigenous peoples, I'm not gonna come and be like, "Okay y'all, this is what we're gonna do. This is how we work up to Indigenous sovereignties. This is what y'all need." I'm not gonna tell them what they need because as a person outside of that community, as a person who doesn't share those same experiences, that history, and just simply as a person that is not Indigenous, I can't come into that community and tell them what to do. And that's historically what the United States has done, and that's exactly the harm that we don't want to continue, and that's the harm that continues to this day as we know—on Hawai'i, here, across the U.S. Making that distinction between leaders and allies, let's not take on that savior complex that we see that the U.S. has taken.

I remember in history class, in my high school textbook—I think I was taking AP U.S. History, Honors U.S. History, and there was this little subsection. I always remember because "Oh wow, those are my peoples, the Filipinos." The title was "Little Brown Brothers" [chuckles] because the U.S. came to the Philippines and put Filipinos—you're our little brown brothers [gesturing air quotes], we're gonna teach you, we're gonna make you better, we're gonna Christianize you, and democracy, we're gonna tell you how to live. And that's literally the system that they have to this day. And it's so corrupt.

Wait, why did I mention that? I forgot, sorry. I just started talking about stuff 'cause I like this topic. My bad [deadpan laugh]. That's the differentiation between leaders and allies. Like Kriya said, if we're in a Filipino space, if I'm in a space where it's like my people, that's when we can take up those roles. And then maybe lead that group of people to supporting and providing solidarity to another group of people and whatever.
(Class recording, April 13, 2021)

I want to highlight that in Espie statement above, they unequivocally identified as Filipinx and that they would be comfortable taking up leadership roles of leader in Filipino spaces. They also mention the harm that the U.S. has caused and continues to cause in Hawai'i and across the continent with its savior complex of coming into communities and telling them what they need and what they need to do. Espie describes this experience of Indigenous communities in Hawai'i and the Americas as parallel to the U.S. colonization of the Philippines, where Filipinos were treated as America's "little brown brothers" in need of saving through the imposition of democracy, education, Christianity, and other American beliefs and ways of living. Espie's exhortation, therefore, is for us as Filipinxs to not emulate the U.S. in its paternalism and saviorism to Native Americans and Filipinos.

As Espie was speaking, the Zoom chat was active with their fellow classmates showing their approval of Espie’s statements. I consider the chat messages below as equivalents of snaps that are common in activist and organizing spaces, a way of responding and showing appreciation to someone “spitting fire”:

In the chat, as Espie is talking above:

Pipay: Yes we love hearing u

Diwata: Go bestie!!!

Alon: ate⁴⁰ espie spits fire only

Alon: charmander is shaking

Kriya: lol

Kriya: love that image

Espie: lmfao

Espie: <3

(Zoom chat log, April 13, 2021)

The class was cheering Espie on, who then responded with some laughs and a heart emoticon. Espie demeanor has always been self-effacing, and this time was not any different. However, “spitting fire” was not something that they shied away from because they know that what they were sharing was based on their own educational experiences—reading about Filipinos as America’s “little brown brothers,” for instance—and the way that they were approaching their community organizing work.

As with their virtual classroom shares, Espie’s second photovoice (with the first one made during winter quarter 2019) was also spitting fire. The background photo of their page, the first thing that a visitor to the site would see, is of Espie participating in a demonstration with a group of activists. They bear signs that say “END STATE FASCISM” and “STOP THE KILLINGS.” Despite Espie and the other protesters wearing a mask, the sense of joy and

⁴⁰ “Ate” (ah-teh) is the Tagalog honorific for older sister but is also typically used for older femme-presenting persons.

camaraderie among them is palpable. In their first photovoice, Espie's title photo was of their mom and them holding a birthday cake together. At the time of my first class with Espie, they had not yet started their community organizing work. Their involvement in the Filipinx community in the second class was evident, with the unmistakable flag of Anakbayan, their national democratic mass organization, featured prominently. Espie titled their second photovoice "AKO SI ESPIE:⁴¹ Welcome to my journey of interrogation, confusion, & hope."

Anakbayan: A Primer

I briefly pause here in the telling of Espie's narrative to provide some background information on Anakbayan, or AB, and its political ideologies. Anak means "child" and bayan means "the people" or "the land" in Tagalog. Anakbayan therefore translates into "children of the peoples" or "children of the land." AB is a youth-led organization that unites Filipinos ages 18 through 35. They are based in the Philippines but many chapters in the U.S. are in existence, including Anakbayan Seattle. AB believes in what is termed "national democracy," a political ideology articulated by Amado Guerrero (2006) as a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist analysis of the social ills of the peoples of the Philippines. Guerrero asserts that the three root causes of social injustices affecting the Filipino masses are imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucrat capitalism. Guerrero also denotes that the many policies and agreements between the Philippines and the United States have maintained the former's status as a neocolony, and that revolutionary national democratic movement is essential in reversing the existing social class pyramid that has farmworkers and working class Filipinos at the bottom. National democracy is different and distinct from the current democratic form of government in the Philippines.

⁴¹ "I am Espie" in Tagalog.

I was a member of a chapter of AB in the Bay Area when I was in undergrad. Several years before, my politicization had started when an older generation of activists helped train me in these ideologies while I was volunteering at a Filipino non-profit in Los Angeles. My existing knowledge of AB and its precepts made it easier for me to talk to Espie about their work in the Filipinx community. Espie began working with AB August of 2019, a few months after they finished taking my first class (Unforgetting), though they've stated that they took a hiatus from the organization in 2020.

Filipinx on Indigenous Lands, Continued

The influence of AB and its national democracy ideology on Espie's reflections were visible in all aspects of their engagement with the class—photovoice, discussion, Zoom chat messages—as well as in our out-of-class conversations. How this theoretical framework intersects with the topics and ideas we covered in class, and the repercussions of those intersections, will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

At our second meeting, we started with Tuck and Yang's (2012) "Decolonization is not a metaphor" as one of our foundational pieces. Espie started off the discussion by sharing what they had mentioned in their small group breakout group, which was based on their photovoice entry for the week:

I basically shared what I wrote in my photovoice, which is essentially me as an individual...I was reflecting on how I lived on this...so my family's lived in this apartment for the last nine years, and I've seen the same bedroom. I took the photo peering outside my bedroom window and surrounding, on the window, are decorations. I personalized it. The nonchalance and ignorance of those nine years of just being here and not really thinking critically about me as a settler, my family as settlers as well. It was really...my mind broadened a lot because of the reading. What else did I want to say? Oh yeah. It was also...I'm guilty of a lot of these things growing up, prior to college especially, and even during college. Then I was also thinking: I did a workshop on decolonization in the fall to my high school students—I work with high school youth—and now I'm looking back as I read this. I should check how I framed everything, I

should check how I did that [workshop] to ensure that I did it in a way that's...I don't want to throw it out like a buzz word without the work, and I'm wondering if I should do a follow up workshop for my students because of this reading. Ilaw said she read this in high school, and I was like "I should share this reading with my high school students so that they can [explosion sound, motions with both hands moving downward from head to body, like a beam of light from above], 'cause yeah, really really good reading. Thinking critically about the purpose and...and the aspect of settler futurity. Wow! A lot of discourse focuses on that, and it's strange when you point it out. For me, it's like, "Wow, I'm certainly guilty of these."
(Class recording, April 6, 2021)

Espie engaged with the class's focus on the place, roles, and responsibilities of Filipinx in decolonization.. From "nonchalance and ignorance," they were now looking at their own apartment as part of the settler colonial machinery, with their own and their family's complicity in settler colonialism. They admit to feeling guilty of furthering discourse on settler futurity, which Tuck and Yang describe as reconciling settler guilt and complicity that is "dependent on the foreclosure of an Indigenous futurity" (p. 14). What does it mean for Espie to think critically of their settler status? Besides Espie considering their usage of the language of decolonization in their workshop with high school students, they also are aware of the need to put in the work required to decolonize ("I don't want to throw it out like a buzz word without the work").

Recall that previously, Espie had been contemplating on their "place" as a light-skinned Filipina, with the word denoting Merriam-Webster's (n.d.) definition of "a proper or designated niche or setting." Now, more than just an abstract notion of their place in the Filipinx community, Espie was also considering "place" as land and water, as their home and the room from where they were sitting and sharing their thoughts with our virtual class. They were looking at their quotidian surroundings, the objects and scenes with which they've grown familiar over nine years at their residence, with a critical perspective. Espie continued to interrogate the physicality of their home space in their first photovoice entry. The photo they shared was of the

view of their bedroom window, decorated with personal effects, looking outside. They captioned the photo:

I captured this setting because it beckons to the occupation of land I have resided upon the last 9 years, most of which filled with ignorance and nonchalance regarding my positionality as a settler - as a person on stolen land. "Decolonization is not a metaphor" touches upon the very real and very flawed discourse that comes with today's academia when adopting the term "decolonization" - the settler innocence, the blatant disregard of Indigenous peoples, teachings, and existences within "decolonizing" discourse, and focus on settler futurity. I am guilty of these. We may all very well be. Because of my personal relationship to this land and society that has contributed to these issues, I felt this photo was appropriate. I also learned that our perspectives must shift from what decolonization and settler future looks like, to Indigenous sovereignty and futures. (Photovoice, spring 2021)

Espie admitted being a “settler” on “stolen land,” which is a step away from settler innocence and settler futurity. Tuck and Yang put forth an ethic of incommensurability, which says that “decolonization is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity” (p. 35).

Espie realized that they’ve had an ongoing relationship with the land and the people in their communities (e.g., Filipinx, Puget Sound, UW) but that they haven’t contextualized these relations through the framework of decolonization. Through this contextualization, Espie felt compelled to shift their perspective from settler futures to Indigenous futures. This commitment, in turn, has manifested in what Espie has shared in our class discussion, in their work with AB, and in their contributions to our collaborative museum exhibit.

Your Liberation Is Bound up With Mine: Salugpongan Schools Discussion and Kwentuhan With Lumad⁴² Bakwit Schools

As part of the FIL class’s coverage of solidarities and resistance on the sixth week of the quarter, I assigned Saturay’s (2015) documentary “Pangandoy,” which details the resistance of

⁴² “Lumad” (in both lower- and upper-case), which comes from the Bisaya language, has become the umbrella term for Indigenous peoples in the Philippines, particularly in the Mindanao island group. “Katutubo” is a Tagalog word with the same meaning but is used less frequently.

the Talaingod Manobo—an Indigenous community in Davao del Norte, Mindanao, Philippines—against state-sanctioned theft of their ancestral lands and their efforts to establish a culturally sustaining school. The first Salugpongan school, derived from their founders’ organization named Salugpongan Ta Tanu Igkanogon, or Unity in Defense of Ancestral Land, opened in 2003 as a literacy-numeracy school. It wasn’t until 2014 that the school received accreditation status from the Philippine Department of Education. In April that same year, increasing militarization in Talaingod forced the community to evacuate to a nearby church (Cagula, 2019). This evacuation, transliterated into the local language as “bakwit,” became the namesake for the Lumad Bakwit Schools—makeshift learning centers for culturally sustaining stories and lifeways. The Lumad Bakwit schools were thus born from the Manobo’s need for a safe space to teach their children critical Indigenous knowledge that was deemed by the Philippine government as “ideologies that advocate against the government” (Kilab Multimedia, 2019). The government’s agenda of securing Indigenous lands for settlement, primarily for resource extraction, has been escalating since the 1990s with the liberalization of Philippine mining laws (Ballard & Banks, 2003). In its efforts to secure capital for economic development, the Philippine government has continued to hand out concessions to multinational mining companies while disregarding the sovereignty of Indigenous communities (Cheng, 2012).

I was intentional about connecting the struggles⁴³ of Indigenous peoples in the Philippines for land, sovereignty, and culturally sustaining education with the struggles of Indigenous peoples here in the Americas. I thought that this was one way that my students could see that systems of oppression—settler colonialism here and state-led militarization there—are

⁴³ I use “struggles” here as a catch-all for notions of resistance against systemic oppression. “Struggle” is also the most commonly accepted translation of the Tagalog word “pakikibaka” used by national democracy organizations in the Philippines in their curricula and protest signage.

entangled and that perhaps trans-Pacific solidarity could inform our liberation work. In our class discussion, Espie verbally shared some thoughts regarding the displacement, killing, and continued marginalization of Lumad peoples as interconnected with struggles for education and resistance to nation-state policing:

How are you gonna get mad at people for being educated and having the tools needed to identify the fact that all the characteristics you're exemplifying and exhibiting here, as a dictator fascist, settler, you know I mean? You're the one doing all these things, expanding executive powers, wielding the military to create terror on people... They're [the Philippine government] framing it in a way that's like "Oh, you're rebelling." They're [the Indigenous people] getting this education and those tools needed to identify that this is messed up, and they're critiquing you. The government just wants to squash all critique and dissent of any form so they can retain ultimate and supreme power over the lands. If that doesn't scream dictatorship, fascism, all those other things, I don't know.

(Class recording, May 4, 2021)

In the chat, right before sharing, Espie wrote: "the government wants to maintain these communities as 'subjects' whom must 'subject' themselves to the governments power." Espie therefore acknowledged that a critical education provided by Indigenous peoples for their own communities was a threat to the Philippine government, which would rather have its own educational "standards" be taught at all schools. These "standards" have not taught the Talaingod Manobo about native plants in their lands nor their people's songs and traditions (Saturay, 2015), knowledge that is essential for their community's thrivance (Vizenor, 2010). The "tools needed to identify... a dictator fascist" are common teachings in AB and other national democracy organizations, which stress the importance of education in providing a critical politic among the farmers and working class peoples. Espie recognized the overlap between what they've learned through community organizing and the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples that we studied in class: that nation-state apparatuses (e.g., extractive capitalism for economic gain without regard for Indigenous land and sovereignty and the concomitant militarization to quell

Indigenous resistance to development) are the root of oppression for many, if not all, Indigenous peoples. The Talaingod Manobo and the peasants and working-class peoples fight against the Philippine state as their common enemy.

Espie understood that here in the U.S., the settler colonial nation-state continues to deny Indigenous communities of their relationships to lands, waters, and other relatives. Meanwhile, in the Philippines, the government steals Indigenous lands towards its efforts to nationalize and to declares lands, waters, and minerals as state-owned capital. Espie is thus hinting at a simultaneous critique of settler colonialism in the Americas and the state-led displacement of Indigenous peoples in the Philippines, which could serve as a nascent framework for theorizing trans-Pacific justice movements. It may be worth considering how classes such as FIL could be used to teach diasporic Filipinos about settler colonialism in the Americas as entangled with nationalization efforts in our homelands. Conceptualizing justice and liberation for ourselves would therefore require consideration of the liberation of Indigenous peoples here in the United States as well as in the Philippines.

Coincidentally, in the same week that we covered Indigenous resistance to militarization in the Philippines, Espie was also helping organize a public event as part of a campaign called “Save Lumad Schools,” an alliance of Filipinos across the U.S. fighting for human rights in the Philippines. Espie’s event was called *Kuwentuhan*, Tagalog for storytelling, which involved Bakwit Lumad students telling stories of their struggles to a primarily U.S.-based audience. Espie shared to the class that the *Kuwentuhan* would create space for storytelling and that

Stories are a powerful tool for building connection. The ability to honor these stories and pass on ancestral knowledge is currently threatened by red-tagging and state-sanctioned violence. This space is to celebrate and center these stories as we continue the fight for liberation.

(Class recording, May 4, 2021)

Red-tagging is a remnant of Cold War tactics that labels non-profit, religious, and Indigenous communities as communist, terrorist, or both regardless of their political beliefs and practices (Torres, 2019). It is commonly applied to any group or individual that the Philippine government deems as against nationalist agendas. Through red-tagging, the nation-state justifies the theft of Indigenous lands and the murder of Indigenous peoples.

Espie deemed Kuwentuhan as important to share with their peers because of the power of stories not just in conveying information about systemic oppression and resistance to such but also in building a community around listening, empathy, and kapwa—shared Filipinoness. Espie’s invitation to the class may have been rooted in their desire to expose the participants in the FIL class to an ongoing issue that directly connected with our topic of resistance and solidarity. Additionally, I surmise that Espie felt motivated to invite us to the event because they believed that Bakwit Lumad struggle for land and education was a topic that we would all relate to by virtue of our shared Filipinoness. Ironically, this Filipinoness, which on one hand includes the land theft and Indigenous genocide by the Philippine nation-state and on the other hand the Philippine republic that arose as a revolt from Spanish colonization and which was precipitated by the masses in the 1898 Philippine Revolution, seems to be the glue that binds us—diasporic Filipinos sharing a learning space—and the Bakwit Lumad students who wanted to share their stories to as many people as possible. Said another way, the Filipinoness of the Bakwit Lumad students and the Filipinoness of students in the FIL class were bound together by our imagined community (Anderson, 2016) of shared histories of resistance to colonialism as well as a nationalist agenda dependent on the erasure of Indigenous communities. Through both of these and more, Espie “continue[s] the fight for liberation.”

In post-course conversations with Espie, I got the impression that they were deeply invested in finding justice for Indigenous peoples in the Philippines as much as they thought and reflected about working for the liberation of Indigenous peoples here in the Americas. I believe that as a saling-pusa Filipinx residing on the Indigenous lands of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians, Coast Salish, and Steilacoom peoples, Espie was seeing their “marginal” positionality as one of possibility—they could be, and they choose to be, part of the liberation movements that involved Native peoples in their home community in Tacoma and the Philippines, as well as non-Indigenous Filipinx on both sides of the Pacific. In the following section, I show how Espie has imagined and demonstrated their solidarity work in the FIL class.

ARAK or Araling Aktibista (Activist Study): Comrades in the Struggle

During the same class that Espie invited students to the Lumad Bakwit storytelling event, they also brought an altar item to share to class. Recall that students sign up to present a physical object that was meaningful in their life and in their learning. Altar items have included mementos, heirlooms, and family photographs. Students talk about how the altar item connects back to the course’s themes and to their education at large.

For their altar share, Espie brought a little book called *Araling Aktibista* (Tagalog for Activist Study), or ARAK. The book is widely available through the Foreign Language Press (PADEPA, 2021).⁴⁴ Espie described ARAK as follows:

This book is called activist study, and essentially it’s on how to be a good activist, or how to be a sharp, critical person in this world. It has all the elements of Maoism, democracy, and tools to wage revolution, but really accessible. So I know those are kinda big words but it really breaks it down into basic elements to find the essence points of all of those. It has three different lessons. First is the basic revolutionary attitude and the five golden rays and basically, this is the stuff on how not to be an asshole—like literally that’s what

⁴⁴ PADEPA stands for Pambansang Demokratikong Paaralan (National Democratic School), which is linked to the Communist Party of the Philippines, the New People’s Army, and the National Democratic Front, among other national democracy groups in the Philippines.

we call it. I got introduced to this book through Anakbayan, which is this grassroots organization. It's a mass organization that is waging a revolution to restore national democracy in the Philippines with a socialist perspective.
(Class recording, May 4, 2021)

With the above description, Espie confirms their political leanings and ideological standpoint as being heavily influenced by their work with Anakbayan. We also get a glimpse of the terminology used in national democracy circles like Maoism, revolution, socialist. Lastly, “how not to be an asshole” was Espie’s way of communicating the essence of ARAK to those who were unfamiliar with it, similar to “how to be a good activist” implied not doing harm or perpetuating oppression. Espie added that the second part of ARAK was about how to study, which they then related to the week’s topic of Land Back:⁴⁵

Lesson two is revolutionary study. There’s a part about what is—how to—study. And then it talks about the mass lines, the masses and all that, democratic centrism, and committee systems and stuff like that. So that’s the gist of this book. A lot of it has to do with how to be a critical activist and attain self-awareness and decisiveness and I really thought that this connects to this past week’s reading because those articles that we had to read—action items and the land back movement as a whole—really prompted me to reflect on the work that I do. And a lot of the work that I do is mostly for our kababayan⁴⁶ in the Philippines. And honestly from all the readings we’ve had to do within this class or that have been introduced by Kriya, a lot of it is really prompting me to think introspectively and to reflect on my work and also draw parallels on what is needed and what tangible action items that we can do to contribute to movements such as land back movements because similar methodologies and strategies can be applied, from what I learned, in organizing spaces right now for Filipino people, directly to how I can support the land back movement too.

Though Espie didn’t go into detail on how they are directly applying national democracy ideals to Land Back in the Americas, they acknowledged that they have been reflecting on the parallels between their socialist-oriented work with Anakbayan and the topic of Land Back and decolonization that were discussing in class. A few times during our meetings outside of class,

⁴⁵ Weeks five, six, and seven were all under the theme of Solidarities and Resistance. We covered Art, Refusal, and Recognition; Land Back; and Abolition, respectively.

⁴⁶ Tagalog for “fellow Filipinos.”

Espie and I have discussed how national democracy aims to invert the social class pyramid—from peasants, farmworkers, and laborers being in the bottom to being at the top. This meant that those who toiled hard in the production of goods or who worked the land for meager wages could finally benefit from their labors. A revolutionary socialist society in the Philippines could theoretically promote the interest of the broad masses and “free the people from exploitation towards genuine change in society” (PADEPA, 2021, p. 130). In some ways, this aligns with Land Back’s goals, which entail “nourishing [Indigenous peoples’] relationship to all things on the land” (Gray-Donald, 2020, p. 5). Land back and socialism also differ in many ways: the former is about reestablishing relationships while the latter is about shifting the means of production and ownership of land and goods. In a dinner with Espie last January, I shared my own critiques of national democracy, primarily that a unified national polity has been antithetical to Indigenous sovereignty in the Americas and in the Philippines, and that such sovereignty would then be counter to the centralist democratic⁴⁷ ideologies of Anakbayan and other national democracy groups. Espie responded by saying they had not considered that perspective before and that they would further reflect on the tensions between decolonization movements and national democracy. In summary, through their ARAK sharing and our dialogues, Espie has demonstrated how they are situating themselves within competing ideologies that strongly inform their community organizing and their professional work with high school students.

Espie continued recounting how ARAK was helping them think about Land Back:

And also, all the critical perspectives that we need to undertake in imagining a future that centers Indigenous people and Indigenous futures like what we had been talking about. And so this book is super important to me. I also think about the Lumad Bakwit schools

⁴⁷ In ARAK, democratic centralism is defined as “democracy guided by centralized leadership” (p. 132). ARAK stresses that in centralism, individual interests are subordinate to and agree with the overall interests and goals of the unified organization. A unified organization will be guided by centralized leadership, which I presume will be sourced from different sub-organizations.

and the rest of the many lumad peoples for practicing education and for holding spaces like their own educational curriculum. And I was thinking about how this is similar to significant issues that Indigenous peoples face here in the U.S., fighting for the right to exist, to simply be, to practice their culture, their languages, and hold on to their traditions.

Espie acknowledged how Land Back in the Philippines is crucial for the lumad peoples not just in holding relationships with the land and everything on the land but also in their educational efforts. The Lumad Bakwit schools were established after all so that the Talaingod Manobo, among other Indigenous groups, could keep pursuing culturally sustaining education that would help their communities in passing on Indigenous knowledge and lifeways and in their continued struggle for land and education. Espie recognized the interconnectedness of Indigenous struggles here and in the homelands as well as the importance of culturally sustaining education for Indigenous peoples.

In the penultimate part of Espie's altar share of their ARAK book, they delved into the connections between education and the importance of self-study in doing resistance work. Espie also argued that U.S. imperialism is the common source of oppression for Filipinxs here and in the Philippines:

That leads me to the thought that education and self-study is so, so important, and how in a capitalist society we see education and learning as this obligation, like a chore, something we have to do, especially in K-12, just because how the system is really built to produce a certain type of individual to work within a society that values people based on labor—all that stuff. [Pause] I take it upon myself to really transform how I view and interpret education for myself and within the collectives that I'm a part of, like [my sorority] or Anakbayan, or even in this class itself. We're not necessarily graded on doing these readings. We're not really forced to do these readings—I mean we should, honestly, and I trust that we're all doing these readings because we've all chosen to take this class and to share space with one another and to learn all of these willingly. I didn't need to take this, you know what I mean? I feel like we're all here willingly to do this collective struggle and collective self-study. And collective self-study is so integral to furthering myself as a pro-people activist. I was thinking about the tangible ways I can maneuver these teachings and self-studies that I do with my other kasamas and the kasamas here in this call as one way to dedicate my life, like I said before, to imagining a future that is

Indigenous and that sort of thing. I didn't really gain that perspective until this class, which I'm like, "Oh my gosh!" Really grateful for this class and how it's really...[pause] I was thinking about how...well, sometimes I'll see the struggle for the Filipino people as separate from the struggle for Black liberation or Indigenous sovereignty, but they're really interconnected in so many ways and how it's U.S. imperialism and the force, the hold, that the U.S. has on the globe that is contributing. And I think of the picture of the octopus with its head and its arms—I don't know if y'all know from that textbook or something, I don't know where it's from, it's like Great Britain or something—and basically it's from the same thing that's causing all these ills and issues. So yeah, they're really all interconnected and related. How can I do better in recognizing the mutualities and that sort of thing? I know MLK once said, "Injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere." Connecting all these struggles—I just think about that a lot, especially with this last week's readings.

The first thing I want to highlight in Espie's beautiful sharing above is their perspective on self-motivated study. Espie contrasted self-study with capitalist education. To them, the former is about intentionally transforming education for themselves as part of participating in collective struggle.⁴⁸ In other words, Espie was alluding to self-study as an essential element of joining the collective struggle in which they have willingly engaged. They didn't need to take the class, do the readings, nor discuss any of their work with their peers, to obtain their bachelor's degree, yet they chose to sign up because they recognized an opportunity to grow in their justice work through the class. This growth has happened with the many relationships that have blossomed out of the FIL class and its previous iterations—between the students themselves as well as between me and the students—and the co-theorizing and knowledge creation that we all have taken on together. When Espie said, "we're all here willingly to do this collective struggle and collective self-study," they were reiterating that their peers were part of the FIL class because they had decided to—and continued to engage in—social justice work that was

⁴⁸ In Tagalog, this collective struggle is called pakikibaka. "Makibaka, huwag matakot" (Join the struggle, be not afraid) is a common national democracy slogan often used in protests.

contributing to the collective struggle for justice for the Filipinx community (and other communities).

The second thing I want to underscore is how Espie explained the crucial role of self-study—personal and collective—in furthering themselves as a pro-people activist. “Pro-people” signifies a proletarian lens, which I have read and heard as “makamasa” (for the people) in national democracy materials and in Philippine activist circles. However, their usage of the phrase hinted at a broadly collective notion of “people,” which included Indigenous folks, Filipinos, and Black people. I contend that Espie’s conception of self-study is what culturally sustaining pedagogy envisions education to be: we study what sustains us, and we are intentional in the learning that we’re doing with each other. I also argue that self-study is inherently kapwa-based: we make the decision to study to expand our own critical knowledge, but we’re ultimately doing it for ourselves as much as we’re doing it for the sake of the collective. One’s decision is thus being made not merely for oneself but for the collective. The overlap of these three concepts—self-study (which can also be considered as Marxist/labor critique), CSP, and kapwa—and how it fits within their life and their work is what Espie was describing in their reflections above.

Espie understood that the struggles of Indigenous peoples in the Philippines and in the Americas, Black struggles, and proletarian struggles all have U.S. imperialism as their common enemy. The imperialist octopus that Espie alluded to was the cartoon of John Bull, the personification of England, published in *Punch Magazine* ca. 1888 with the title “The Devilfish in Egyptian Waters” (Akengin, 2021). The cartoon depicted England with its many tentacles grabbing on to land on every continent. Espie was drawing parallels between the British Empire then and the imperial U.S. nation-state now as “the same thing that’s causing all these ills and

issues,” including the status of the Philippines as an American neocolony (Lichauco, 1973) and U.S. settler colonialism. Identifying the root cause of social problems is also one of the first things that an activist learns in ARAK, so Espie was once again drawing upon both national democracy ideology and settler colonial theory.

To Espie, their classmates were already their *kasama*,⁴⁹ or comrade in the struggle—the struggle for a liberated future for all. They also recognized that though they are part of different circles (“...self-studies that I do with my *other kasamas* and the *kasamas here* in this call...”), the overlapping systems of oppression impacts all of them, and the resistance to these systems need to be concerted and multidimensional. As a *saling-pusa* activist, Espie drew from their many social and organizational circles to enact justice and liberation with a holistic, multi-pronged, “multimarginal” approach. Moreover, Espie emphasized that they were navigating how they can “dedicate [their] life to imagining a future that is Indigenous,” which implies that they were considering how Indigenous liberation theories that we were discussing in class could inform their liberation work with their “other”⁵⁰ *kasamas*. Espie was therefore employing an intersectional, multifaceted approach to justice and liberation, which I also consider as resistance from several margins (hooks, 1990). Espie as *saling-pusa* activist was imagining new possibilities for communities.

Because the FIL class focused on land and Indigenous theories of liberation, I got to witness how Espie was imagining collective liberation through a Land Back lens. Here’s an example from their photovoice for Land Back week:

⁴⁹ *Kasama* translates to “someone you are with.” It has been used in national democracy circles to connote brothers/sisters/siblings/comrades in the struggle.

⁵⁰ I use quotes here because I’m arguing that there isn’t an “other” or a separate group to Espie. Because they articulate liberation as only possible collectively, the different groups that they’re part of are co-constitutive, concerted efforts towards collective liberation.

I love the concreteness of the articles chosen for this week's class. People tend to get stuck in a shallow puddle of ambiguity when it comes to supporting Indigenous peoples and their sovereignty. Questions like, "what more can I do?" "how, when I'm all but one person?" drench them further into a lack of responsibility and agency that can be ignited by simply keeping themselves accountable and seeking out those tangible action items. Am I talking about myself in this? Yes, absolutely. I think this is a great opportunity for self-criticism and self-exploration in terms of the potential role I, and everyone else, can play as an accomplice to the Land Back movement. The fake and alluring blur of where we can contribute creates this feeling of comfort that is easy to slip into and feel absolved from our position as a settler. We need to do better. I need to do better.
(Photovoice, spring 2021)

Espie was adamant about not letting settler moves to innocence stymie their liberation work.

They knew that they needed to keep asking themselves the important, albeit difficult, questions in order for them to “play as an accomplice [or *saling-pusa*] to the Land Back movement.” They were also aware that their individual impact mattered, and that their role was significant despite lingering self-criticism and the echoing of the imperative to do better. In the times that Espie and I have hung out, I have tried to emphasize to them that they’re doing valuable work and that they are doing more than enough. Their photovoice caption corroborates that they are often thinking about their role as settler and how they can deepen their work towards Land Back.

Espie ended their ARAK sharing by reiterating what they referenced in their photovoice as their contributions to Land Back by doing more and doing better:

And I also want to say—I wrote this in my photovoice—how a lot of the times people get stuck in this ambiguity of “Oh, what can I really do,” and feel like a blur, especially cause they sit in their own self comfort of being outside of their struggle. It doesn’t affect them. People use “Oh, well I don’t know what to do. What can I do as an individual?” And they use that to make themselves feel better, to absolve them from responsibility. I’m just like, “No!” I love how the article came about with providing tangible action items. You can do stuff. Come on now. Even criticizing my own self and what I can do, you know? And thinking about the future especially because I’m graduating! I’m gonna have a salary, I think. I’m like, “Wow! Big adult things!” I actually just had an interview this last week. I think I’m gonna get the job. It’s in education, a little bit of education. Now that I’m having a stable income, how can I, like, paying rent, dedicating 18.55 a month like the article suggested. I pay 15 dollars a month for a Netflix subscription. That’s the same. It’s not that hard. Those little things. Finding ways within our capacities. I guess my

capacity's expanding so I can contribute in that way. But yeah, how we as individuals, wherever our capacities lie. Anyway, [pause] that's why I chose this book. I really hold this book dear. I haven't finished it yet, and that's also because within Anakbayan spaces we really emphasize collective study, collective self-study. And so, while I could read on, I know that we'll get to it within our collective spaces to study these together and struggle together. There's a lot of beauty in that.

Espie thus ends their sharing by naming tangible steps that they are taking and that others can also consider, like paying “rent” to the Duwamish, because “You can do stuff. Come on now.” Espie's commitment is as much symbolic as it is material, and their efforts demonstrate that they are willing and intentional about contributing to Land Back in their own capacity. According to Espie, doing so “is not that hard.” Everyone has a responsibility to do something about addressing settler colonialism, and Espie's exhortations for their peers to engage in the struggle could perhaps be coming from a place of *kapwa*—of our liberations being tied together. Finally, Espie conveyed that though they have the opportunity to keep reading their ARAK, they choose to adapt to the pace of their *kasamas* because they appreciate the beauty in collective self-study. Again, this is *kapwa* in action—learning together as a beautiful process—which is also CSP in action. As Espie said in our last class: “I think what nourishes me the most as a Filipino and a person, it's like, just community, you know? And I know...I feel that's so...I was like, ‘Is this basic?’ But also, that's so real.”

In summary, Espie is a *saling-pusa* Filipinx in how they see and describe themselves—Filipinx, white, Chinese, European, brown. They are also a *saling-pusa* in their activist work, utilizing multiple liberatory frameworks for different communities marginalized by the same dominant systems. Espie doesn't let rigid rules of group “membership” impede their liberation work. In these ways, Espie demonstrates their desires to continue the struggle for justice,

decolonization, and Land Back along the margins as driven by their relations to their kasamas/comrades on Coast Salish and Indigenous Philippine lands.

Coda

Let's rewind for a second to take in Espie's desires and where it has led them. In winter 2019, Espie wrote:

I hope to gain a greater sense of belonging within the Filipinx community and expand my understanding of culture, society, & politics. I hope this will aid my goal to increase my activism and pave a path to leading others with these values.
(In-class writing exercise, January 9, 2019)

In February 2019, in the Unforgetting seminar, I asked students to write a love letter to themselves. They were given the choice of addressing it to their younger, present, or future self. At the end of the quarter, I brought envelopes and returned students' letters. I instructed them to address it lovingly to themselves, if they haven't already, to fold their letter and seal it within the envelope, and to write their name on the outside with a note stating that the envelope only be opened five years hence. I wanted this activity to serve as a time capsule for students, a reminder of the class in their future lives when they're most likely done with college and in the beginning stages of their careers and also likely deep in their community and decolonizing work.

Espie decided to pen a letter to their younger self. I end this section by sharing Espie's expression of love, of messages that they hope they remember years from now, with the hope that it (as well as this chapter as whole) will serve as a message to Filipinx students, educators, researchers, community organizers, activists, and artists.

You may feel out of place, but there is a community for you out there. Be confident, and don't just focus on academics. There is so much more...but don't worry, regardless of the choices you make, you will find a way to define home. Remind yourself that you can be whoever you want to be!
(In-class writing exercise, February 13, 2019)

Implications

“Finding” oneself through community organizing is both an inherently selfish and selfless act. I argue that Espie’s community organizing work is one of their means of making sense of their Filipinxness. Though their conscious motives were of serving the community, of being in good relations with the people, with the land, they were also naturally finding out more of themselves. In many ways, finding oneself could also mean being *saling-pusa* to multiple racial and ethnic categories. What Espie has shown is that one could attempt to belong until they “fit in” or feel accepted into the group, or one could push on the definition of the group (e.g., expanding what Filipinxness means), or one could do both.

Besides teaching us about navigating group membership, Espie also shows us how community is always involved in learning about ourselves and others. Many communities around the world have tied their teaching and learning with the community’s wholeness, wellness, and thriving as its foundations. I would say that the Unforgetting class, the FIL class, and the continuing conversations and community organizing and education that we do are, in our own ways, a re-membering/unforgetting/reclaiming of that which sustains us. Many communities continue to do this crucial work of educating and liberating their communities. Our research and work together has been about finding ways to make sense of who we are while taking care of ourselves and those we love. For Espie, learning about the struggles and resistance of Indigenous peoples both here and in the homeland, among other communities who continue to resist ongoing colonialism, racial capitalism, cisheteropatriarchy, ableism, transphobia, classism, and other systems of oppression, was paramount in their learning about their own Filipinxness.

Espie’s stories suggest that part of our work as Filipinxs in the Americas is to dispel the myth of the American Dream, that migrating to the United States is not harmless or neutral. We

can be saling-pusa to the American Dream, but Espie reminds us that this dream is far from our goal. Espie's work with their relations, primarily with Anakbayan in seeking to reform the social stratification in the Philippines, is a step in this direction. Could we consider community organizing as parallel, even commensurable, with decolonization? I argue that within Tuck and Yang's (2012) ethics of incommensurability, engaging in community organizing to obviate Filipinx migration to the US—i.e., Filipinxs in the homeland gaining sovereignty and relationships to human and beyond human relatives so that they won't need to leave—is decolonization. However, this does not address existing settlers in the Americas. In Tuck and Yang's ethic, decolonization is not accountable to settlers. However, the bodies and lives of many Filipinos and other communities of color (among others) will still have to be accounted for. Decolonization and accountability to our community are part of the work that Espie, Hiyas, and Ashley are already doing. It is through their examples and through other Filipinx decolonizers, community organizers, and radical educators that we can construct new theories on the intersections of Native and Filipinx justice and to consider how Filipinxs settlers on Turtle Island, Guam/Guahan, and elsewhere can work toward liberation for themselves and Indigenous peoples alike.

For us educators, this chapter hopefully offers insights on the possibilities of curricular and pedagogical strategies (e.g., photovoice) on elucidating Filipinx-Indigenous intersections. Additionally, I hope that it informs those who seek to imbricate themselves and their students in thinking of their liberation as bound up with the liberation of Indigenous peoples. Espie's case study tells us that the connections they're making between their family's migration stories (mother followed the stolen resources of the Philippines to the U.S. metropole and dad was a European refugee fleeing communism), the land that they call home (lands and waters of the

Puyallup Tribe of Indians, Steilacoom, and Coast Salish peoples), Filipinxness (through participation in community organizing, Filipinx sorority, and other organizations), and decolonization (through their work and activism and through classes such as Filipinx on Indigenous Lands) could help other critical students/activists/researchers (re)imagine their commitments to Indigenous futurities. Therefore, curricula such as those of FIL that successfully meld the four elements of (1) personal and familial stories, (2) ethnic histories and narratives, (3) local lands and waters (e.g., using photovoice that encourages engagement with lands and other geographies), and (4) Indigenous liberation seem necessary in the efforts toward finding “common ground” between Filipinxs and Indigenous Peoples in the Americas.

Additionally, I believe that Marxist critiques of labor and capitalist means of production could be especially salient in complementing Land Back and similar theories of liberation (Grande, 2004; Guerrero, 2006; PADEPA, 2021; The Red Nation, 2021). That Espie was drawing from multiple liberatory frameworks for multiple communities is testament to the potential of these frameworks. Because decolonization and national democracy intersect and overlap along Filipinx experiences, Espie was able to see their personal struggles and the struggles of many different communities—Indigenous peoples here in the Americas and in the Philippines, Black people, and non-Indigenous Filipinos, to name a few—as part of the collective struggle for liberation for multiple groups. Therefore, a fifth element of additional theories of liberation could potentially be added to my recommendations of a curriculum centered on Indigenous futurities. We need to be *saling-pusa* by dipping into multiple theoretical fields to help inform our *saling-pusa* work.

Chapter 6

Mga Pusa, Uwian Na!:⁵¹ Some Concluding Thoughts

It is Sunday, October 17, 2021. The Filipinx students and I are on Zoom, along with some Filipinx elders, staff from the Wing Luke Museum, and a good crowd of people. It feels as if it's my first day of teaching a class—dry mouth, shallow breathing, fast heartbeat. I don't know why even after a decade of teaching I still get nervous being in front of a crowd (even virtual ones).

I've told my students before that the nerves come from my desire to do right by them. I tense up because I care. I want the students to feel at home. I want them to learn. I want to make a good impression. I want them to like me, but of course I don't tell them that on the first day.

The total number of Zoom participants reaches 92. Wow. I was expecting around 50, probably even less. Maybe people are interested in the topic of being Filipinx on Indigenous lands more than I anticipated.

I cycle through the welcome slides and play some harana music as people continue to trickle in.

The students and I have been planning the program for weeks. As part of Filipino American History month, we collaborated with the Filipinx elders who organized the multimedia exhibition "I Am Filipino" at the Wing. It opened to the public in March 2012.

Almost ten years later, on January 2021, I reached out to museum staff asking if there was an opportunity to collaborate with my Filipinx on Indigenous lands course. Each class I've led has had a community-engaged aspect, and I was exploring options for the spring 2021 course. Initial responses indicated that the museum had its hands full since the height of the

⁵¹ Literally, "Cats, time to go home!" The statement "uwian na" was often used in my childhood as a signal for everyone that play time was over, whether because someone has to do chores or it was time to eat lunch or dinner.

pandemic. At the last minute, however, when I was about to look elsewhere, a museum staff responded that they were teaching a class at UW and would love to partner with mine. They also told me that there was some newly vacated space as part of the original “I Am Filipino” exhibit as part of the museum’s adaptations for patrons in the midst of COVID.

Five months later, the collaboration led to our saling-pusa exhibit. We were “updating” the previous Filipino installation with a two-and-a-half foot wide space on the wall, which I thought was plenty, by responding to the same questions we had explored in the spring quarter: “What does it mean to be Filipinx on Indigenous lands? How do we navigate the world as Filipinx?” Ten students from the class responded by constructing a digital zine page with optional narration responding to the prompt, which I stitched together into a short video (the Wing let us know that we would have a video monitor with audio, and I thought a video would be the most effective use of the small space). Other students, mostly the saling-pusa ones (i.e., the ones who weren’t officially registered for the class), were instrumental in the planning, brainstorming, coordinating, and organizing involved for the exhibit. I offered the saling-pusa students the opportunity to make zine pages like their peers, but they either refused or did not feel compelled to participate in that way. I respected their decision.

We start the program. My students speak with the eloquence and fervor of the ancestors speaking their truths, breathing life into the world. The Filipinx elders do the same.

The program ends with the students and I feeling ecstatic about our work together.

I think about Lolo Toribio, my maternal great grandfather whom I had to research for one of my first graduate school classes. I wonder what he thinks about the exhibit that we’ve just contributed to, or this dissertation, or our diasporic family. I hope he doesn’t feel that I’m

“squandering” his hard work. Lolo, we’re here building the better world that you imagined, that you started toiling for.

Almost a hundred years ago, Lolo Toribio crossed oceans to be a saling-pusa on Hawai’i, the lands and waters of the Kānaka Maoli, which at present remain as denotative saling-pusa (i.e., the saling-pusa which some scholars have described as possessing limited power) to the U.S. settler-colonial state. Four generations of my family, myself included, have been saling-pusa on Indigenous lands. Some of us have assimilated and are content. I, however, continue to paw and claw at the margins. I lovingly invite you and others to join me. Let us see what lies beneath—beyond—the academy, the nation-state, and other colonial apparatuses.

To be Filipinx on Indigenous lands is to be the saling-pusa.

What is our “goal” as liminal beings? Are we to remain in the margins? Or is the saling-pusa something that wasn’t built to last? Is there a next step after becoming one? At the Wing Luke Museum, would we rather have the whole wall rather than the small nook we were given? Would we rather have the entire museum to ourselves? At UW, how would the Filipinx classes have been different if they were graded and could satisfy graduation requirements? In higher education, do we Filipinxs want to have our own university where we take center stage, where we get to teach about our peoples, histories, and cultures? Is liminality inherent in pluralistic societies, a limitation of human consciousness of always needing a focus that then births peripheries?

I have been in the margins as a graduate student. I had always felt like Miller Hall was a home that was never a home. I find this funny because even in my dissertation defense, the supposed culmination of six years of graduate study, the College of Education could not secure a physical space for me. I had to find one on my own, and luckily enough, my relationship with a

staff member at the library helped me reserve a nice room with a projector. Through the connections I've made with faculty, staff, fellow graduate students, and the students in my class, I am happy with being a saling-pusa in the university.

Ashley, Hiyas, and Espie are all saling-pusa, just like me, though I think they may associate themselves more loosely with the concept. What they've been doing in their environmental advocacy, activism, teaching, and relationships with their communities has showed us that the margins are indeed a site of resistance, solidarity, radical possibilities, and creation. We continue to dive into the contradictions and paradoxes of being the saling-pusa.

My advisor says that culturally sustaining pedagogy exists to nourish communities in their knowledges and lifeways. I believe that leaning into our liminality, embodying the saling-pusa, is a way to sustain ourselves and our communities amidst hegemonic gazes and oppressive structures. Until such gazes and structures are dismantled, we will remain saling-pusa to the system with much love, joy, and resistance, creating realities and radical possibilities for ourselves and our peoples.

And though we may be going home at the end of the day, we get to play again tomorrow.

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Appendix

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
STATEMENT OF RESEARCH COMMITMENTS
(Participant Consent Form)
What Does It Mean to be Filipinx on Indigenous Lands?

Researcher: Kriya Issa A. Velasco, kriyav@uw.edu, 206-313-4519

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Django Paris, dparis@uw.edu, 206-616-9541

Personal Declaration: I am Kriya Velasco, a Filipinx doctoral candidate in Multicultural Education. With your permission and with continued dialogue, I would like to invite you to be my co-researcher for my dissertation study. The purpose of this document is to give you all the information you will need to help you decide whether you want to participate in this study. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what I would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a co-researcher and volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” I will give you a copy of this form for your records.

Why am I doing this, and what are my intentions: Being Filipino/Filipina/Filipinx/Pinoy on Indigenous lands is a topic that I wish to explore with you and other undergraduate students. I believe that discussing, reflecting on, and sharing about ourselves, including the various contexts that we are part of (e.g., histories, lands, waters, systems of power), can be helpful in considering possibilities for justice, joy, and solidarities with our communities and with Indigenous peoples.

Though I am primarily doing this “research” now for my doctoral dissertation, our work together will be part of my ongoing efforts toward the liberation of Filipinos and other systemically marginalized communities. We are only free if all of us are free.

I do not own any of this research. I believe in generating free knowledge for the betterment of our communities and to be in solidarities/co-conspiratorships with others.

If you wish, you can have access to any material that I/we produce from our time together.

Your role in this project and what I will be doing: If you choose to be a co-researcher with me, we will consider all your output for this class to be “data,” which means that it will be subject to further analysis by you, me, and other co-researchers. It is also possible for our work to be published eventually. The data will be co-owned by all co-researchers, and we will decide what to do with it along the way. I will consult with you and other co-researchers about the future steps of analysis and publication, if necessary.

Another thing I ask is that you engage in what is commonly known as “interviews,” which I reframe in my methods as a conversation. I am expecting at least half an hour to an hour of dialogue, or however much time you choose. You are free to share or refuse to share any information, and you can leave at any time. With your permission, I will record the video and audio of our conversation so I can transcribe it. I may invite you to meet multiple times to continue our talks or to inquire about a specific topic that we have discussed. Participation in any of these discussions is completely voluntary.

Benefits of the study: I am hoping that our time together can lead to some insight on both our parts about Filipinx identities and solidarities. These effects may not be apparent and may only happen in retrospect. It may be possible for our work to have zero benefits. Nevertheless, I am hoping that the time that we spend together will be beneficial to us both in some way. At the very least, we will get to know each other better.

Potential downsides/side effects: This project is for us to understand one another better and to think about what it means to be who we are, not create undue emotional trauma or cause harm. Though I am not anticipating the latter to happen, what we talk about may cause you stress, discomfort, or make it feel as if I am invading your mental or emotional space. If this happens, feel free to stop the process right away. You also have the right to look at my notes and/or have all or a portion of the audio recording be deleted.

What happens with the information that you provide: You have the option of remaining anonymous, in which case all identifying information will be removed from any publication or derivative work that will be made public. You also have the option of divulging your identity, if you wish. All digital data will be in a password-protected and encrypted storage file under my care.

Other information: You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative repercussions. In the case that this research project is reviewed by governmental or university staff to ensure that the methods being used are legal and safe, your information will remain confidential throughout.

Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions or concerns. My door remains open to you even after the “formal” part of this research is completed; I’m happy to communicate before, during, and after the research process.

If you have any questions about your rights as a co-researcher, please contact my doctoral adviser (also called a PI or principal investigator), Dr. Django Paris.

Signature of investigator

Printed Name

Date

Participant’s statement

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later on about the research, I can ask the investigator listed above. If I have questions about my rights as a co-researcher, I can contact the principal investigator. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

_____ I give permission for this researcher to record my interview.

_____ I do NOT give my permission for the researcher record my interview.

_____ I give permission for the researcher to re-contact me to clarify information.

_____ I do NOT give permission for the researcher to re-contact me to clarify information.

Signature of participant

Printed Name

Date