

Pinoys in Aotearoa: Family Agency in the Doing of Family in the Context of *kapwa* and Structural Migration

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Summary

‘*Pinoys* in Aotearoa’ examines how Filipino transnational families negotiate migration, family life, and obligations across national borders. Situated within the political economy of the Philippines’ labour export policy (LEP; PD No. 442, 1974), this thesis asks how agency is constituted relationally within families, and how migration transforms the practices through which family life is enacted. It addresses four interrelated questions.

- How has migration reshaped the ways Filipino migrants and their families understand and practise family relationships?
- How do understandings of culturally grounded norms of family obligation, such as *kapwa* (shared selfhood) and *utang na loób* (intergenerational reciprocity), shape Filipino migration and remittance-sending practices?
- How do Filipino migrants negotiate competing moral expectations through emotional reflexivity?
- How do these processes reshape migrants’ agency, moral identities, and understandings of family?

Answering these questions helps make sense of how Filipino migrants maintain and sustain continuity, moral coherence and the reproduction of relational worlds.

Advancing family sociology, the study reveals how the LEP transformed the context within which Filipinos ‘do family’, rewriting the possibilities for how family obligation is done to include migration and remittance sending. Filipino migration is a collective family project embedded within enduring moral, emotional, and relational commitments. Moreover, rather than weakening familial relationships, migration reconfigures them via transnational relational practices of sending money remittances and *balikbayan boxes* (*balik*—return and *bayán*—nation, boxes filled with goods sent by Filipino migrants to their families back home), and through ongoing communication. However, exposure to new social contexts causes some migrants to challenge expectations surrounding *utang na loób* and extended family obligations, even while continuing to value family solidarity. These tensions are negotiated through emotional reflexivity, which is an emotional, embodied and cognitive process in which people have feelings about and try to change their lives with respect to their relationship with others, and the world about them (Holmes, 2010).

The thesis’ principal theoretical contribution is the development of the tripartite *kapwa*-based family agency concept—a culturally grounded and relational form of agency that extends beyond the individual actor that remains hegemonic in sociological analysis. Drawing on Duncan (2011), Phạm (2013), and Burkitt (2016), family agency is theorised as a relational process through which family members collectively negotiate aspirations, obligations, and

decisions within structural constraints. Family agency advances relational sociology by demonstrating that, rather than residing solely within autonomous individuals, agency emerges within interactions between family relationships, cultural meanings, emotions, and structural conditions. Finally, drawing upon indigenous Filipino concepts and methodology alongside sociological theory to generate new sociological insights, the study contributes to ongoing efforts to decolonise migration and family scholarship.

The findings speak to wider debates within *New Zealand Sociology* concerning migration, transnational families, care, ethnicity, and belonging in increasingly diverse societies. As the second fastest-growing migrant group in Aotearoa New Zealand (Stats NZ, 2024), Filipinos provide an important lens through which to understand how families sustain relationships across geographical dispersion, and within contexts of institutional, cultural, and economic change. The thesis also demonstrates the value of integrating indigenous epistemologies with sociological analysis to produce more culturally responsive understandings of migration and family life.

Future research avenues include investigations of subsequent migrant generations and changing family forms. Additionally, applying a gendered and queer lens to the analysis will provide different insights into how family is done transnationally. Also, comparative studies interrogating the interaction between relational agency and migration governance across migrant communities and national contexts will enable the examination of how culturally specific understandings of family agency operate under differing migration regimes. Thus, this thesis establishes a foundation for further theoretical development of relational approaches to migration, governance, family sociology, and decolonial social theory.

[Link to thesis](#)

Associated publications

Grava, G., Elizabeth, V., & Keil, M. (2026). “Am I obligated to help?” Emotions in the transnational enactment of Filipino family obligation and *utang na loób* in remittance-sending. *New Zealand Sociology*, 41(1), 45–66. <https://nzsociology.nz/index.php/nzs/article/view/185>

Grava, G.R., Keil, M., & Elizabeth, V. (2026). Beyond the agentic individual: Rethinking agency in transnational collectivist Filipino Families. *Journal of Family Studies*, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2026.2655733>

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Activist Learning under Constraint: Stratified Struggles and Resistance of Indonesian Student Activists

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Summary

This thesis examines how Indonesian higher education student activists learn and develop critical consciousness within fields shaped by structural inequality, authoritarian legacies, shrinking civic space and the marketisation of universities (Rosser, 2016). It asks how activists learn through collective action, how structures of inequality shape opportunities for critical learning and activism, and how activists navigate barriers within unequal and constrained contexts. This question is central as student activism has long shaped political change in Indonesia (Aspinall, 2012), yet scholarship has concentrated largely on prominent protests, mobilisation outcomes and digital networks, leaving the everyday processes through which activists learning—and the inequalities governing who can participate and persist—poorly understood (Savirani, 2023). The analysis draws on six months of critical ethnographic fieldwork with 11 student activists in Yogyakarta, combining participant observation, semi-structured interviews, auto-driven photo elicitation and *nongkrong*, or informal hanging out.

The findings show that activism, rather than formal university education, provided the principal pedagogical field through which participants developed critical consciousness. Consistent with scholarship on movements as sites of learning and knowledge production (Choudry, 2015; della Porta & Pavan, 2017; Foley, 1999), participants learned through structured training programmes and reading groups, but also through protests, organising, shared meals, basecamps and conversations at *angkringan* (roadside food stalls). These settings joined reflection to action, enabling participants to question inherited assumptions, interpret social injustice and imagine political alternatives. This learning, however, remained sharply stratified. Institutional accreditation, family resources, regional origin and unequal access to economic, social, cultural and linguistic capital influenced who could obtain books, enter activist networks, contribute confidently and sustain their involvement. Universities frequently reinforced market-oriented individualism, hierarchy and depoliticisation, although occasional lectures and institutional spaces offered critical possibilities. Activists responded by pooling food and money, sharing texts and knowledge, and creating peer-led learning spaces. Mutual aid therefore operated both as material infrastructure and as pedagogy, since activists learned collectivism by practising it.

The thesis reaches a deliberately double-edged conclusion. Student activism constituted a relational, communal and praxis-driven form of education, yet it did not escape the inequalities surrounding it. Redistribution sustained participation without abolishing hierarchy, while those with fewer resources often carried greater risks and burdens, leading to exhaustion, disillusionment and withdrawal. Critical consciousness was consequently neither an individual awakening nor a steady progression. It was a fragile collective achievement formed through struggle, contradiction, care and repeated reflection. Empirically, the thesis provides a rare account of activist learning in Indonesia from inside activists' everyday lives, correcting scholarship that privileges spectacular protests, mobilisation outcomes or digital networks but also extending work on the limited relationship between university

curricula and student protest (Savirani, 2023). Theoretically, it brings Bourdieu's (1979/1984) concepts of field, capital and habitus into dialogue with Freire's (1970/2000) conscientisation and praxis. From this synthesis, it develops the concept of communal radical habitus, understood as collectively formed dispositions towards shared responsibility, redistribution and endurance, cultivated through repeated mutual aid, shared labour and collective risk. This concept explains both how movements persist under conditions of scarcity and why their solidarities remain uneven. Methodologically, the study treats activists as co-interpreters through ethnography, *nongkrong* and participant-generated photographs.

The thesis recommends comparative research across elite, mid-tier, peripheral, rural, faith-based and technical institutions, alongside closer study of students who are excluded from activism or eventually withdraw. Longitudinal research could follow activists beyond the university, while institutional studies could examine how policy, academic labour and marketisation structure the possibilities for dissent. Further intersectional work is also needed on class, gender, sexuality, religion, race and region, as well as on how unequal capital shapes authority, conflict and coalition within movements. For a *New Zealand Sociology* audience, the central message is that activism should be understood not only as protest but also as education, collective social reproduction and an infrastructure of dissent. The Indonesian case unsettles assumptions that universities naturally support critique and invites sociologists in Aotearoa to examine how marketisation, institutional hierarchy and unequal resources shape who can participate in political life, whose knowledge counts, and what everyday labour keeps democratic possibility alive.

[Link to thesis](#)

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Building Capability for Sustainable Construction: A Practice Architectures Perspective on Apprenticeship Learning in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Summary

This thesis examines how vocational education and training in Aotearoa New Zealand can better support construction apprentices to engage with, and transition towards, more sustainable construction practices. Drawing together research on workplace learning, vocational education and training (VET) and sustainability transitions, the thesis examines how apprentices learn to participate in more environmentally friendly construction practices. It is concerned with how apprentices learn within employer-based VET, how that learning is shaped by the worksite, and what this means for their relationship to sustainability. Drawing on the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2024), the thesis asks how the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements of construction sites enable and constrain apprentice learning, how these arrangements shape apprentices' understandings of sustainable construction, and how they might be reconfigured to better support more environmentally friendly practice.

The thesis draws on 38 semi-structured interviews with 18 construction apprentices and 20 industry professionals, including tradespeople, vocational educators, architects, sustainability specialists, and waste management professionals. The main argument of the thesis is that apprenticeship learning is socially situated. Apprentices participate as part of an ensemble (Kemmis et al., 2024) oriented towards a common project or telos. This ensemble is made up of different trades and professional occupations, including project managers, architects, engineers, clients, and suppliers. For apprentices, much of their learning emerges through participation in the everyday practices of construction and is shaped by the opportunities, relationships and tasks available on a worksite (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Winch et al., 2022). Each site has its own histories, material conditions, and temporality, enabling some practices and constraining others (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2024).

The thesis discusses the limitations of employer-based VET as the main mechanism for teaching and learning sustainability. Workplace learning is important, but it also produces uneven access to knowledge. Apprentices' opportunities to learn depend heavily on the informal networks, mentoring relationships, and social-political arrangements available on a particular worksite or within a particular business. There is no guarantee that the tradesperson responsible for an apprentice is also prepared, well resourced, or expected to have been trained as an educator as part of their professional development. As a result, apprentices' experiences of learning can vary significantly, especially when time pressures and commercial demands leave little dedicated space for teaching. Sustainability provides a useful lens for understanding these dynamics because opportunities to engage with sustainability depend heavily on workplace opportunities and relationships with sustainability-minded professionals.

The thesis argues that sustainability depends on an ensemble of construction professionals coming together, each bringing different goals, skills, responsibilities, and constraints to the practice of construction. Apprentices are part of this workforce, but their ability to act sustainably is shaped by decisions made by designers, clients, suppliers, supervisors, and other trades. This reframes apprentices as participants in distributed construction practices, where learning emerges through participation in a wider ensemble. In the Aotearoa New Zealand context, these findings highlight how apprentices' aspirations and future identities are shaped through participation in work-place learning, and how the scope for sustainable practice is influenced by the future states they can envision for themselves, their occupations, and the sector.

The thesis contributes to sociological discussions of work and learning by showing how opportunities to learn and participate in sustainable construction are shaped by the social, material, and organisational arrangements of construction sites. The contribution of the thesis is to show that learning for sustainable construction is more nuanced than adding content to apprenticeships or asking apprentices to care more about sustainability. Learning is grounded in the everyday practices of construction and shaped by the arrangements that enable and constrain participation on a worksite. Because learning emerges through participation in practice, apprentices need opportunities to participate in worksites where sustainability is actively being practiced and to develop relationships with other professionals who have an interest in sustainability. Future research should explore how the theory of practice architectures might inform the design of vocational education and training to embed sustainability within the practice-material arrangements of construction apprentices. This could help vocational education better support the transition to more environmentally friendly construction practices.

[Link to thesis](#)

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Understanding Climate Action: An Integrative Framework

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Summary

The climate crisis confronts societies with a deceptively simple yet profoundly difficult question: *What should we do?* While social science has generated extensive knowledge about the causes and consequences of climate change, it has been far less successful in addressing the ‘how’ of social transformation (Bentz et al., 2022). Many scholarly analyses of transformation obscure the role of agency, overlooking how people consciously shape processes of change (Jasper, 2004). At the same time, the literatures on social movement strategy, climate justice, and urgency remain fragmented and underdeveloped (Meyer & Staggenborg, 2012; Patterson et al., 2018; van Bommel & Höffken, 2023). While social movement research has generated valuable analyses of tactics and outcomes, it has devoted less attention to theorising the strategic reasoning linking actions to broader theories of social transformation, and existing strategic frameworks can imply that approaches are mutually exclusive rather than interconnected.

Responding to these gaps in scholarship, the dissertation develops a theoretical analysis focused on three central research questions:

1. What actions do people take to respond to the climate crisis?
2. How are these actions shaped by strategic decision-making and theories of social transformation?
3. How are these strategies and theories shaped by perspectives on climate justice and urgency?

The dissertation's principal contribution is an integrative conceptual framework that clarifies foundational concepts and synthesises fragmented literatures, connecting forms of action, strategic reasoning, theories of social transformation, justice, and urgency within a single analytical architecture.

The dissertation develops the concept of *strategic logics*: patterned beliefs about how social change occurs that shape decision-making and orient actors towards particular forms of action. Strategic logics connect forms of action to broader *theories of social transformation* (Wright, 2010, 2019), providing a common language for analysing approaches to change. Building from this conceptualisation and drawing on existing scholarship, the dissertation analyses three primary strategic logics: *enactment*, *communication*, and *confrontation*. The dissertation explores how these strategic logics intersect and coexist within a broader *ecosystem of climate action* (Case, 2017), often overlapping and interacting while generating strategic tensions.

A further contribution is the integration of *climate justice* and *urgency* into the analysis of strategy and social transformation. The dissertation develops a *multidimensional theory of climate justice* that synthesises key dimensions and centres social groups to ground justice in lived realities. It demonstrates that understandings of justice shape both desired outcomes and pathways of change, a claim further developed through the concept of the *instrumental case for climate justice* (Green & Healy, 2022; Patterson et al., 2018). The dissertation also develops a systematic conceptualisation of *urgency*, a concept that is widely invoked in climate scholarship but rarely theorised directly. It

demonstrates how expectations of future harm and perceptions of temporal constraint shape strategic decision-making in contested but consequential ways (de Moor, 2023). By analysing urgency alongside climate justice (van Bommel & Höffken, 2023), the dissertation demonstrates how both perspectives structure theories of social transformation.

The dissertation develops an integrative framework that addresses fragmentation in climate action and social transformation scholarship and provides a foundation for cumulative research. The dissertation primarily addresses climate action in high-income Western societies, making it directly relevant to debates surrounding climate action in Aotearoa New Zealand. Future research could extend the framework through empirical analyses, while further theoretical work could explore applications beyond climate action and evaluate alternative frameworks. Ultimately, rather than prescribing a single strategy, the dissertation suggests that social transformation requires a diverse combination of actions embodying the logics of enactment, communication, and confrontation, coordinated within an ecosystem of action and guided by substantive considerations of justice and urgency.

[Link to thesis](#)

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Understanding (Digital) Citizenship Practices of Women Activists in Indian Diasporic Communities in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Summary

This thesis examines the experiences of progressive women activists in the Indian diaspora in terms of the challenges they face and the agency they exhibit in a context of rising Hindu nationalism in Aotearoa New Zealand. The main research question of this project is: How do progressive women activists in the Indian diaspora in Aotearoa New Zealand enact their (digital) citizenship? What challenges do they face, and how do they navigate those challenges? To explore this main research question around (digital) citizenship, it was necessary to understand the nature of the Indian diasporic community in Aotearoa New Zealand and their experiences of negotiating multiple identities and belongings. Thus, the secondary research question asks: How do progressive women activists in the Indian diaspora in Aotearoa New Zealand navigate their belonging, citizenship and identity? What challenges do they face? In my project, I focus on progressive kinds of women's activism, i.e., social justice activism, including anti-Hindutva, anti-Islamophobia, feminist, LGBTQ+, anti-caste,¹ and Indigenous activism. To explore these questions, I used a feminist ethnographic approach, deploying principles of reciprocity, mitigation of power imbalances, accountability, and knowledge sharing to develop meaningful relationships with my research participants (Davis & Craven, 2023). I deployed a multi-sited ethnographic approach through a combination of semi-structured interviews, ethnographic fieldwork and netnography to explore the experiences of women activists in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Drawing on ethnographical insights, I developed a novel concept of (digital) citizenship: a fluid, complex, and multidimensional concept that challenges the traditional definitions of citizenship that envisage citizenship in relation to territorial boundaries. Building on existing scholarship in the disciplines of citizenship studies and media and technology studies (Bloemraad, 2018; Citron & Norton, 2011; McCosker, et al., 2016; McLaughlin, 1992), the term refers to the dynamic practice of activism and community participation across national boundaries and digital platforms.

Empirically, the project illustrates that the progressive women activists in the Indian diaspora in Aotearoa New Zealand are excluded from discourses of citizenship through processes of racialisation, including racism, sexism, queerphobia, and Islamophobia from their own Indian diasporic community and in the wider Western society. Women activists in my project respond to this racialisation by engaging in transnational (digital) activism that challenges state discourses of exclusion and reclaims belonging and citizenship to both India and Aotearoa New Zealand. A crucial finding of this project is the proportional relationship between citizenship and activism, with New Zealand citizenship empowering these women activists to critique the authoritarian Indian state more

¹ Caste is a system of social stratification in India. Lower caste people are highly marginalised and still experience high levels of violence.

safely. By centring the voices and experiences of women activists, this study reimagines citizenship not as a fixed legal status but as an ongoing transnational political and (digital) activist practice. The experiences of women activists in my research point towards a kind of (digital) citizenship that is rooted in accountability to land, Indigenous people and a recognition of structures of power that organise settler-colonial societies like Aotearoa New Zealand. A foundational recommendation for diasporic activists that emerges from this research is to ground their activism in a commitment to upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi and, as such, Māori sovereignty. The second recommendation this work points toward is the importance of engaging in radical inclusion within diasporic organisations, which involves creating conditions where minority voices and marginalised perspectives within the community are not simply invited but are architecturally central (Singh, 2025).

[Link to thesis](#)

Associated Publications

Singh, S. (2025). Sustaining anti-Hindutva activism in Aotearoa New Zealand: Strategies, challenges and way forward. *New Zealand Sociology*, 40(2), 30–44. <https://nzsociology.nz/index.php/nzs/article/view/179>

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