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An Archipelago of Belonging:
Community, Conflict, and Coping of Filipino International
Students in Hungary

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An Archipelago of Belonging:
Community, Conflict, and Coping of Filipino International Students
in Hungary

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the transnational experiences of Filipino international students in Hungary, examining how they navigate community formation, interpersonal conflict, and coping strategies within the context of stratified knowledge migration. The transnational experience of Filipinos taking classes abroad will be studied for how community formation, interpersonal conflict, and coping occur within the context of the stratified migration of knowledge. The dissertation uses an interdisciplinary theoretical framework combining concepts and theories from sociology, including transnational social fields, agency in mobility, Bourdieusian capital and habitus; and anthropology, including liminality, symbolic violence, and narrative meaning making, to challenge traditional portrayals of international students as a homogenous "migratory elite."

Employing qualitative narrative inquiry, the research draws on in-depth interviews with 26 Filipino *Stipendium Hungaricum* scholarship holders enrolled in Hungarian universities. The findings revealed that mobility is initially seen as a practical way to obtain an education, but as it progresses, it becomes transformative and involves disparate encounters characterized by academic disorientation, economic insecurity, linguistic exclusion, and racialized othering. In order to respond to these challenges, students construct networks to establish "archipelagos of belonging" – composed of tiers of individuals from the same nation, other international students, and occasionally, Hungarian friends – which provide a foundation for their survival.

The Filipino community, while providing essential support, simultaneously generates intense internal frictions. Gossip is important for establishing "social cartography." Social cartography is one way that groups create boundaries, regulate symbolic capital, and contest belonging. Class, political, and age differences create fragmentation within the community. Therefore, students use strategies such as strategic diversification and selective engagement. Reconciliation is often viewed as a personal growth experience rather than a reconnection with the original relationship.

Coping is reconceptualized as "negotiated resilience"—socially embedded tactical agency exercised within structural constraints. International students create individual and community strategies to survive the global knowledge migration system's existing inequities across multiple domains—academic, language, culture, materials, and emotions. The study produces a new integrated model of the experience of transnational students, based on the interaction of

individual and community, that has implications for policies related to scholarship programs, university support services, and migration governance.

Keywords: international student mobility, knowledge migration, transnationalism, Filipino students, Hungary, community, conflict, coping, gossip, liminality, habitus, narrative inquiry, Stipendium Hungaricum

CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR — LIKENED TO A TRAIN JOURNEY

The train that began its journey in the introduction—carrying passengers from the Philippines to Hungary, through the varied landscapes of academic adaptation, social navigation, and personal transformation—continues its movement. This research observed a few things you can find in the train carriage: communities develop when people share a sense of vulnerability; there are tensions created by being too close together; passengers create ways to deal with the challenges they face while travelling; and they change as they travel.

But the train does not stop there. New passengers board each year, bringing fresh aspirations and different capital endowments. Once graduates, they leave the train; they are forever changed and take that experience into some ambiguous new life path. Those passengers will be shaped through the institutional legacy of the carriage—the Hungarian higher education system, the legacy of scholarship programs, and the legacy of migration systems. Part of these ongoing changes are visible, and other parts are not as easily seen.

What this study offers is not a final destination but a detailed map of a particular segment of the track. The routes we travelled are presented here through the eyes of the people who made these journeys. Theories have been used to give structure to our travels, and questions have been created from our unique experiences while travelling. These stories are meant to be used by new travelers and anyone interested in supporting them as a source of inspiration or caution; a source of caution because of the many invisible walls that will need to be negotiated while on the road track, and a source of inspiration to know that you are not alone, that you can overcome the obstacles in your way, and that those who do so will have changed—not as a result of the struggles they faced—but rather, because of the lessons learned from facing their struggles.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION — THE TRAIN STARTS

Life—and learning—can be likened to a train journey. A train doesn't go forward because of just one thing. It's all of these parts—engine, driver, connected coaches, and wheels —working together to push the train down the track at a certain weight, direction, and responsibility. If one of these parts malfunctions, then we have no idea where we are going. Additionally, before we even begin to move, we have to leave the station and put ourselves on an established track towards something we haven't seen yet.

1.1 Background

The transnational experiences of Filipino international students in Hungary can be understood through this journey metaphor. This study seeks to understand the lived experiences of Filipino international students in Hungary and their building of community, navigation of conflict, and development of coping strategies while living transnationally. Knowledge migration, or the intentional and directional movement of people for academic purposes, is filled with negotiation, tension, and resilience as the individuals involved and the relationships between them strive to hold together through the movement; sometimes they fail and develop a new community of support, or they are fully integrated into a community of support.

In this study, international student mobility is understood as a process that has challenges due to differences in experiences with academics and culture, developing friendships, experiences with conflict, and developing resiliency. Filipino international students in Hungary develop their sense of belonging, loss, and resilience through narration of their lived experience, which will assist in understanding the complexity of the human dimensions of knowledge migration. This study is about how the complexities of social networks are creating pathways to knowledge migration. Knowledge migration occurs when people intentionally or unintentionally migrate for an academic reason. Though there is no prescribed pathway to crafting a knowledge migration path, fostering social networks to help build either that pathway or academia-centered communities helps identify how people and social groups build paths to knowledge migration.

In addition, international student mobility (ISM) is inherently tied to discussions of “elite status.” This dissertation problematizes the term “elite” throughout. Specifically for this discussion, elite is defined in the way that Bourdieu might, as holders of convertible capital—

economic, cultural, social, symbolic—who wield social power and whose mobility through transnational spaces is privileged. It is to be noted that not all international students are members of the globally mobile elite—as implied by many policy documents.

Moving forward, in understanding the institutional context, it is essential to note that Hungary has become an important hub for international higher education students in the recent years, especially through governmental scholarship programs like Stipendium Hungaricum. Hungary's higher education system transformed drastically after the post-socialist era, along with growing trends in internationalization efforts, *English Medium Instruction* (EMI), and recruitment of foreign students (see Gebregergis & Csukonyi, 2025; Tompos, 2019). The research topic fits into the framework of internationalization processes taking place in Hungarian higher education.

Within the context of Filipino Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship holders, Tempus Közalapítvány (2020) reported that there were two (2) Filipino students in the school year 2016-2017; nine (9) in 2017-2018; eighteen (18) in 2018-2019; twenty-three (23) in 2019-2020, and forty-four (44) in 2020-2021 and becoming a constant 35 slots allotted for Filipino international students up until the present. This shows that, over the years, there has been an increasing number of Filipinos in Hungary, more than fifteen (15) times since 2016; thus, it is becoming relevant to study this student group. The offered courses for Filipino academic scholars are aligned with agricultural sciences and culture-related sciences but are not limited to, as students still have the freedom to choose which program they can take as long as the Hungarian university offers the said courses. With reference to Stipendium Hungaricum Programme (2013), it has been revealed that the Hungarian government, through the management of Tempus Public Foundation, established the said scholarship, which has an aim to support the internationalization of Hungarian higher education. It also further recognizes and strengthens its relationship with the participating partner countries through the academic and research community, to show the world its good reputation and competitiveness.

Hungary, however, as a semi-peripheral European study destination, has some differences from typical Western European study destinations to note—the Hungarian language (which is not part of the Indo-European language family), post-socialist institutional practices, and migrant-state relationships, among others. While research has been conducted on international students who study in Hungary (see, e.g., Pabingwit, 2025; Suchi, 2025) highlighting issues such as language acquisition struggles, cultural adjustment challenges, and financial difficulties, there

has been no study examining the experiences of Filipino students studying within these institutions specifically. This study seeks to fill this gap by asking how Filipino students navigate Hungary's unique amalgamation of opportunity and constraints.

1.2 Defining the Problem: Knowledge Migration, Contested Trajectories, and Heterogeneous Experiences

Anchored in the concept of *knowledge migration* as a transnational mobility—understood as the dual process of students moving to accumulate cultural capital and navigating a pathway intended to link education to future labor mobility (see Findlay, 2011; Findlay et al., 2012; King & Raghuram, 2013)—this research critically engages with and complicates dominant narratives of transnational student flows. The study explicitly rejects the idea that international students are a homogeneous group of "migratory elites" (see Murphy-Lejeune, 2003)—a view that ignores significant differences within this group. In accordance with Pásztor (2015), this study affirms that international students have many different and unequal socio-economic, cultural, and institutional positions on a spectrum; they do not all belong to one elite category. This diversity creates the basis for international students' interaction with the contradictions of migration, where the positive representations of global citizens and human capital development collide with migration control policies and the experience of being racialized (see King & Raghuram, 2013; O'Connor, 2018).

Within this framework of stratified knowledge migration, the presumed seamless trajectory of personal and professional advancement is revealed as deeply problematic. The unanticipated outcomes of students who study abroad, including access to jobs; barriers to "settling" in the host country; and the precarious "portability" of foreign credentials, are heavily influenced by the resources, networks, and commonly available services that influence the lived experience of students (see Knight, 2012; Moskal, 2017). For students from non-elite backgrounds, the transition will have been marked by "class disadvantage and resource inadequacy" as they navigate through "compromise and complicity," rather than being a transition of elite status, as it is perceived by the individualist human capital model (see Brooks & Waters, 2010). As such, there is a need for an epistemological shift from methodologically quantitative, empirical, and positivist methods of scholarly research to qualitative narrative-type methodology in order to understand how stratified realities are experienced and contested.

Methodologically, the complexity of differentiated knowledge migration demands research attentive to subjective experience and everyday practice. Numerous studies have utilized life

stories and narrative interviews (see Bertaux & Thompson, 2017; Eichsteller, 2020; Kull, 2016) as tools for deconstruction of the migratory elite myth and for examining different types of capital (or lack of capital) and how it interacts with institutional structures and identifies how agency can be expressed as struggle and resistance (Tran & Vu, 2018) in unequal social fields. This way of enacting research is essential for understanding how Filipino international students are positioned in Hungarian education institutions and by extension, within the greater Philippine diaspora.

From a sociological perspective, the problem involves analyzing how these differentially positioned individuals negotiate belonging and construct community within transnational social fields (Levitt & Schiller, 2004). The dual embeddedness of Filipino international students in Hungary and their home country serves as both a resource and a source of stress that varies significantly within the range of socio-economic status. From an anthropological and Bourdieusian perspective, much attention has been paid to the conflict that arises when deeply internalized dispositions (Lehmann, 2007) are confronted with Hungarian academic and cultural practices and norms, as well as to the clash between old and new habitus that results from this conflict. This phenomenon creates a sense of liminality and epistemic tension for students who do not inhabit an elite status, and requires the development of culturally specific coping techniques to effectively manage these challenges.

Consequently, conflict arises not only from cultural differences but also from the interaction of precarious legal status, dependence on financial resources, and inequalities in resource access — all of which disproportionately affect individuals lower on the socio-educational continuum (Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2012). Thus, coping must be viewed as a social and embedded practice of tactical agency (Harris et al., 2018) and varies across the student population. The fundamental issue is how to understand the dialectic relationship between *community* (formed across borders from different positions), *conflict* (originating from an asymmetrical position within knowledge migration systems), and *coping* (as differentiated according to cultural knowledge).

To summarize, this research explores how the global education hierarchy repeats itself in our daily lives through its emphasis on the stratification of knowledge migration. The heterogeneous experiences of Filipino international students studying in Hungary show that the global structure of knowledge migration is not a linear or uniform upward journey, but rather a contested place where different pathways develop through ongoing negotiations of

structural barriers and subjective experiences as a part of their migration process (see Rizvi 2020; Yeoh & Ramdas 2014).

1.3 Research Aim and Questions

1.3.1 Aim of the Study

Guided by sociological and anthropological perspectives on transnationalism, knowledge migration, and international student mobility, this study aims to explore the student-life stories and lived experiences of Filipino international students in Hungary.

The objective of this study is to understand how students are making their way through the motivations of mobility, developing transnational lives, forming communities, experiencing conflict, and coping with their realities within the context of higher education's asymmetries globally. The study is grounded in the notion of knowledge migration, which can be viewed as either the act of migrating students in order to amass cultural capital or as being a conduit for education to contribute to future labor mobility (see Findlay, 2011; Findlay et al., 2012; King & Raghuram, 2013). This investigation adopts a critical perspective in engaging with current hegemonic discourses that classify all international students as a singular group of "migratory elite" (see Murphy-Lejeune, 2003). By employing the work of Pásztor (2015), this study seeks to challenge the perception that international students are all members of an elite category and instead considers that international students are dispersed across a continuum exhibiting various unequal socio-economic, cultural, and institutional attributes.

1.3.2 Main Research Questions

RQ1. How do Filipino international students in Hungary experience international student mobility and knowledge migration?

- **RQ1a.** How do Filipino international students narrate their motivations for studying abroad, particularly in relation to aspirations for cultural capital, social mobility, and future work trajectories?
- **RQ1b.** How do they experience and make sense of their transnational lives, including simultaneous attachments to the Philippines and Hungary?

RQ2. How are Filipino student communities in Hungary formed, fragmented, and reconciled within the context of transnational mobility?

- **RQ2a.** What role does gossip play in shaping group boundaries, conflicts, exclusions, and reconciliation among Filipino student groups?

RQ3. How do Filipino international students cope with the challenges and contradictions of their transnational experiences in Hungary?

- **RQ3a.** How do students navigate academic pressures, language barriers, cultural differences, material precarity, and emotional distance from home?
- **RQ3b.** What individual and collective strategies do they develop to sustain their academic and social lives abroad?

1.3.3 Conceptual Alignment with the Problem Definition

The research questions developed in this study directly relate to the research problem identified in this study; the difference between the ideal great narratives of international student mobility and elite academic migration and the lived experiences of Filipino international students as they navigate their community, face conflict, and deal with coping mechanisms in a Central/Eastern European context. These questions are focused on the lived experiences and social interactions of the individuals as well as the day-to-day activities they engage in; hence, they are compatible with the qualitative, phenomenological-narrative methodology, which is most appropriate for exploring the complex realities of knowledge migration in a manner that is not limited to economic or success-oriented criteria.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF THE STUDY — *THE TRAIN WAITS*

The train does not simply leave one station for another; it waits, it exists simultaneously on multiple networks—connected to the signals of home and the switches of the host country. The study is likened to a train: how the carriages are coupled to rails both here and there, carrying the weight of ‘dual belonging’, and how conflict often arises at the junctions where these systems meet—theoretical frameworks let us see this simultaneity.

2.1 Sociology and Anthropology in Studying Transnational Student Mobility

This study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical approach that deliberately integrates sociological and anthropological perspectives to critically examine the transnational experiences of Filipino international students in Hungary. This study adopts this approach because existing dominant analyses of international student mobility (ISM) have largely been based on economic, policy-oriented, or celebratory narratives as opposed to examining the uneven power relations and lived struggles that exist within the framework of academic migration from South-to-North. Drawing from sociology and anthropology, this research goes beyond merely documenting mobility at a surface level and instead interrogates both the structural conditions that govern student trajectories, as well as the subjective, embodied experiences through which individuals experience and negotiate these structural conditions.

The theoretical soundness of this interdisciplinary stance is well established in student transnational migration. Morawska (2003) proposes that effective interdisciplinary research regarding transnational migration relies on a shared conceptual language among disciplines rather than conducting separate or disconnected analyses; therefore, sociological theories such as Gargano’s (2009) concept of transnational social fields and Xu’s (2023) research on identities created through cross-border movements, may provide insights into the ways that students can operate within multiple localities, institutions and societies simultaneously, enabling us to see that identities do not simply move across borders but rather, identities are reconstructed in relation to, and as part of, overlapping fields of power, belonging and expectation.

However, despite strong theoretical foundations, direct empirical research on Filipino international students in Hungary remains conspicuously absent. The existing body of literature has provided a limited view and indirect insight into international student experiences in

Hungary. Eugenio et al. (2025) reported on the resilience of Filipino tertiary students in Southeast Asia, who experienced transformative learning through institutional and financial difficulties. However, their findings only apply to this specific area of the world, and in particular, there are other types of international students, such as those who travel from South to Europe, about whom little is known in terms of transformative learning experiences. Suchi (2025) researched Bangladeshi student migrants studying in Hungary, and while they reported that financial uncertainty and cultural dislocation are among the challenges faced by these international students, they did not consider the distinctive historical, linguistic, and postcolonial characteristics of Filipinos. Gebregergis and Csukonyi (2025) performed a much larger and more quantitative study on 447 international students in Hungary and found that sociocultural adaptation is the strongest predictor of psychological well-being for international students; however, generalizing findings from this study could risk the elimination of differences in experiences between students from different countries, cultures, and social classes. As such, these prior studies support the relevance of Hungary as the host context for this study and highlight how this study seeks to fill a significant analytical gap.

The necessity of interdisciplinarity becomes clearer when considering the distinct but complementary strengths of sociology and anthropology. One way of analyzing the structure and inequalities in education on a global scale, including the relationship between systems of mobility and those associated with education, is through sociological frameworks. Gargano (2009) identifies transnational social fields as explaining how the identity of students is formed in multiple institutions and countries; Pásztor (2023) uses Bourdieu's field theory to demonstrate how both states and institutions contribute to educational inequality, and Schiller and Salazar (2013) demonstrate the differential value of individuals in their system of mobility by outlining the different regimes of mobility in terms of value. These three approaches together position the mobility of students within the larger structures of power that exist within the global stratification system.

Anthropological perspectives, by contrast, center on lived experience, cultural meaning-making, and emotional labor. Mobility may be thought of as imagined and as experienced; a process that includes aspirations, uncertainty, and affect (see Salazar & Smart, 2011). Bartlett et al. (2015) show how migration and education are intertwined in everyday life practices, and Yang (2018) stresses the necessity of "on-the-ground" accounts in order to illustrate the lived experiences of disadvantaged and marginalized migrants. These studies illustrate aspects of

mobility such as loneliness, belongingness, moral obligation, and cultural negotiation that can not be adequately expressed by structural analysis alone.

Despite their complementary potential, most existing studies treat these disciplinary approaches as parallel rather than integrated. Only Lero (2023) connects sociological issues with power hierarchy and anthropological attention on emotions and cultural practices to develop a single framework that addresses both structural constraint and subjective experience at once. This relative lack of purposeful synthesis indicates that ISM research has little in the way of methodological synthesis in its use of interdisciplinary and/or cross-disciplinary methods, and that interdisciplinarity is generally assumed rather than methodologically constructed.

Such integration is especially crucial for examining South-to-North knowledge migration. As related to Rizvi (2020) and Yeoh and Ramdas (2014), the sending countries in the Global South and the European host institution have significant differences in how they view mobility, with both the opportunity to experience mobility and the use of exclusionary logics governing mobility. Using an interdisciplinary approach to analysis allows us to make our analysis between macro (e.g., visa regimes, conditional scholarships, and academic marketisation) and micro (e.g., identity, aspiration, and survival) levels when working with both groups.

Empirical studies that bridge sociology and anthropology further demonstrate the practical necessity of this approach. As illustrated in Eiras and Huijser (2021), who incorporate sociological assessments of transnational embeddedness with anthropological definitions of liminality and reflexivity, intensive re-imagining of cross-border interactions transforms individuals' self-perceptions and their identities. Likewise, Baldassar and Merla (2014), in examining transnational kinship assemblages, show that migration alters family dynamics via both structural limitations (i.e., legal statuses and remittances) and interpretation practices (i.e., emotional care through digital rituals). The findings from both articles' analyses demonstrate that multidisciplinary analyses are not simply desirable on a theoretical level but empirically necessary in order to appreciate the complexities of transnational existence.

The major contribution of this multidisciplinary integration is that it challenges simplified conceptualizations of international student mobility. Linear representations of studying abroad frequently appear in policy rhetoric, recruitment brochures, and some media accounts that frame education abroad as an unproblematic means to opportunity focused on individual achievement, intercultural development, and economic mobility rather than structural

limitation, hierarchy, and contestation. Recent works have started to critique and nuance these claims (see, e.g., Pásztor, 2015; 2023). Utilizing both sociological critiques of marketization and neoliberalism within the realm of higher education (see Rizvi, 2020) and anthropological accounts of everyday experiences (see Conradson & Latham, 2005), this approach highlights political mobilities as being shaped by power, precarity, resilience, and stratification; issues which aren't often addressed traditionally in policy documents that discuss these topics. However, this approach comes with its own potential drawbacks; much of the foundational literature is Western or Anglophone-centric (the literature is primarily located within either Western democracies or English-speaking countries), which creates a question regarding its potential applicability to Central European countries such as Hungary due to different geopolitical histories and academic systems within those regions.

Limitations within the related studies further justify the present research. Pustułka and Ślusarczyk's (2016) research into the experiences of Polish migrations presents an opportunity to gain a deep emic insight into individual narratives of Polish migrants. Conversely, Wu et al. (2015), which employs a macro-level analysis of emergence, provides an ability to understand macro-level structural characteristics presenting challenges to ISM; this reflects the lack of available data on applicable economic precariousness and psychological stress that students from the Global South experience in the Western host country in which they are located. These methodological and contextual gaps reflect the importance of further developing both grounded and contextually sensitive research in order to actively explore interdisciplinary research methodologies in new locations where these methodologies have typically not been used.

The present research utilizes an interdisciplinary approach as a framework and justification for the analysis. It is linked directly to the central research question, which is how to bridge the idealized narratives of elite academic mobility with the actual experience of struggles within the context of the Filipino international student population in Hungary. The sociological lens looks at the structural impediments to obtaining scholarships, work visas, and participating in a globalized academic hierarchy, while the anthropological lens examines how students experience, articulate, and deal with these difficulties on a daily basis. By examining these two areas of inquiry, this study provides a complete understanding of the systemic and structural constraints that impact the relationship between the formation of communities, conflict, and coping mechanisms within asymmetric transnational fields.

2.2 Sociological Foundations: Structure, Power, and Stratified Mobility

2.2.1 Transnational Social Fields and Simultaneity

The concept of transnational social fields, developed by Levitt and Schiller (2004), provides a foundational sociological framework for analyzing migration and mobility beyond the bounded logic of the nation-state. Instead of viewing migration as a one-way trip between where you live now and where you will move to, this view sees migrants and people on the move as located inside multiple geographical areas that are connected together across borders through networks of social relationships, actions, and resources. One of the theoretical contributions of this framework is to differentiate between “ways of being”—the everyday routine or practical experiences of engaging in social relationships across international borders; and “ways of belonging”—the reflexive, identity-based expressions of connectedness and affiliation. Both of these concepts emphasize simultaneity, meaning that individuals are engaged socially, emotionally, and in an institutionally based way in more than one country concurrently.

This framework is particularly well-suited to the study of international students, whose lives are inherently structured by simultaneity. Generally, there is not a clean break from the home country for the student when they have entered into mobility; there are often familial expectations, financial obligations, and symbolic connections with family that are often held onto by the student while they are trying to assimilate into the host academic and social fields. Therefore, the perspective of transnational social fields allows for an analysis of the international student as an actor who has access to many overlapping spaces, rather than as a limited sojourner who is experiencing linear forms of adjustment or assimilation.

The theoretical foundations of this perspective are firmly established. Levitt and Schiller (2004) expand on Schiller et al.'s (1992) work on transnationalism as a set of processes linking settlements with their societies of origin through sustained social practices. Tsuda (2012) provides further refinement of this dimension by identifying multiple, dynamic configurations of engagement between home and host countries that may be fluid over time and across life-cycle stages. Collectively, these developments challenge methodological nationalism and assimilationist models, which assume that migrants must complete an orderly and progressive withdrawal from one context before developing a full sense of belonging in another.

The application of transnational social fields to international student mobility is also supported by a growing body of empirical and conceptual research. Gargano (2009) specifically applies this theoretical framework to comprehend how international learners cope with creating their

own identity, sense of belonging, and their aspirations through multiple experiences and interactions. This theory does not view the identity of a student in transition as incomplete; rather, it views the multiplicity that is experienced throughout the mobile life cycle as establishing a condition for establishing relationships with multiple cultures. Similarly, the ethnographic research conducted by Valentin (2017) on Nepali nationals studying in Denmark illustrates how these learners were capable of maintaining active, transnational networks while pursuing a sense of integration into their host country. The research provided evidence that engaging in these transnational networks and adapting to a host country were not incompatible experiences. Tyne and Ruspini (2021) also argue that this theoretical framework concerning transnational social fields illustrates how the transnational learning experiences of students studying abroad can transform a student's social imaginary and relationship to other cultures around the world.

While some of the most cited empirical work using this framework focuses on migrant populations rather than students per se, these studies remain analytically instructive. Erdal's (2020) multiscale experiences further the theorization of interactions of migrant transnationalism and integration by foregrounding simultaneity as integral to experiences of interconnected geographies, spheres, and temporalities of transnational social fields. Such simultaneity may be both challenging and productive for individuals as members of societies 'here' and 'there' (p. 14). These results call into question zero-sum assumptions regarding transnationalism while demonstrating the existence of "ways of being" that occur simultaneously. In addition, Nowicka's (2020) qualitative research with Polish migrants living in the UK shows how nationalism and "deep stories" continue to exist within transnational spaces. The presence of nationalism produces an ongoing sense of belonging through the use of ambiguous boundaries to create a sense of community, but at the same time it excludes others. Although neither study is focused on students, the findings relate directly to student mobility contexts in terms of dual embeddedness and identity negotiation.

The strengths of the transnational social fields' perspective are substantial. This framework dismantles methodological nationalism (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002) and provides a relational and networked understanding of mobility which reflects realities of how people move today on a global level. This framework is particularly applicable to the study of fragile and shifting communities in mobile populations because it reflects the lived complexity of fulfilling obligations, maintaining identities, and working towards the achievement of aspirations across borders, in relation to the concept of simultaneity. Based on the focus of research with respect

to divided loyalties, uneven integration, and disputed belonging, this framework serves as a sound basis from which to conduct analysis.

At the same time, scholarship has increasingly identified important limitations. Critiques cite the tendency of some transnationalism literature to overly celebrate interconnectivity (connections between people in different countries) to create a picture that assumes all connections give individuals agency, with minimal consideration given to unequal power relationships that limit access to mobility and access to resources. For example, Yeoh and Collins (2022) suggest that the excessive amount of attention given to interconnectivity can obscure the importance of place, locality, and constraints; Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004) point out how much state policy (law), visa regimes, and institutional control restrict opportunities for transnational engagement. Additionally, without other analytical lenses, the framework may not adequately theorize on embodiment, emotional labor, and psychological strain, which are all important aspects of how student migrants experience transnationalism.

The empirical literature applying this perspective also reveals methodological constraints. Many of the supporting studies referenced are primarily composed of qualitative interviews. These yield a wealth of contextualized knowledge, but their applicability across broader areas of determination is limited. For example, studies conducted by Erdal (2020) and Nowicka (2020) were both conducted in specific geographic areas with unique demographics, which may affect their ability to translate to migrations from countries outside Europe or to populations residing outside of Europe within Central and Eastern European regions, such as Hungary, which is a focus of this dissertation. This highlights the necessity of refining and testing the concept of transnational social fields through research that is both contextually based and designed to investigate underrepresented populations, such as Filipinos.

In the present study, the transnational social fields perspective plays a central analytical role. The theoretical framework is important in analyzing **RQ1a** (How do they experience and make sense of their transnational lives, including their simultaneous attachments to both the Philippines and Hungary?), as it focuses on how Filipino student-scholars perceive and relate their experiences of their simultaneous attachments to both the Philippines and Hungary. It also provides a context for **RQ2** (How are Filipino student communities in Hungary formed, fragmented, and reconciled within a transnational mobility context?) by illustrating that Filipino student communities tend to be fluid, fragmented, and frequently in states of tension due to competing loyalties, varying rates of integration, and access to resources. Furthermore,

this conceptualizes transnational ties as sources of both stress and benefits, thereby supporting analysis of coping strategy outcomes and identity construction within both asymmetric social and academic systems. Ultimately, the framework allows for linking macro-global hierarchies with micro-daily practices, and for this reason, is critical for understanding how power, identification, and community are created and challenged in the broader context of Hungarian higher education.

2.2.2 Bourdieusian Framework: Habitus, Capital, and Social Fields

Transnational social fields highlight the idea that people engage with multiple locations simultaneously and notice how the governance of movement between these locations tends to be unequal. While this perspective provides insight into the reasons for cross-border movement and connection, it does not adequately account for how inequalities are embodied, internalized, and reproduced when travelling internationally for education. To fill this gap, the present study uses Pierre Bourdieu's theories regarding habitus, capital, and social fields as an additional sociological approach to exploring the stratification experienced by individuals who travel internationally for academic purposes.

Bourdieu defines the concept of habitus as an enduring foundation of dispositions developed from early socialization during an individual's life, affecting the ways in which an individual perceives, evaluates, and acts in the world. Capital refers to the economic, cultural, social, and symbolic resources that an individual has acquired and uses, while social fields are the structured arenas of competition between agents, wherein they compete to gain recognition and legitimacy and to gain an advantage over other agents. When applied to international student mobility, this theoretical model helps to uncover the stratified nature of educational migration, demonstrating that educational migration is not a neutral way to achieve social mobility or an automatic equalizing of class distinctions, but that pre-existing class inequalities are often transmitted and transformed, as well as reproduced across international borders. Therefore, this contests claims (common in neoliberal policy discourse and found sometimes in institutional promotional materials) that international education levels the playing field. By pushing narratives of international student mobility as a means to grow human capital and economies and enhance cross-cultural understanding, organizations like the OECD and UNESCO have often presented participation while downplaying stratification among the mobile. Claims about stratification have often existed in scholarly works about the sociology of education focusing on within-institutional inequalities rather than across them (see, e.g., Brooks & Waters, 2010; Pasztor, 2015; Rizvi, 2020). Yet narratives of international education continue to exist in policy

talk in “universalizing” ways. Here, I dialogue with those policy narratives and draw from scholarly works that contest economistic narratives of mobility.

The relevance of Bourdieusian theory to international student mobility is strongly supported in the literature. According to Carlson et al. (2025), Bourdieusian class analysis has emerged as one of the leading theoretical perspectives within ISM research due to its ability to explain the mechanisms of inequality that are not always detectable through empirical analysis. Empirical literature illustrates that the distributional consequences of access to mobility, convertibility of credentials, and educational capital valuation are unevenly distributed throughout the global ISM field. For example, Yang (2022) illustrates how countries' positions in global educational hierarchies are influenced by their proportional possession of economic, human, and symbolic capitals, with China occupying a semi-peripheral location whereby its level of outward mobility is reflective both of aspirations and structural constraints. Similarly, Zhang (2023) finds that the mobility capacity of individuals serves as a mechanism by which intergenerational capital is transmitted, providing "hypermobile" middle-class families with opportunities to pursue elite pathways to education while others do not.

Similarly, the existing body of literature has added complexity to the conventional reading of Bourdieu's theory as one of purely mechanical class reproduction. Evidence from Soong et al. (2018) states that some international students have been able to create a transnational habitus through their experiences abroad and to hold on to belief systems that motivate them and demonstrate their effort to improve themselves, even when they have been unable to convert their social capital into institutionally recognized credentials in the host country. Tran (2016) has provided a reframed understanding of mobility as a 'becoming' process in which an emphasis is placed upon transformation and reflexivity as well as ethical self-formation, rather than as simplistic mechanical reproduction of a class position. Therefore, Bourdieusian concepts and principles are most helpful analytically when they are used to examine inequality and the notion of agency and to represent both constraints and possibilities.

Empirical research further validates the applicability of Bourdieu's framework to student mobility by demonstrating how capital conversion is context-dependent and uneven. Brooks and Waters (2010) establish that the status of international credentials is inconsistent worldwide and across national or institutional hierarchies, which indicates that international educational credential holders will have different levels of status attributed to their international education. Similarly, Tran (2016) describes how students' initial status (shaped by class, nation, and

institutional status) influences the return on their mobility due to an impact on their academic experiences. The work of Lehmann (2007) goes one step further by pointing out that international students also experience a "clash between an old and a newly developing habitus" in their school setting; that is, the educational experience they had prior to entering the new classroom environment may devalue their previous experiences; therefore, the experience may result in them dropping out of the university. These situations identify that, in addition to structural forms of inequality, one's lived experiences of being treated differently due to their educational experience are also types of inequality that are experienced daily in a higher education environment.

More recent work has advanced the framework by integrating Bourdieu with mobility and migration governance. In this study, Mulvey (2022) investigates how habitus and capital interact with visa systems, the racialized labor market, and institutional gatekeeping, and argues that the mobility trajectory of students is determined by both the interaction of the internalized dispositions that students possess and the external constraints within which they operate. Similarly, Pásztor (2015) stresses that decisions regarding remaining in the UK or returning home for Ph.D. students 'will often hinge on the nature of the funding received by international students, as most government-funded students are obliged to return home upon completing their Ph.D. studies' (p. 841). These studies provide further evidence for the claim that habitus operates in fields that are shaped by transnational power relations, a claim that complements the previously discussed regimes of mobility framework.

The primary strength of the Bourdieusian framework lies in its capacity to bridge micro-level practices and macro-level structures. It provides an accurate way to understand the means by which inequality based on class, gender, and race is reproduced in so-called meritocratic global education systems. According to Joseph (2020), Bourdieu's research has made an "unparalleled contribution" to resolving the long-standing conflict between agency and structural constraint, while Capdevielle (2011) sees habitus as a way to bridge the gap between the objectivist and subjectivist perspectives.

Nonetheless, the framework is not without limitations. A constant critique has been the tendency of using structural determinism, where many interpretations place greater emphasis on how habitus operates in a pre-reflexive manner. Peters (2013) has identified a form of neo-objectivism that downplays the role of reflexive consciousness, while Adams (2006) and Yang (2014) have argued that the framework has difficulty anticipating the changing-and-

transforming nature of the world. In response, various researchers have proposed adding to, as opposed to abandoning, this theoretical framework. For instance, Elder-Vass (2007) integrates Bourdieu with Archer's reflexivity theory; Decoteau (2016) shows how habitus allows individuals to reflect and transform via exposure to multiple-at-once intersecting fields. These interventions demonstrate how an integrative application of Bourdieu can also account for the role of agency, adaptability, and strategic negotiation.

The limitations of existing empirical studies further justify a context-sensitive application of this framework. The integration of Bourdieusian theory and mobility regimes by Mulvey (2022) demonstrates considerable progress in this area, but as this study is focused on the experiences of African international students studying in China, it will require recalibration when applied to Filipino international students in Hungary due to the differences in the EU migration regime, dependency on scholarships, and cultural expectations.

In the present study, the Bourdieusian framework assumes a central analytical position alongside the concepts of transnational social fields and mobility regimes. In terms of **RQ1a** (motives for studying abroad as it relates to future pursuits and obtaining capital for future purposes), international students strategically plan international mobility by assessing how studying abroad will allow them to gain and exchange capital. These aspirations are dependent upon many factors, including (but not limited to) a student's socio-economic background and educational background, prior learning experience, and their place or status in the institution(s)/countries they studied in; i.e., the Philippines and Hungary.

With respect to **RQ2** (community formation, fragmentation, and reconciliation), the framework explains how the dynamics of groups are related to their differing levels of capital and how they differ in terms of their habitus. For example, when comparing one Filipino to another, their linguistic competency, academic background, money, and previous international living experience will affect the way they are viewed by others (i.e., recognition) and the status that they occupy within Filipino networks as well as within the overall academic community in Hungary. Therefore, community cohesion or division is a reflection of structured inequalities rather than simply an issue of individual relationship problems.

Finally, for **RQ3** (coping and adaptive practices in transnational life), Resilience is being redefined as tactical agency in a framework defined by stratified and structured contexts rather than an inherent psychological trait. There are strategies available to cope with several aspects of academic pressure, such as bureaucratic constraints or symbolic marginalization; these

strategies are viewed as practices that have evolved from the specific demands within a given field (or area of study). In this framework, using Bourdieu's theory, Filipino ISM can be seen as a complex and multifaceted process that includes an essential level of negotiation through which individuals embody, navigate, and, at times, challenge the existing global educational hierarchies through their daily participation in both local and transnational contexts.

2.2.3 Habitus, Capital, and the Unequal Terrain of Transnational Student Mobility

Stratified knowledge migration reframes international student mobility not as a seamless elite trajectory but as a differentiated and contested process structured by unequal distributions of capital and the durable dispositions of habitus. This approach to understanding the role of student mobility does not assume that being mobile equates to being cosmopolitan or moving up in social class. Instead, it describes how students are mobile across international borders or country borders (as regions) with differing resources, expectations, and varying capacities to convert those resources into other forms of capital. Based on Bourdieu's theory of practice, mobility is understood to be a field where there is competition for actors to add, validate, and convert cultural, social, and economic capital in a system shaped by global structures of power. A singular pathway of "global talent circulation" may present as a unified whole but, in reality, has multiple layers of stratification that stem from previously established benefits or resources, and structural limitations that will lead actors to achieve different outcomes (see Pásztor, 2015; Mulvey, 2022).

Pásztor's (2015) study of international doctoral students in an elite British university disrupts the image of the "migratory elite" by demonstrating that international students occupy unequal positions along a socio-economic continuum. The habitus of students is shaped by their class and national background and has a large bearing on how they interpret, represent and navigate in the academic space. Privileged students are usually an embodiment of cultural capital as defined by Western academic standards (e.g. fluency in English, understanding of critique and debate, willingness to approach faculty, and exposure to international contexts). This embodied capital aids privileged students in achieving and converting new forms of capital; for example, by earning academic credentials and establishing professional networks. Students who come from less privilege backgrounds but experience space (higher education institutions) are too often marked by a mismatch between their habitus (the cultural attributes, choices and behaviors from childhood) as compared to the habitus of the world they now find themselves in, resulting in their being able to delay recognition of who they are and create negative feelings associated with not being equal to peers or feeling they have been symbolically marginalized.

This means that even though mobility reconstructs previously established inequities in a new transnational context, when viewed in relation to the same existing inequities, it creates no differences to the previously existing inequities.

Mulvey (2022) analyses the concept of student mobility in relation to global mobility regimes and transnational capital flows. He uses the example of African students in China to illustrate that post-graduation opportunities depend on how well students can convert the capital they gained abroad into resources within racialized and restricted global systems. On Western context, depending on their strategies for onward mobility to Europe or North America, return entrepreneurship, or local employment, students will face different levels of access to economic resources, family networks, and experience in international fields. Students with higher levels of existing capital will be able to navigate visa restrictions, credential recognition, and discriminatory labor markets. Other students will have their hopes of success diminished even though they have similar educational credentials. As a result, stratified knowledge migration cannot be limited to a simple stay/return dichotomy; rather, it demonstrates how global inequality is reproduced through migration policies and the structure of labor markets.

The study investigates the effects of globalization on international students' mobility through three distinct but interrelated types of research questions. **RQ1** focuses on the lived experiences of Filipino international students, their motivations to study abroad, and their attachments to both their homes in the Philippines and their new homes in Hungary. **RQ2** discusses how a sense of community is developed and challenged. This includes exploring how the transnational student community uses gossip as a tool to negotiate status; members of the community do not simply create an equal space, but will use gossip as a way to build relationships and find ways to reconcile themselves with members of the community who have higher or lower levels of cultural capital than themselves. Finally, **RQ3** develops the idea that coping is a social process. The research questions outlined above demonstrate an important gap in the literature: that students have aspirations, and that such aspirations are unable to develop in an equitable way within the context of their global mobility. Thus, through these three research questions, it becomes evident that the idealized story of seamless, borderless mobility for international students simply does not exist; rather, this study provides insight into the actual lived experiences of Filipino international students and the ways in which their aspirations, inequality, their national identity, and their practices of adapting to new environments unfold in asymmetric transnational fields.

2.2.4 Agency, Resistance, and Power in Mobility

Tran and Vu (2018) developed the concept of agency in relation to mobility, providing a critical sociological corrective to overly structural and individualistic explanations of international student mobility (ISM). Students are viewed as more than the passive subjects of global inequalities or as rational, self-directed actors. The basis of this idea is a reconceptualization of agency to include nonlinear, relational, and contextual constraints. Agency arises through struggle and compromise as well as complicity and collective contestation within an unequal power structure composed of migration regimes, racialized hierarchies in academia, and the devaluation of credentials.

This reconceptualization is particularly relevant to ISM because it shifts analytical attention toward how students actively negotiate constraints rather than merely respond to opportunities. Tran and Vu (2018) conducted an important study based on interviews with 105 international students in Australia. Their findings suggest that international students demonstrate agency through four different forms: (1) agency for becoming; (2) needs-responsive agency; (3) agency as struggle and resistance; and (4) collective agency for contestation. In addition to overtly resisting without physically standing up against dominant forms of authority (e.g., by engaging in quiet during class or using their peers to help them adjust), international students demonstrate agency by engaging in more subtle forms of resistance (e.g., by following visa requirements even though they do not agree with them). Thus, Tran and Vu's (2018) empirical work has advanced an understanding of agency by establishing that it is socially embedded and relational rather than simply individual.

Subsequent empirical applications have affirmed the framework's relevance beyond Anglophone host countries. Xu (2023) used the concept with African students in China, while Hou (2024) looked at international graduate students of color during the COVID-19 pandemic, showing that the agency of moving operates in many different cultures and countries. Using an ethnographic approach, Yang (2018) worked with Indian medical students studying in China and showed how being complicit or compromising can be agentic reactions to an unwelcoming environment. Together, these studies provide a strong theoretical basis for the framework, but the empirical data are limited to particular groups of international students in certain parts of the world, and quantitative studies of the agency of moving in different ISM contexts are needed.

The agency's strength in mobility is evident through the diverse depiction of student power. The agency maintains a critique of neoliberal success narratives (i.e., "the successful student") which generally exaggerate individual resilience while at the same time rejecting portrayals of students as powerless victims. In linking macro-level (structural) constraints with micro-level (individual) practices, this agency creates a framework that presents how agency develops in response to power and does not exist independent of power. The primary limitation to the agency's approach is the predominance of empirical data from Anglophone countries (e.g., Australia and the United Kingdom) where significant differences exist in terms of immigration systems, academic cultures and student support systems when compared to those of Central and Eastern Europe.

The study limitations highlight that modifications to the original theories are necessary for use within their specific context. For example, in addition to the state-sponsored *Stipendium Hungaricum* scholarship programme, the existing literature on international students studying in Hungary has documented their language barriers, difficulties adjusting to cultural differences, and economic constraints (Tompos, 2019; Pabingwit, 2025; Suchi, 2025) but has rarely provided insight into how international students exert their agency in relation to these identified constraints. That said, other research has provided related indirect support for this theory. For example, Arendas et al. (2023) examined the experiences of migrant youth in Poland and Hungary and found that these individuals actively develop adaptive strategies, despite having limited support from the state and experiencing little support from a limited macro-constraint to their agency. These results are consistent with the macro-constraint vs. micro-agency dynamic present within the agency in mobility framework.

Despite its explanatory power, the literature reveals gaps. Tran and Vu's (2018) typology can also broaden our understanding of the cultural and narrative ways students view compromise, resistance, and belonging. Conversely, Moskal et al.'s (2017) longitudinal study of Asian graduate students in the UK highlights barriers and networked agency after graduation, but does not provide much detail about student recommendations on how to navigate both academically and socially throughout their study period. The gaps mentioned are particularly important in understanding how scholarship students are integrated into non-Anglophone, government-managed mobility systems.

Going back to the research questions posited in this study, Mobility is an analytical thread that connects all investigations. **(RQ1, RQ1a, RQ1b)** The pursuit of study abroad will be viewed

as more than just an economic rationality; It will be looked at as an aspirational project to accumulate capital, move upwards in life, and develop oneself into the future. The imagined trajectory of students and their development of connections to both the Philippines and Hungary will be interpreted as purposive actions within structural limitations. Therefore, mobility will be analyzed as a space of continuously interconnecting aspirations and barriers.

The analysis of Filipino student communities also follows the initial viewpoint. In regard to **RQ2** and **RQ2a** (community creation, division, and gossip as boundary setting), collective existence is seen as the outcome of relational and negotiated power within a transnational field organized hierarchically. Simply having the same nationality does not, by itself, create unity; rather, the creation of sympathetic, excluded, and reconciled groups occurs through the ongoing relationships created by various levels of access to supportive resources (capital) and symbolic acknowledgement.

Finally, for **RQ3** (coping and socially embedded adaptive strategies), everyday practices are framed as tactical responses to structured pressures. The various ways students have coped with their academic workload, challenges associated with linguistics, financial instability, bureaucratic regulation, and emotional distance from home are considered as situated enactments of agency, rather than only adjusting. By situating these processes within the context of Hungarian state-sponsored scholarships, the research illustrates how students exercise agency on a continual basis across three broad areas of motivation, community dynamics, and coping strategies to bring together all of the research questions within one cohesive analytical framework.

2.3 Anthropological Foundations: Embodiment, Liminality, and Meaning

2.3.1 Liminality and the Betwixt-and-Between State

Van Gennep (2022) defined liminality (transition) as a betwixt-and-between area that has been separated from an existing stable social place but has not yet been included in the next one (regarding Turner (2017)). During this liminal phase, there is uncertainty and ambiguity (identity is suspended), and the individual may experience both solidarity (*communitas*) and conflict. Liminal (betwixt-and-between) was originally used to explain ritual transitions, but it has been used extensively in the migration and mobility literature because the term's ability to express long-term transition (waiting) and lack of long-term belonging is appreciated.

Liminality has become an increasingly useful framework for examining the state of the perpetual foreign student, or an individual who is physically mobile, socially suspended,

academically part of the host nation but culturally marginal, and temporally directed toward a future that is still conditional. While short-term study abroad experiences typically involve discrete transition periods, many students studying internationally experience extended periods of uncertainty, as they are neither completely assimilated in a host country nor entirely anchored to the host country. Given that these international students are experiencing liminitis (liminality), this condition enables researchers to better understand student mobility as an ongoing process as opposed to a series of separate transitions.

The notion of liminality might also be expanded through dialogue with the developmental psychology theory of emerging adulthood (see Arnett, 2000). Emerging adulthood refers to the period of our lives between ages 18-29 during which we explore our identities, experience instability, are self-oriented, feel in-between, and open to possibilities. Most international students find themselves in this stage of development, which conceptually echoes many of liminality's ideas surrounding transition and being "betwixt- and between." Emerging adulthood, however, must be applied with caution to Filipino students. Expectations of family obligation, work trajectory, and marriage are structured differently within the Philippine setting, potentially producing different life development schemes compared to their Western counterparts.

Empirical evidence has demonstrated that liminality is an effective conceptual tool for exploring the lived experiences of both migrant and student populations in a qualitative and phenomenological manner. Qualitative studies on migrant communities have made use of liminality as a theoretical lens to explain themes of social invisibility, temporal suspension, and negotiating identity. In the context of student mobility, liminality has been used to illustrate the overall ambiguity of emotions and relationships throughout the experience of a sojourn; thus, liminality provides a framework for thinking about the process of negotiating one's insider/outsider status as an international student from the initial experience of culture shock through to the continual process of negotiating one's insider/outsider status. Latham and Conradson's (2005) exploration of transnational migrants' emplacement shows how liminality is not an abstract idea but rather is experienced every day through locations, routines, and emotional embodiments that are visceral in nature, and these same insights will help inform understandings of international students who have to navigate their way through classrooms, dormitories, and bureaucracy.

A growing body of student-focused empirical studies reinforces this applicability. Simpson et al. (2010) examined how the concept of liminality could illustrate the unsettling and creative qualities of international education, as it pertains to their renegotiation of identity and aspiration. They conducted their study with Chinese MBA students as the focus of the research. Palmer et al. (2009) applied the framework of liminality to the concept of first-year undergraduate students transitioning into college, noting their experiences of "in-between-ness" and the precarious nature of belonging. Khoshnevis (2017) took the concept of liminality and expanded it to airport thresholds, highlighting that the act of mobility can be ritualized as a place of emotional ambiguity. Using liminality as a framework for analysis, Raghuram et al. (2024) conducted a major qualitative study of distance education students in Africa, and subsequently identified how liminality can be applied to the experience of immobility, epistemic marginalization, and suspended futures.

Despite this strong qualitative support, the literature also reveals clear limitations. The majority of research conducted on liminality is qualitative, experiential, and interpretive; however, there are a small number of quantitative or comparative empirical studies that have been conducted. A systematic review by Söderlund and Borg (2018) references 61 liminality-themed studies from the fields of management and organizational studies, points out the popularity of liminality, yet is critical of the concept's imprecision regarding temporal reference, depth of ritual, and the lack of rigor in terms of comparison. The methodology employed globally for liminality raises questions regarding liminality's experiential validity; however, more importantly, they raise concerns regarding liminality's analytic specificity and generalizability.

Theoretically, liminality's greatest strength—its metaphorical and explanatory power—also constitutes its primary weakness. The idea of liminality is well suited to represent the existential aspects of migration often ignored by structural theory: alienation, a prolonged waiting period, changing identity, psychological stress. However, if liminality is not carefully operationalized, it can easily become a general descriptor for any form of migration hardship. Marotta (2025) specifically cautions that migration scholars tend to reduce liminality's complexity in order to promote their own theories about migration; while Mäklsoo (2012) points out that the conceptual openness of liminality facilitates its use across disciplines but ultimately reduces the analytical clarity associated with liminality.

Another limitation of early liminality theory is the classical view of inflexible linear progression—that is, that there should be a point where the individual is no longer in a liminal

stage and is fully incorporated. In contemporary migration phenomena, this is not typically the case. For example, Ybema et al. (2011) make a well-articulated distinction between temporary and permanent liminality, wherein many mobile people are in a state of indefinite suspension. Tsoni (2016) discusses how many asylum seekers are in a condition of “permanent and portable liminality,” while Scott et al. (2022) present the concept of ambiguous liminality (i.e., when there are multiple pathways to the future, or those pathways are uncertain and incremental versus linear). These refinements are especially important for international students as their futures are often uncertain due to continual changes to visa regimes, labor markets, and recognition of their credentials.

Critically, liminality literature has also been challenged for insufficiently engaging with power and stratification. Regarding the universal experience of liminality (or ‘in-betweenness’), treating liminality as a universal experience runs the risk of failing to recognize that the distribution of uncertainty and suspension is not uniform; therefore, all individuals in liminal spaces do not experience equal degrees of precarity. Because of this, scholars have argued that the potential of liminality for analytical value is maximized when analyzed in conjunction with structural frameworks such as Bourdieu's framework of social capital for assessing who experiences longer-term, more restricted or costly forms of liminality.

Returning to the research questions for this study, liminality is used not as a stand-alone theory of explanation, but rather as a device to sensitize readers and to inform a broader analysis of structure and agency. It adds clarity to the transitional nature of an ‘in-between’ condition that shapes the lived experience of Filipino students in Hungary and directly responds to the core issue of this research study. With respect to **RQ1b** (transnational lived experience and meaning-making), liminality provides an additional analytic perspective for understanding students’ cross-border lives by drawing attention to students’ feelings of suspended belonging, emotional ambivalence, and continual reinvention of their identities with respect to both the Philippines and Hungary.

Concerning **RQ2** and **RQ2a** (community forming, fragmentation, and gossip as boundary work), liminality can be used as a tool to examine group interactions that take place in a common but differentially occupied transition. The groups share a condition of ‘in-betweenness’, but this does not mean that they will have developed solidarity. Interaction within the group is determined by stratification based on the different forms of capital and recognition

that they each bring to the group. Even as students occupy the same migratory status, their experiences of inclusion and exclusion vary.

When addressing **RQ3** (adaptive coping or social network strategies), liminality describes a strategy of adaptation through a culturally mediated networked framework of patterned behavior for managing prolonged and ongoing uncertainty. Thus, as described in the liminality section of this paper, daily routines (i.e., patterned behavior), symbolic acts of belonging (i.e., cultural mediators), peer support network(s), and narrative reframing (using language to create a sense of stability) or as serving to stabilize one's identity (the identity paradigm) in the face of a high degree of ambiguity. Within this study's analysis of liminality, by analyzing power and agency, the study's findings rest within the embodied (physical), emotional, and social inequities of transitive behavior; therefore, the significance of liminality cannot be limited to being metaphorical or universal.

2.3.2 Habitus Clash, Symbolic Violence, and Epistemic Tension

Viewing Bourdieu's sociological concept of habitus through an anthropological lens sharpens the focus on the embodied, sensory, and emotional dimensions of cultural mismatch in migration. The hybrid concept discussed here refers to the profound disorientation and subtle marginalization that an individual may experience as their traditional dispositions from their home context (such as their cultural practices and educational norms) are confronted by a new academic or social field's unspoken rules and norms. This "symbolic violence" does not imply some sort of overt coercive action against an individual, but instead focuses on how the individual's internalized feeling of inferiority is developed when an individual's own worldview and experiences are systematically devalued. This phenomenon is particularly pertinent to international students in the classroom and in social interactions.

Empirical studies powerfully demonstrate this concept in action. Lehmann (2007) has utilized this theoretical framing to undertake an investigation into the experiences of university students, whereby their experiences of marginalization and feelings of inadequacy, due to the university environment, even if their grades were good enough. Some anthropological ethnographies regarding migration also highlight the numerous daily and embodied examples of a clash of habitus that occur, including discomfort with new food and communication styles, as well as exhaustion resulting from continual code-switching.

The strength of this anthropological take on habitus is its commitment to thick description of lived experience. The transition from ideologically framed analyses of inequity to regard to the

everyday experiences of people allows one to understand how globally based systems of power asymmetry are manifest in both the body and psyche. An additional strength of this work is that it highlights micro-aggressions and provides clarity on hierarchical systems that may not be detected through quantitative research. However, an over-emphasis on the "clash" and "violence" of both the host culture and the damaged state of students may lead to a misrepresentation of the culture as homogeneous and of the student as being solely damaged by their experiences, thereby minimizing the narratives of hyperadaptation, hybridization, and creative synthesis that also exist as a result of participation within these contexts.

Although previous research has provided helpful insights, many studies tend to be descriptive in nature by focusing on the documentation of injury rather than exploring the process by which student resistance is created, or the co-creation and development of new hybrid dispositions. Therefore, future inquiries should attempt to provide a balanced perspective in order to attempt to describe the complete spectrum of meaning-making and agency within the context of student experiences with opposing forces.

The analytical utility of this notion for the current analysis lies in its ability to specify and explain how the phenomena referred to in the problem statement, i.e., "cultural clashes" and "epistemic marginalization", are produced. The framework provides specificity to the manner in which the tensions created by the misalignment of students' dispositions and those of the host academic field create day-to-day friction and encapsulated symbolic disadvantages, as opposed to leaving those tensions as general adjustment challenges.

In relation to **RQ1b** (meaning-making and transnational lived experiences), students' cross-border lives are analyzed through the lens of habitus-field disjuncture, highlighting how students' lived experience is influenced by their daily struggles with habitus-field disjuncture. Emotional strain, ambivalence, and changing senses of belonging are therefore seen as structured results of navigating through institutional norms that privilege certain forms of linguistics, epistemologies, and competencies.

In relation to **RQ2** and **RQ2a**, in terms of community formation, fragmentation, and gossip as boundary-making, the above frames how interpersonal tensions can occur within Filipino student groups (community). Differences in adaptability to academic expectations may result in unequal symbolic recognition, creating subtle changes in the hierarchy and generating conflict, exclusion, or reconciliation in the community.

RQ3 (adapting through social/relational networks and coping through relational networks) discusses the ways that students will develop patterned behaviors to cope with/mitigate the effects of symbolic violence. The means used to facilitate the reproduction of dignity and continuity within a context of structural violence can include collective solidarity, narrative reframing, strategic compliance, and selective withdrawal. Through demonstrating how power is expressed (embodied) and negotiated, and established an understanding of the way in which inequality is experienced and endured in relation to the Hungarian academic field through the use of this conceptual framework.

2.3.3 Narrative Anthropology and Everyday Meaning-Making

As defined by Bruner (1987) and Mattingly (1998), narrative anthropology states that individuals understand their existence and their experience through the medium of narrative. When individuals experience an interruption in their life, such as when migrating from one place to another, narrative provides an important means of establishing coherence, asserting agency, and negotiating identity. Thus, narrative is a process of making meaning, continually occurring in both formal life stories and informal conversation through the use of gossip and ritual, as well as through the use of modern communication devices or literacies. This perspective is fundamentally applicable for the study of mobile populations; migration forces mobile populations to constantly engage in interpretive work to bring together their past, present, and future across multiple cultural spaces.

Empirical research consistently affirms the centrality of narrative in migration. The examination of transnational migrants' "mundane" sociality and placement in studies such as Conradson and Latham's (2005) research illustrates how meaning is embedded in everyday practice and experience. In the case of Pustułka and Ślusarczyk's (2016) study of Polish migrants in Norway, they use narrative analysis to demonstrate how migrants create a non-linear and fluid narrative to describe their migration. Migrants' narratives create a stark contrast with the occasional official narrative based on the establishment of categories and reflect the impact of serendipity and identity reconstruction on the functionality of migration.

Narrative anthropology's greatest asset is its emphasis on the subjective, emic perspective, which allows for a deeper understanding of individual value systems, emotions, and cognitive frameworks that shape an individual's consciousness. Narrative anthropology is the foremost approach for examining the "why" of an individual's actions; that is, the motivations, rationalizations, and aspirations that motivate action. However, the biggest liability associated

with the use of narrative anthropology is methodological in nature; because narrative data tend to be rich, they tend to be particularistic in nature and yield results that are difficult to use to generalize or make systematic connections to larger social structures. As a result of this dynamic, Pustulka and Ślusarczyk (2016) highlight a consistent tension between the need to have a qualitatively rich understanding and the need to make sociological generalizations.

The cited studies exemplify this tension. They generate strong and complex critiques of neoliberal myths of mobility, though sometimes their connection to the structural forces of visa regimes or labor markets may be implicit in their work. This does not detract from the validity of their approach; rather, it suggests that narrative methodologies will be most effective when incorporated into an interdisciplinary design that acknowledges structural constraints.

The research employs an anthropological approach to the study of narrative, which serves as the key methodological and analytical basis for the qualitative, life-history approach taken in the research. Through narrative anthropology, I am able to address **RQ1a** concerning what motivates participants to tell their story and **RQ1b** concerning how their lived experience is expressed through the stories they tell. Narrative anthropology also provides a means for me to analyze gossip as a narrative method for delineating community boundaries (**RQ2a**). Finally, research using the narrative anthropology framework will be used to investigate coping (**RQ3**) because students frequently reveal and construct their coping strategies through the stories they tell themselves and others about their experiences. Thus, by utilizing a narrative anthropology framework for the research, the ultimate conclusions will be rooted in the students' own perspectives and interpretations of their experiences.

2.4 Coping Strategies: Tactical Agency Within Structural Constraints

The dominant neoliberal discourse describes international students as self-sustaining, globally mobile beings who overcome their environment through their own personal drive, adaptability, and perseverance. The critical literature challenges the psychologized notion of resilience and demonstrates that the "psychologization of resilience", as Zembylas (2020) puts it, is a form of neoliberal governmentality that transfers the responsibility for adapting to structural inequalities from systemic actors to individuals who experience those disadvantages. Moreover, Dagdeviren and Donoghue (2019) argue that the majority of coping mechanisms used in response to adversity are "absorptive" and "adaptive"; they remain in conformity with how the structure is designed rather than being transformative. Therefore, coping is not

indicative of structural equality but rather is simply a reaction to the constraints of the existing structure.

As students seek to survive in an unfamiliar country, they create their own informal systems of support. For example, they join together in WhatsApp groups to help them navigate the visa process. They also seek out each other for help finding housing that will enable them to share the rising costs of living in their new home. Lastly, students are able to help each other translate documents related to their status with immigration authorities. These practices mirror the findings of Németh and Váradi (2018), who describe how students take tactical action in response to the constraints of their new environment; however, those tactical actions do not change the structures from which they came; rather, they provide students with tools to operate within those structures. Furthermore, Lee-Chua (2022) also supports this view when he argues that Filipino ingenuity is oriented toward community, rather than self.

The stratified structure of global knowledge migration complicates the processes of coping. Ortega (2011) demonstrates how international students are affected by the epistemic cultures they have internalized and how those epistemic cultures conflict with their parent country's cultural norms. Furthermore, Lee and Kramer (2013) refer to "cleft habitus" as mobile students experience different sets of expectations based upon their environments.

Arnado (2023) identifies how students from the Philippines adapt their habitus to reposition themselves within global academic systems. In this case, students are coping through the process of epistemic negotiation; they adopt Western academic traditions to validate themselves but struggle privately with the feelings of alienation that this adaptation creates. Coping is therefore seen as having a dual character; it is both empowering and complicit.

The study of transnational caregiving networks indicates disparities by gender and class. For example, Aranda (2003) and Nukaga (2013) demonstrate that migrants carry a disproportionate share of the emotional burden in transnational situations, while Darwin and Norton (2014) and Igarashi and Saito (2014) highlight how access to cultural capital shapes migrants' capacity to navigate global educational spaces. Migrant students who possess a higher level of fluency in English, come from educationally urbanized settings, or have had previous exposure to international cultural norms, often demonstrate greater capacity for effective coping than do similar migrant students from rural or economically marginalized communities. As a result, coping cannot be regarded as universal but rather embodies global hierarchies that permeate individualized contexts in which academic and social behaviors occur on an everyday basis.

Harris et al. (2018) offer a crucial corrective to celebratory representations of student adaptability through their conception of "negotiated resilience," which understands resilience as embedded in competing social relations. Survival is grounded in precarious, often renegotiated, networks, which can also emerge as sources of conflict and marginalization. The process of coping can be conceptualized as relational; however, this relationship is not necessarily always characterized by cooperation and harmony.

To complement the theoretical discussion of "negotiated resilience" (Harris et al., 2018), this dissertation also considers Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress, appraisal, and coping. This perspective has been drawn upon because it views coping as a process rather than a trait: (1) primary appraisal—is a situation relevant to one's well-being and is possibly stressful? (e.g., should I view the language barrier as a threat to my success in school?); (2) secondary appraisal—a person's perception of the options and resources they have available. (e.g., is there technology I can use to translate what they are saying?); and (3) coping responses—a person's thoughts and actions to deal with the demands (e.g., problem-focused coping like learning Hungarian phrases). This framework also aligns with how this dissertation approaches students' experiences. Students appraise what happens to them, which means making meaning of their experience—making judgments about whether they can handle what they are experiencing, for instance, and crafting narratives about problems and responses to them. Students' stories about their struggles and coping efforts can be viewed as appraisals. With this framework in mind, I can connect how structural barriers limit students' options (what I can uncover through sociological analysis) with students' meaning-making efforts (what I can examine using anthropological lenses).

The "agency in mobility" framework provided by Tran and Vu's (2018) describes how agency is constructed through struggle, compromise, complicity and collective contestation. International students will frequently use tactical accommodation rather than overt resistance—that is, they accept the temporary precarity of a visa as they plan to migrate, conform to Eurocentric notions of academic rigor while making private critiques of them, or avoid political expression in order to maintain their scholarship status. These calculated trade-offs demonstrate how agency can exist within constraints. However, these tactics may also lead to unintentional reproduction of epistemic hierarchies as international students internalize dominant norms as part of the process to survive. Therefore, the process of coping becomes a site of profound ambivalence; respect for oneself is maintained through negotiation rather than transformation.

By defining social embeddedness and tactical agency in this way, reframing coping allows us to understand the difference between the narrative of seamless global student mobility and the real-life experiences of stratified knowledge migration from South to North. Examining coping as a system of everyday bureaucratic, academic, and relational encounters allows us to uncover the structural violence embedded within these processes. By using the lived experiences of those negotiating these realities as its central focus, this study does not romanticize resilience, but rather sees coping as an act of quiet relational resistance that helps maintain dignity in a world of precarity.

The relationship between structural inequality and choice must be taken into account when developing this research study; therefore, answers to the research questions framed by studying the experiences of Filipino international students in relation to the aforementioned structural inequalities will include (a) how motivation for mobility (**RQ1a**) is developed and expressed inside of the global hierarchy of education, thereby explaining the formation, division, and reconciliation (**RQ2**) of groups; (b) how mutual aid networks, sharing of resources, and use of online forums simultaneously contribute to solidarity and tension; and (c) how coping strategies (**RQ3**) are framed as tactical and socially embedded, as determined by an individual's class, sex, cultural capital, and institutional power.

2.5 Gossip: Social Cartography in Fragile Transnational Communities

Dreby's (2009) 'Gender and Transnational Gossip' provides foundational knowledge and insights into the role of gossip in constructing social networks across national borders and shaping family relationships. Similarly, Drotbohm's (2012) work on 'Gossip and social control across the oceans' in Cape Verdean transnational families also elucidates how gossip contributes to the perpetuation of social disparities and the regulation of individuals' behaviours based on considerations of gender and resource allocation. The work of Dreby and Drotbohm provides further understanding of how an 'interpretive community' can be established at a considerable distance. In comparatively small and relatively contained migrant cohorts where there is a lack of institutional assistance and formal supports, informal communication, particularly through gossip, is central to daily survival. Through such forms of communication, students will create and maintain what can be understood as an interpretive community or an insider group that exists within a trust, a system based on mutual support and the exchange of resources. As such, gossip is not anecdotal or causally related to regulatory systems; it is at the core of informal regulatory systems that exist in constrained transnational social contexts.

A substantial body of scholarship supports this reconceptualization of gossip as socially productive and regulatory rather than merely disruptive. According to Clawson (2005), gossip is crucial for maintaining occupational networks. Gossip helps to maintain strong connections among people and allows people to share information about each other's reputations. While it does provide some positive benefit to social solidarity, it also creates the potential for maintaining a link between trustworthiness and cooperation (Nanakdewa et al., 2022). Thus, gossip is important for strengthening relationships in settings where trust is important, but there is limited formal oversight. Casella et al. (2001) argue that network closure also provides a means to enforce sanctions against individuals who behave inappropriately, reducing the risk of violating trust and creating stability among the group. For migrant students, informal sanctioning mechanisms may have a significant impact on access to housing resources such as housing leads, shared resources, and emotional support based on reputation credibility.

Beyond trust-building, gossip also enacts and reproduces power structures. According to Besnier et al. (2009), gossip is used to amplify, negotiate, and sometimes transform social differences. It can reflect and produce hierarchies by distributing symbolic capital via the circulation of narratives. Guendouzi (2020) further conceptualizes gossip as an important component of "practice communities," where members collectively create and challenge values as they engage in daily conversations.

Viewed through a Bourdieusian lens, gossip functions as a form of symbolic power operating within a stratified transnational field. Gossip not only spreads cultural and social capital but also influences access to scarce resources. Gossiping helps create social hierarchies among migrant groups that are based on the uneven distribution of social, cultural, and informational capital. It creates clear distinctions between scholarship versus non-scholarship recipients, doctoral students versus undergraduates, urban versus rural migrants, or those labelled "too Westernized" versus those who are considered authentically communally connected. Therefore, one small social infraction can lead to reputational damage and, in turn, the imposition of material consequences. In this way, symbolic forms of judgment become manifested through materialized outcomes, demonstrating how power operates through everyday forms of talk and interaction.

The potency of gossip intensifies under conditions of liminality. International students feel like if they're living in both worlds - they have an attachment to their home country, and they also have an attachment to the academic and social life in their new country, but they're not

completely integrated into either place. Because of this 'betwixt and between' social experience, many international students use 'gossip as a map' to understand the layout of their new environment and discover where to find trustworthy people, where to obtain useful institutional knowledge, and identify people who violate community norms and people who have found ways to establish social capital. Anthropology supports this idea through research showing that gossip is a low-cost method to ensure that norms are enforced within small communities (Giardini & Conte, 2012; Wiessner, 2005) while sociological work shows that in constrained systems with limited formal avenues for recourse actors turn to informal means (gossip) for regulating the behavior of themselves and the group (Vaidyanathan et al., 2016; Jóhannesdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2023). Thus, gossip functions as both a glue for society (Jolly & Chang, 2021) and as a social weapon (Giardini & Conte, 2012; Sommerfeld et al., 2007). In fragile but highly migratory settings where anonymity is scarce and exit options are limited, the consequences of reputational damage to individuals become severe, which helps illustrate how the interplay of global hierarchies and local precarity manifests itself within the intimate spaces of transnational living.

The duality of gossip—both creating division and building bridges—demonstrates the ambivalence of transnational belonging. When shared, experiences can create bonds and shift the focus from internal divisions to collective precarity by calling into question dominant narratives about individuals and social groups (Guerrero, 2022). In contexts where there is a policing of dominant definitions of being 'foreign' within the European context, there is also an escalation of gossip from social mapping to social sanctioning. In these moments, the use of gossip as a social means of governance internalizes the external geopolitical pressures upon students to "properly represent" their countries of origin within the already racialized and stereotyped context of the Global North. As such, the internal surveillance of morality mimics the external systemic pressure. As a result, community is not a logical consequence of sharing a national identity, but rather a site for negotiating the hierarchies of authenticity.

At the same time, gossip has the potential to restore. By sharing stories about the hardships, generosity, or discrimination experienced by others, people are able to break down barriers between each other and shift their attention away from their own internal divisions and toward their collective vulnerability. Evidence indicates that gossip has restorative potential through sharing narratives of hardship. For example, Gomburg-Muñoz (2016) finds that undocumented immigrants use stories of hardship as a means of "building community, legitimizing their experiences, raising political awareness, and combating the dehumanization associated with

being undocumented." Evidence also demonstrates that gossip in an ethnically diverse Italian community creates strong community bonds by maintaining local norms and fostering trust and shared stories within the community (Driel & Verkuyten, 2022). Jolly and Chang (2021) also find that gossip is an important way of facilitating vicarious learning and social bonding. Gossip, therefore, contributes to what Harris et al. (2018) refer to as negotiated resilience, which refers not only to social processes that reflect but also respond to power. Cohesion is not a fixed state but a function of context and emerges and dissolves based on changing structural pressures.

As seen through these lenses of agency related to mobility (Tran & Vu, 2018), it could be identified that gossip, as an act of agency, can be considered a form of tactical agency. The majority of students are not going to challenge their institutions' exercise of power by directly confronting them. They use relational maneuvers to navigate their way around limitations imposed by institutions to achieve the results they want. Gossip enables students to signal their conformity to social norms, express subtle resistance, or negotiate tensions without confronting the institution in an overt manner that may threaten their academic standing or their immigration status. At the same time, these tactics can be ambiguous in their outcome. For example, although gossip can serve to protect someone within a particular group, it may also reinforce exclusionary class and gender practices, e.g., women are often subjected to more stringent moral analysis, or students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds can face more severe judgments based upon ill-judged actions. Gossip serves as an example of how global power relations are not eliminated but rather transformed into localized and intimate spaces as a result of South-to-North forms of mobility that create and/or recreate hierarchies.

Examining gossip as a type of social cartography provides an important critique of the romanticized understandings of diasporic solidarity (Chanzà, 2021). Transnational collectives are not inherently peaceful; they are active, conflictual areas of belonging that are being reconstructed through their negotiations. Gossip shows the continued tension between communal survival and internal social divisions. It shows how hierarchies found in the educational system of the world exist within the visa system of the destination, the space of the classroom, and within the social interactions of people who share both housing and chat groups. By analyzing the politics of gossip as a form of culture, this research demonstrates the ways in which the circulation of power is created in subtle and embodied ways in the transnational context.

Through analyzing gossip, the study's primary research objectives are directed toward understanding how Filipino international students experience belongingness, exclusion, and identity negotiation in liminally located transnational spaces (**RQ1**). Secondly, the study demonstrates that communities are not pre-established or static but can be created through narrative exchanges that exist within the dynamics of power (**RQ2**). In addition, gossip acts as an important social mechanism for delineating boundary lines, distributing reputation capital, increasing or decreasing conflicts, and revealing emotional and authenticity demands that shape everyday life outside of formal academic contexts and thus supports the concept that fragile transnational communities exist through active negotiations rather than pre-existing naturally occurring phenomena.

2.6 Synthesis of the Literature Review

In a critical regard to the concept of international student mobility (ISM), the research comprehensively analyzes the trajectory of international students as stratified knowledge migration rather than merely celebratory or economistic narratives. The literature reveals that international students are often treated as a single, homogenized group or "migratory elite" with seamless access and progression through education. Studies, such as those by Pásztor (2015), Brooks and Waters (2010), and Yang (2018), provide compelling evidence that students occupy vastly different positions along the socio-economic and cultural continuum. The socio-economic and cultural stratification associated with international student mobility profoundly structures their entire mobility experience by creating vastly different levels of accessibility to resources, portability of educational credentials, and exposure to systemic barriers, which subsequently undermines universalistic premises under which human capital models have been developed.

To adequately analyze this complex, stratified reality, an interdisciplinary theoretical perspective that integrates sociological & anthropological perspectives is needed. Sociological frameworks (i.e., transnational social fields [Levitt & Schiller, 2004] and Bourdieusian concepts of capital, habitus, and field) provide tools for mapping out the structural inequalities and power hierarchies that shape global educational systems. They also explain how the "dual embeddedness" of international students and the "habitus clash" between their deeply held dispositions & the academic environment interact with each other. In addition, anthropological perspectives on liminality, embodiment, and everyday meaning-making are important for illustrating how students have lived through this experience: the felt experience of "betwixt-and-between," and the informal storytelling that creates social reality.

Three main themes dominate the literature describing the transnational student experience: *community, conflict, and coping*. Community is not a single, stable outcome created by sharing a nationality; rather, it develops over time as a process of social construction, and through gossip, which provides both social cohesion and a method through which to create boundaries. Conflict does not arise simply from cultural differences; rather, conflict arises from the intersection of multiple structural inequalities, including (but not limited to) precarious legal status, financial dependence, and unequal access (or lack thereof) to various resources. For this reason, coping is not simply a psychological trait of the individual; rather, coping is an example of socially embedded tactical agency (Tran & Vu, 2018); as such, resilience is negotiated among groups of people through relational strategies and under-the-radar tactics working within a limited set of circumstances.

There is a growing body of research pertaining to international student mobility and knowledge migration. However, significant gaps exist in understanding how South-to-North academic mobility plays out on a lived, relational, conflictual basis within European contexts that receive less attention from existing literature. Existing literature about international student mobility and knowledge migration focuses almost exclusively on major Anglophone destinations or on structural outcomes (e.g., employability, policy frameworks, economic returns). Very few studies have been conducted that examine how international students from the Global South experience the formation of community, interpersonal conflict, and coping in Central and Eastern European contexts, where migration politics, language borders, and post-socialist institutional cultures influence everyday life differently than in Western Europe or North America. While previous qualitative studies have highlighted the agency and struggle of Filipino international students, few of them highlight the intra-community tensions (e.g., gossip, fragmentation, and reconciliation) that serve as sociological processes, rather than merely peripheral experiences. By exploring the transnational experiences of Filipino international students in Hungary, this study will address the gap in understanding the relationship among community, conflict, and coping in the context of international student mobility; these factors are interrelated and form integral components of knowledge migration. This research employs a qualitative, phenomenological, and narrative approach within a sociological and anthropological framework to produce a contextually specific and human-centered understanding of international student mobility beyond the elite, economic, and 'success story' perspectives present in most existing literature.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY — THE PASSENGERS OF THE TRAIN

The research methodology is like the railway guiding a moving train. The tracks should be a clear path, ensuring that the train—carrying knowledge, theories, and data—advances steadily. The researcher, along with the participants, drives the engine, steering inquiry, while each wagon holds a piece of the intellectual cargo. Together, they travel purposefully from questions to answers, so as to arrive meaningfully without derailment.

3.1 Research Design: Qualitative Narrative Inquiry

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in narrative inquiry to investigate the transnational experiences of Filipino international students in Hungary. This qualitative design has both a theoretical and epistemological grounding based on the primary argument of this dissertation, which asserts that international student mobility, especially when conceptualized as a hierarchical knowledge migration, cannot be fully explored through economic, policy-oriented or quantitative means. The current frameworks used to study international student mobility are mostly hegemonic and operationally framed, and they typically neglect the processes associated with the physical relocation of international students. Examples of this include measuring international students' mobility through the use of criteria such as employment outcomes, integration measures, and economic benefit. However, as outlined in the literature review, mobility is a lived experience, negotiated by those engaged in the process, and is experienced differently by different individuals engaged in the mobility process. The experience of mobility is formed as a result of an individual's habitus and capital, as well as their position in relation to various social contexts, their agency, and the symbolic power of others within the context of mobility. Therefore, a qualitative methodological approach is necessary to achieve the required objective of capturing the lived, relational, and affective experience of the participants engaged in the study.

Narrative inquiry is specifically employed because the study conceptualizes mobility not as a static event but as a temporally unfolding journey. Essentially, the research examines the ways in which Filipino students make meaning out of their experiences as international students. The research questions assess how students describe their motivation for studying abroad (RQ1a) and how the students interpret their simultaneous connection to both their home country of the Philippines and their host country of Hungary (RQ1b). Furthermore, the research questions assess how the students describe their formation of community and fragmentation of

community (RQ2), and how the students describe their use of coping strategies in the face of structural barriers (RQ3). To adequately address these four research questions, it is necessary to obtain narrative accounts rather than short answers or quantitative measures. Through narrative inquiry, the research participants have the ability to create a timeline of their experiences, connecting earlier dispositions, later negotiations, and future aspirations. This timeline structure is particularly important due to the theoretical framework of Bourdieu that is utilized in this research; in that, "habitus" is created in the past, and "capital" is built and converted over time. Without sufficient narratives, the processes of aspiration, misalignment, and adaptation would not be able to be analyzed at depth.

The decision to focus on narrative accounts is also justified by the interdisciplinary theoretical foundation of the study. Simultaneity, or being involved in more than one national context at the same time, is emphasized in transnational social fields. This simultaneous existence is not just structural but also experiential since it has been realized in the form of stories about obligation, desire, hope, and ambivalence. Those who tell these stories experience both of these engagements through narrative inquiry as they describe how they maintain their "ways of being" and "ways of belonging" across national borders. The anthropological idea of liminality (being "betwixt and between") also cannot be measured with measurable indicators but must be understood through experience and descriptions of uncertainty, waiting, emotional dislocation, and suspended belonging. Narrative accounts allow for a sufficient depth of understanding to describe these ambiguous states.

Furthermore, the study examines community dynamics, including gossip, fragmentation, and reconciliation (RQ2 and RQ2a). Narratives are used to create and construct reputation, delineate; create boundaries, and circulate symbolic capital among networks of Filipino students through storytelling. I can analyze a variety of conflict resolution methods, including how each conflict is told; justification of conflicts; and moral framing of conflicts using narrative design of research. This is consistent with both Bourdieu's perspective on the use of symbolic power and an anthropological perspective of the social construction of meaning on a day-to-day basis. Therefore, treating community as a constantly changing and negotiated process instead of merely as the final product of being a member of the same nation-state.

The choice of narrative inquiry is equally justified in relation to coping (RQ3). The approach pursued in this research reframes coping from an individual psychological resilience definition to one that emphasizes how students' coping mechanisms are socially based, tactical forms of

agency. In order for us to understand coping through students as negotiation within structures that constrain their actions (e.g., visa precarity, scholarship dependency, academic marginalization, and emotional distance from home), we need to focus on how students make meaning out of and reconstruct their experiences of hardship through a narrative lens. Coping strategies are illustrated through the narrative "texts" that study participants share about their experience of managing work, interacting with governmental bureaucracies, and maintaining their dignity through the use of symbolic violence. Exploring these themes using narrative inquiry allows for a more in-depth view into how resilience is built, rationalized, and experienced with some ambivalence, which cannot be obtained through survey-based methods.

3.2 Participants of the Study

The participants of this study consist of 26 Filipino international students under the Stipendium Hungaricum Scholarship Programme who are officially enrolled in accredited Hungarian higher education institutions. The Stipendium Hungaricum Programme is an example of how to structure a regime of state-sponsored academic mobility that provides a quite formalized means to engage in transnational exchange of knowledge with sending countries (e.g., the Philippines). The focus on the mobility of Filipino international students studying in this program allows the study to look at stratified migrations of knowledge within the well-defined institutional field of transnational knowledge exchange where the mobility of the student has been facilitated, rather than initiated, by the use of scholarship structures, bilateral agreements, and regulatory obligations.

Participants were located at universities across Hungary, with the majority based in Budapest. Those who did not attend university in Budapest were studying at universities in smaller cities and provincial areas, such as Debrecen, Szeged, and Pécs. However, the sample size does not support systematic geographic comparison; hence, this could be explored in future studies.

The aim of the dissertation is to study Filipino international students and their experiences regarding mobility, community, conflict, and coping as they relate to the former context of Central and Eastern Europe. The shared cultural habitus of the Filipino identity also has importance because it is influenced by cultural structures of education in the Philippines, family, language, and socio-economic status. However, their status as a Filipino international student does not indicate that they are all identical or the same class; some students come from different regions and have different experiences within academic, professional, and regional structures. Focusing on this particular national cohort allows for identification of both

commonalities in terms of cultural framework and differentiation in regard to stratification within all Filipinos.

Participants in this study must be officially registered at a Hungarian university to be a part of the academic system. The way that the habitus will interact with a new educational system that has different pedagogical styles, academic hierarchies, language practices, and assessment methods will be analyzed according to their institutional integration into a Hungarian university. Because of this, using Bourdieusian forms of capital and field in the analysis means that all participants must be part of the Hungarian higher education system and can negotiate or have the opportunity to negotiate and, therefore, convert symbolic capital, cultural capital, and academic capital. Short-term or informal visitors to Hungary for academic purposes do not have time to experience or be exposed to these structural forces. When participants are officially registered with the university, they are also subjected to the academic expectations, the bureaucratic requirements, and the performance evaluations of their academic mobility experiences.

By analyzing Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship holders, structural mobility has a clearer analytic lens. The scholarship covers tuition fees, stipend, accommodation, and medical insurance; however, it also comes with requirements such as academic performance, compliance with visa regulations, and continuous monitoring by institutions. These structural parameters produce a unique configuration of opportunity and constraint; on one hand, scholarship holders have the appearance of being recipients of institutional support and may therefore have greater symbolic legitimacy and economic stability than self-funded students. On the other hand, being dependent on a scholarship may increase pressure on the individual to perform well in school as well as make them more vulnerable to failing academically or being in violation of bureaucratic processes. This duality of experience within Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship holders provides an intriguing case study from which to understand how agency operates within a structurally defined regime of mobility.

Filipino Stipendium scholarship holders live in multiple cultures simultaneously: being institutionally located in Hungary but being socially, economically, and emotionally connected to the Philippines. Many scholarships have familial ties to Filipinos, either through family transfer (remittances), professional opportunities (career advancement), or national representation (the model citizen). These obligations across borders impact how they measure success and failure, leading to conflicting emotions and having ongoing experiences with their

mentors and family (through the scholarship program). The study examines how these groups of individuals represent both access to transnationality and integration into the transnationalism that exists within Hungary, and how these intersect with academic institutions in providing more complicated forms of inclusion.

By sharing a scholarship programme, the participants also belong to a semi-bounded community in Hungary, which further connects them by way of regular orientation programs or events at embassies, via social media groups, or through informal gatherings. Their close geographical proximity helps support the ability of the scholarship holders to build support systems. At the same time, this closeness can lead to tension or rivalry between the holders (e.g., through competition) and can create problems between them (e.g., through gossip). Because the study looks at the processes of community building, breaking down communities, and coming back together, the fact that the participants share a scholarship allows for a good example of how proximity based upon having the same foundational institution both brings people together and divides them from one another. The scholarship therefore is both a process of uniting participants as a whole as well as being an example of the stratification of participants.

The use of purposive sampling ensured participants had a range of gender, academic level (bachelor's, master's, doctoral), field of study, length of time in the host country, and past international (outside the Philippines) experience. This is important because it prevents portraying Filipino Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship recipients as a single group. Factors such as different types of disciplinary capital, different levels of English proficiency, socio-economic differences, and different types of professional aspirations will impact how the experience and narration of mobility are perceived. For example, doctoral and undergraduate students may experience different forms of academic autonomy and academic instability. This variation within a scholarship category will allow for an analysis on how stratification functions.

Protecting participant privacy is ethical, because there are few officially enrolled Filipino Stipendium Hungaricum scholars in Hungary, and they tend to know each other. Because of this, the security of participants' identities is critical when discussing sensitive topics such as conflict within the community, challenges in their academic program, or dissatisfaction with how an institution operates. Participants may use pseudonyms, and in some instances, identifying information will be removed as an additional safeguard for privacy. Participation is

completely voluntary, and informed consent provides scholars with an understanding of the purpose and scope of the study and any potential risks associated with their participation.

Defining participants as Filipino Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship holders enrolled in Hungarian universities establishes a connection between theoretical and empirical aspects. These participants represent the migration of stratified knowledge, with features such as being mobile on a global scale, having a regulated structure, having a cultural connection, being institutionally supported, and having barriers based on performance. Their experiences provide insight into how qualities such as aspirations for capital will affect motivation for mobility; demonstrate the existence of community dynamics within bounded, national cohorts abroad; and highlight the emergence of coping strategies in structured, transnational systems. By centering on this particular group, this study will provide a targeted and analytically meaningful examination of transnational student mobility within the context of Central and Eastern Europe.

3.3 Positionality of the Researcher

This study acknowledges that research is not conducted from a neutral or detached standpoint. As a Filipino with a Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship in Hungary, I have an insider-outside position in the transnational social field being investigated. This position shapes how access is gained, interpreted, and used during the research process in qualitative inquiry. Recognizing my position is essential to qualitative narrative inquiry since meaning develops between the researcher and the participant.

As a Filipino, I share linguistic, cultural, and historical affinities with the participants. As I have a shared national identity with study participants, it establishes a foundation for developing rapport, trust, and increasing levels of disclosure. Because I can display an understanding of Filipino culture (e.g., understanding the use of humor, feelings of expressing emotions, or communicating without words), the participant may feel comfortable sharing with me feelings of being vulnerable, marginalized, or concerned with the conflict in their community. There are concepts that are integral to Filipino social relations, such as *pakikisama* (smoothness in relationships), *hiya* (shame), *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), and obligation to family; all of which exist in the Filipino habitus. If a researcher is an insider, they will be more likely than an outsider to see these dynamics when they manifest subtly in narratives. Being culturally close to the study participants allows for interpretive sensitivity to occur, moving the analysis beyond literal statements to culturally embedded meaning.

However, shared nationality does not automatically equate to uniform experience. Shared nationhood does not mean all people in the same country have had exactly the same experiences. The Filipino diaspora around the world has a lot of internal differences: for example, depending on their class, education, region, gender, and access to money as capital. As a holder of a Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship, I find myself in an institutional or symbolic position with respect to the Filipino student body outside of the Philippines. The scholarship gives me various kinds of capital (i.e., economic security, academic legitimacy, institutional affiliation) that may not be shared by many of the Filipino scholarship holders. This positioning is likely to shape some of the ways that the participants view me as either a fellow scholarship holder (peer), an institutional representative, or a privileged student on an academic track. Recognizing this differential status is important because a researcher may otherwise think of their participants as having the same experience or may miss subtle hierarchy within this community.

In addition, I am also occupying a space and context within the structural realities of the study examined (visa regulations, obligations of the scholarship, academic evaluations). Being situated in this experiential space gives me interpretive leverage to grasp the unuttered pressures of performing under the scholarship, the accompanying fears of non-compliance, and the psychological burden felt by an individual representing their country of origin outside of their country. This embodied knowledge of context enriches my ability to interpret the narratives provided by participants regarding coping, liminality, and symbolic negotiations. Through the lens of Bourdieu, I share similar fields of capital, and my habitus has been partially shaped by similar transnational mobility (field). This proximal position in the field allows me to readily identify the struggles associated with the conversion of various forms of capital and the dislocations of habitus.

Yet this closeness also presents methodological risks. Researching one's own community by observing can become too invested in the philosophies, lifestyles, and culture because they strongly identify with the people being researched; it may create what is hard to understand and thus normal to the insider's view, therefore allowing for uncritical acceptance of these issues as "typical" or "reasonable" within the community. For example, certain issues related to dealing with trauma or resolving differences within the community may be interpreted as "normal" or "reasonable" and thus subject to no analysis. Therefore, reflexivity is not an option; it is essential for methodical research; one should routinely examine the extent to which one's own goals, disappointments, and community influences will affect how they frame questions

for data collection, interpret what silence during data collection means, and highlight certain themes. It is necessary to maintain an analytical distance and preserve an experiential proximity while still engaging in all data collection and analysis by intentionally participating in reflexive methods throughout the entire process.

Furthermore, the liminal methodological position of occupying a dual role as both participant-observer in the transnational field and researcher creates a unique perspective from which to gather data. I negotiate multiple roles such as community member, scholar, confidant, and analyst that affect data collection. This multiplicity mirrors the liminality described in the dissertation itself. While this multiplicity could be considered a limitation of the research methodology, the study paradigm considers it an opportunity for new and productive ways of knowing. My embeddedness in the community provides access to informal spaces of interaction, allows for an understanding of how gossip is disseminated in the community, and creates awareness of how communities create boundaries that may be imperceptible to outside researchers. Ethical vigilance must always be exercised when conducting research on sensitive topics (e.g., conflicts within communities or reputation issues) so that the confidentiality of individuals or communities involved is maintained—even though the Filipino student population in Hungary is relatively small, maintaining the confidentiality of individual participants is an important ethical principle in this research.

In the context of transnational social fields, I also inhabit the simultaneity of being studied. As a participant, I too enjoy a connection with the Philippines, but in addition, I have to negotiate participation within the academic context in Europe, which influences my personal experiences and conceptual framework and helps me develop empathy towards narratives of yearning, duty, and identity construction. Furthermore, I recognize that there are differences in the extent to which my career path (e.g., stage of the career, discipline focus, length of time in the field) will differ from my participants through the use of reflexive journals, memos, and ongoing critical self-examination documenting the evolution of my interpretation and analytical decisions rooted in positionality.

This research recognizes and does not attempt to obscure my positionality in the quest for false objectivity. Knowledge creation in qualitative research has to be understood as co-constructed; thus, the data created during the interview process exists in a relational space between me and my participants, created via shared language, mutual recognition, and one person's power being significantly different from the other participant. Articulating my positionality allows for more

credibility and transparency within the research project. The result of this is that the findings of this dissertation are situated within the context of the conditions in which the data were constructed, and that although the interpretation of the data has some relation to my own mobility path, the two cannot be equated.

Ultimately, my position as a Filipino on the Stipendium scholarship in Hungary provides me with epistemic privilege and ethical responsibility. The position allows access to deep cultural insight and allows an understanding and connection to the forms of scholarship, as well as a sympathetic involvement in the narratives of stratified knowledge migration. It also requires a disciplined reflexivity in order to not romanticize resilience, reject inequality, or reproduce community hierarchies in the analysis. By critically reflecting upon this insider–outsider position, the research follows interpretivist principles and reinforces the methodological coherence of narrative inquiry. The reflexive acknowledgment of my positionality increases both the analytical rigor and the degree of integrity in the research.

3.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The interpretive research paradigm and qualitative narrative inquiry methodology guided the data collection of this research. The data collection was designed to explore how Filipino Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship recipients live and tell their story in the life of being a scholarship recipient while in Hungary. For this reason, the depth of the data explorations, interactions with the participants during the data collection process, as well as ongoing reflexivity, were emphasized as opposed to breadth and/or numeric representation of research participants' experiences. The overall data collection method was structured to be consistent with answering the research questions focused on motivating factors for mobility, transnational experiences created as a result of mobility, community dynamics formed and/or influenced by mobility, conflict arising from mobility, and coping methods associated with mobility.

3.4.1 Recruitment and Access

I used purposive sampling to recruit for this study, tapping into an existing community of Filipino students who are enrolled under the Stipendium Hungaricum Programme at universities in Hungary. Initial access was gained through academic networks, contact with Filipino student associations, scholarship communication channels, and personal referrals. Because of the small and highly connected nature of the Filipino student community within Hungary, I had to be very careful in how I positioned myself ethically when recruiting for this study. I only invited participants through private and personal communication, rather than

through public advertisement of the project, to prevent any form of implicit coercion or perceived endorsement from an institution.

With the purposive approach, participants adhered to the inclusion criteria but also varied in terms of academic level, discipline, length of residency in Hungary, and socio-economic status. This variation among participants was required for capturing differences in the cohort's internal stratification and for providing a theoretical framework that is concerned with demonstrating the existence of unequal forms of capital. The recruitment process proceeded until the emergence of sufficient narrative content and thematic saturation of similar emerging themes related to mobility motivation, community conflict, and coping strategies.

3.4.2 Informed Consent and Ethical Safeguards

Before collecting data from the participants, they were provided with an extensive informed consent form that included the purpose of the study, procedures associated with it, risks that may be involved, confidentiality procedures, as well as the fact that participation is voluntary. Emphasis was placed on confidentiality, especially since the number of Filipino students in Hungary is small. Participants were told that pseudonyms would be used in the writing of the final manuscript; therefore, any identifying information about their institutions or themselves will not be included in the final paper.

As the research looks at sensitive topics like community conflicts, informal talk in the community about other people, student academic pressures, and dissatisfaction with educational institutions, all participants are reminded that they can choose not to answer particular questions or withdraw from participating at any time without any repercussions. This helps provide the ethical clarity needed to help reduce any power imbalances since I have an affiliation with the scholarship that is the same as that of a participant and have an insider identity with the community.

3.4.3 Narrative Interview Process

Data collection through in-depth semi-structured interviews was selected as the primary means for implementing this study. This method will permit participants to express and explain their own mobility experiences using their own words while allowing the research questions to be addressed. Unlike structured interviews, which break apart experience into separate answers, narrative interviews promote the sharing of experiences in chronological order and allow participants to reflect on their own interpretation of the experience.

At the outset of each interview, there was an overall open-ended question to ask participants to share the story of their journey towards studying in Hungary. For instance, participants were asked about how they found out about the scholarship program, the reasons they decided to apply, and their thoughts on their future at the time of applying. This provided the opportunity for mobility motivations (RQ1a) to come forth organically as a part of a larger life trajectory rather than as individual variables.

In later questions, I explored the experiences of participants after they had arrived in Hungary and were adjusting to the Hungarian academic culture, their interactions within classes, learning to communicate in another language, and their sense of belonging or being an outsider in Hungary. I asked the participants to share stories about times they faced difficulties, had someone help them, or experienced something significant on their journey. This permits me to analyze (RQ1b) the issues around transnational simultaneity, how communities are made and broken (RQ2), and how participants dealt with and coped with being an international student (RQ3) through actual lived experiences rather than through abstract generalities.

Interviews were conducted using either English or Filipino, depending on what each participant preferred, so that each participant would feel comfortable expressing what they wanted to say. As English is one of the national languages of the Philippines, most participants chose to use English as the language during their interviews. Allowing for alternative languages (without requiring the participants to switch languages) was important because there are many culturally based words in the participants' languages that do not translate fully into English, such as *hiya*, *pakikisama*, and *utang na loob*. Audio recordings of the interviews were obtained from participants who gave consent, and each interview lasted 60-120 minutes, allowing enough time for in-depth storytelling while not tiring the participant.

3.4.4 Reflexive Engagement During Interviews

Because narrative inquiry views data as a co-constructed entity (i.e., sourced through multiple individuals), reflexivity was apparent for me when conducting interviews in two ways. First, rather than identifying myself as a disinterested observer, I was an active participant (e.g., listening carefully during interviews and asking for clarification or further elaboration of information, but avoiding leading questions). Second, after each interview, I wrote reflexive memos to document contextual impressions, emotional tones, and emerging analytical cognitions. By doing these two things, I would limit the confusion between participant

narratives and my interpretive responses, thereby adding credibility and usefulness to the analysis.

Due to the commonality of the cultural identities of myself and my participants, caution was taken regarding making assumptions of having a common understanding. When something culturally specific was referred to, I asked the participants for additional detail and not to assume there was a common understanding. This approach also assisted in avoiding over-familiarization with the participants, which would potentially hinder the degree of analytical depth of the data collected.

3.4.5 Data Management and Transcription

Verbatim transcription of all the interviews was completed to capture linguistic nuances, pauses, emotional expressions, and sequencing of each narrative. The transcription process was viewed as an initial analysis phase, allowing me to immerse myself in the data and discover emerging thematic patterns prior to conducting further analysis on the transcript data. All audio files and transcripts have been stored securely in password-protected digital files, which only I can access.

Sections of the transcripts where confidential identifying information (such as department names and/or personal circumstances) have been removed and/or generalized to enable the protection of confidentiality. Individual participant codes were assigned in order to provide anonymity and allow for the systematic organization of data by participant.

3.4.6 Depth and Saturation

The data collection process was iterative. The pilot interviews helped to form succeeding interviews and thus helped me to refine the questions to explore the newly identified themes. As an example, if there were multiple narratives that described tension due to pressure from scholarship requirements, and there was also tension due to gossip from the community, then in the second wave of interviews, there would be a need to provide focused questions on these topics. The iterative approach is consistent with qualitative research principles, which suggest that data collection should be flexible rather than rigid.

I declared data saturation reached when I began to see enough of the same sentiments among participants to consider any new incoming data as an extension of the already developed themes—the narrative accounts would continue to develop definitions of the participants that represented their lived experiences. Data saturation in this sense is therefore not understood as

being redundant; rather, it is seen as having enough depth to represent the complexity of the lived experiences of the defined group of participants.

I reported no new findings being revealed for participant numbers 23 through 26 because their responses would have represented some of the same shared sentiments that were already discussed in earlier interviews with participants 1-22. However, despite reaching saturation on their data set, I still included these additional participants.

3.4.7 Coherence with Theoretical Framework

The methods used to collect information for this study were developed as part of an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that represents how social relationships affect people's ability to experience life changes. The interviews collected participants' chronological life experiences, including how they had experienced habitus in relation to new fields; negotiating and exchanging capital; and experiencing liminality as an ongoing process over a period of self-persistence. The community interaction questions allowed me to examine the role of symbolic power and boundary creation within the transnational social field, as well as to elicit the experiences of the participants coping with their experiences of agency within an area of structured limitation.

Therefore, although the methods of data collection were scientific, they were not only scientific but also theoretically embedded. It was determined that the empirical data produced would be useful for answering the primary thesis of the dissertation: that the movement of Filipino students under the Stipendium Hungaricum Programme is a stratified, negotiated, and narrative process, where structure, agency, and everyday social relationships shape the effectiveness of the movement of Filipino students.

3.5 Analysis of the Data

This research analyzed the data via a qualitative narrative-interpretive approach that provides for experiencing participants' lives, including time, relationships, and meaning creation. Since this study was based on narrative inquiry, the data analysis did not fragment participant interviews into separate coded sections or decontextualized segments before analyzing them. Rather, the data analysis involved initial holistic immersion in each participant's narrative so as to understand the narrative that links to their mobility journey's coherence, sequence, and logical relationship. This approach ensured that the data analysis remains true to the nature of the experience being represented as a narrative and that the process of movement is studied from a temporal perspective rather than a discrete event.

3.5.1 Immersion and Holistic Reading

During analysis of each participant's story, the process began with multiple readings of each word-for-word transcript to enable me to understand the overall flow of the story of each participant from motivation to leave before leaving, through arriving and adjusting to their current reflections and future dreams. I paid attention to how the story was told (i.e., major turning points of the story; intensity of emotions when saying that part of the story; when the participants paused when telling part of the story; where the participants emphasized parts of their stories, as well as what the participants stated as important. The holistic reading phase of narrative inquiry is vital in preserving the integrity of the person's life story prior to beginning analysis by understanding the overall flow of the person's life, which enabled me to determine the key overarching themes of the story of the participants' life (i.e., desire for success and upward progress; disillusionment and adjustment; communities coming together and falling apart; resiliency regardless of difficulty).

At this stage, analytic memos were created in order to record initial thoughts, conceptual connections, and emerging patterns. The analytic memos served as a bridge between participants' raw narrative accounts and conceptual interpretation, thereby ensuring that theoretical application is grounded in participants' lived experience.

3.5.2 Narrative-Thematic Analysis

After immersion was completed, I began the process of narrative-thematic analysis. Whereas traditional thematic analysis breaks data into separate codes, narrative-thematic analysis finds themes across narratives while keeping the stories in context. The analysis of themes followed the objectives: mobility motivations, transnational attachments, community building and separation; gossip and symbolic boundary-making; academic adaptation; coping mechanisms.

One of the goals of researching the motivations for mobility (RQ1a) was to look at the different ways that individuals talked about their desire for cultural capital and social mobility, professional advancement, and family responsibility. Themes related to an individual's class, their educational background, and their anticipated future were also taken into account in this analysis. Instead of looking at the reasons someone has for wanting to move only as static reasons for doing something, the analysis looked at how an individual's motivations to move change over time; sometimes the motivations became stronger, sometimes they were adjusted, and occasionally they were destabilized.

The analysis of transnational experiences (RQ1b) illustrated how participants viewed the experience of being engaged with both Hungary and the Philippines at the same time. The narratives regarding homesickness, digital connections, expectations of remittances, as well as representations of being from one country while living in another were examined through the theoretical lens of transnational social fields. These narratives demonstrated that membership in a nation was negotiated rather than presumed.

Gossip and its structural and functional roles within a group's dynamics (RQ2) as well as within the community (RQ3) were analyzed using different theme categories. These categories included solidarity, competition, misunderstanding, regional subcultures, and gossip. While gossip may be viewed merely as an anecdotal source of conflict and an avenue for distributing/controlling symbolic capital, it can also be analyzed as a narrative technique used to create and/or reinforce group boundaries.

Coping strategies (RQ3) were coded based on emotional management, peer support, academic persistence, spiritual resources, and strategic compliance with institutional expectations.

3.5.3 Structural and Positioning Analysis

Besides thematic patterns, the analysis of the data also looked at narrative structure and narrative positioning. Structural analysis examined how participants had organized their stories—including the events presented as central (foreground) or additional (background), the framing of crises, and the ways in which they created resolution. Particular attention was focused on turning points (academic failure, conflict with others, and/ or recognition) because these points of change often represented deeper struggle between habitus and field.

The analysis of relative positioning among study participants explored how participants positioned themselves relationally to others in relation to institutions' professional environments. For example, several participants described, to some extent, their self-positioning of being resilient and having achieved success in the midst of overcoming challenges; however, others described themselves as constrained or limited social actors who were responding to, or making their way through, systemic social inequalities. The self-positioning of each participant was analyzed through the application of Bourdieu's concepts of the different forms of capital, the symbolic power associated with capital, and the negotiation of a participant's habitus. Therefore, this layer of analysis assisted in connecting the micro-narrative construction of participants to macro-structural conditions.

3.5.4 Theoretical Integration

The integration of multi-disciplinary theories was an important part of the analysis. The Bourdieusian theories were employed to interpret participant experiences regarding academic acknowledgement; language access or barriers; feelings of class-based insecurity; and changing forms of capital. The application of transnational social field theory aided the analysis in illustrating the simultaneous connections and obligations of participants across borders. Finally, anthropological theories of liminality provided the necessary theoretical grounding for understanding uncertain, waiting, and suspended feelings of belonging expressed in participants' narratives.

In addition to the above, the theory did not dictate the data through deduction from the data. Instead, the analysis took an iterative approach from both empirical narrative and prevalent theory. For example, the feeling of being 'out of place' in a classroom by Hungarian students was seen as a manifestation of dislocated habitus; when participants described challenges in their Filipino community groupings, this was analyzed as a struggle for symbolic capital within a bounded transnational setting. This abductive process of analysis provided for theoretical and empirical convergence while also providing for the entire voices of the participants without constraining participants into any preconceived categories.

3.5.5 Reflexivity in Analysis

As a Filipino Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship holder, reflexivity was an important tool in my analytic process. Throughout the project, I kept analytic memos documenting moments of resonance, discomfort, and/or disagreement with the participant narratives. This allowed me to differentiate between my own personal experience and the participants' narratives, and mitigated the potential for over-identification with the participants. Where there was close alignment between the narratives being presented by the participants, I engaged in additional scrutiny to ensure that the interpretations of the narratives were based on transcript evidence, rather than assumed commonalities.

Reflexive awareness also included analyzing silences and omissions. In a small, interrelated community, participants may avoid naming individuals or institutions when discussing conflict. I analyzed these silences not as absences, but as important narrative strategies shaped by ethical caution and by the social proximity of the participants.

3.5.6 Ensuring Trustworthiness

In an effort to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, I utilized an iterative, transparent methodology. Themes were continually examined for consistency among participants' narratives. Where possible, I solicited informal feedback from select participants regarding their interpretations of the analytic representations of the data to determine whether those interpretations aligned with participants' intended meanings. Findings were presented utilizing “thick description” to provide readers with sufficient detail to determine the transferability of the findings to other contexts. I grounded my analytic claims in long excerpts from participants' narratives to maintain evidence-based rigor and to accurately represent participants' voices.

3.5.7 Coherence with Research Design

Narrative analysis is consistent with the study's structure and theoretical principles. Because the dissertation seeks to describe how knowledge is transferred through experience, the analysis had to retain the depth of time, the complexities of relations, and interpretive complexity. Purely categorical or content analysis would have concealed the dynamic relationships among aspiration, constraint, community, and coping.

Through the use of narrative-thematic analysis to examine the subjects' stories, structural analysis to identify how the subjects' stories relate to the structures, and the meaning-making process to reveal how the subjects' stories relate to their experiences, the research study has established a bridge between individual narrative and individual structural analyses and common themes across the two types of analyses.

Overall, this analysis demonstrates that Filipino Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship holders in Hungary experience mobility as a journey of negotiation rather than as a singularly directed development; their mobility has been influenced by distributions of capital that are unequal, transnational commitments, tensions within their communities, and their active participation in formulating their own mobility options. These types of analyses transform data from descriptive to explanatory and indicate some of the sociological and anthropological forces that are driving knowledge migration today.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION — *THE TRAIN MOVES*

The train moves with all the passengers in it, carrying with them the lifelong experiences of their journey during the travel. The lived experiences shared with one another, the learnings, and the frictions that happened while on track — all of these are shared memories.

Structure of the Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings from three interconnected research questions to present a holistic understanding of Filipino international students' transnational experiences in Hungary. The structure for this integration is in three distinct parts.

Part One describes the overall travel journey of students, the process of pragmatic choices triggering the potential for transformative processes of self, while navigating across institutional, linguistic, and cultural boundaries.

Part Two describes the internal characteristics of the Filipino student community – the development of the community to survive as a student group, the social divisions within the community caused by tensions and external pressures, and the various individual strategies of reconciliation for members of the community.

Part Three systematically examines how multiple challenges affect student coping and demonstrates that resilience is achieved through coping strategies that are negotiated within structural constraints. Throughout the chapter, verbatim participant testimony is included with theoretical frameworks to ensure the consistency of the analysis with lived experience and contribute to scholarly understanding of student coping strategies.

Note on the Multiple Use of Interview Excerpts

As will become evident throughout this chapter, some interview excerpts are used at multiple points in the analysis. This stylistic choice is intentional. Students' lives were woven together – one line of narrative could speak to different aspects of being transnational simultaneously. For example, a comment about maintaining friendships with Hungarians might tell me something about how they cope with challenges, something about their imagined community, and something about changes in their identity. Because students' stories do not divide up neatly as this analysis does, I do not want to pull one quote from its context and use it for one analytical point before throwing it away. Each time a quotation is used, a different dimension of that

quotation will be discussed. This is one way that the connectedness of participants' lives is demonstrated through the organization of this dissertation. Using quotes in multiple places also ties back to the tradition of narrative inquiry.

PART ONE: THE TRANSNATIONAL JOURNEY

Chapter 4.1: The Calculated Leap — From Pragmatism to Transformation

4.1.1 Overview: The Paradox of Mobility

The first research question asked: *How do Filipino international students navigate their transnational experiences in Hungary?* The answer begins with a fundamental paradox: what starts as a pragmatic, calculated decision—driven by scholarship availability and instrumental career considerations—evolves into a profound process of personal transformation that transcends the initial instrumental logic. However, students' mobility cannot be simplified as just a process of struggle. Students also gained access to European higher education, international networks, qualifications that hold global value, and independence and intercultural skills. It was never my impression that students thought everything they gained was effortless; instead, these students had gained something of value and consistently spoke about these positives alongside their struggles. For these reasons, in this chapter I tell the story of students' experiences that involved both limits and agency. Students made a 'calculated leap' because they calculated what they could gain and what they might have to struggle with in the process.

4.1.2 The Pragmatic Foundation: Scholarship as Enabler and Constraint

The Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship was the primary factor in students' decisions to study in Hungary, and this conclusion is of great importance. Students in all 26 transcripts indicated they selected Hungary because of the scholarship and not because they had an appreciation or connection to the Hungarian culture, language, or society. This demonstrates that the idea of international students being cosmopolitan and having an open choice between equally attractive destinations is inaccurate.

Alejandro articulates the calculated rationale with remarkable candor, explicitly rejecting romanticized narratives:

"For me, it was just for convenience, actually... it was the first to reply to me... I won't sugarcoat my story. So to set this straight, Hungary is just the most convenient place for me to like, you know, study in Europe." (Alejandro)

Yang's (2018) argument that the movement of non-elite students is characterized by some level of "compromise and complicity" instead of first choice or idealized representations of cosmopolitan elite mobility is clearly validated by this honest admission. It is in contrast to the celebratory view of international students as cosmopolitan globally mobile students exercising 'unfettered' choice in an unbroken continuum of mobility available to them as described in this study (King & Raghuram, 2013).

Relando's account exemplifies the opportunistic, almost serendipitous nature of many applications:

"I was already done with my master's program in Taiwan... my former supervisor just shared this information about scholarship in Hungary like two days before the deadline on Facebook." (Relando)

The finding that access to information about mobility opportunities is heavily dependent on the use of social networks instead of academically rigorous research is further substantiated by the data reviewed and suggests that prospective students of higher education possess differing amounts of social capital relative to their ability to access mobility information (Brooks & Waters, 2010). The data are consistent with Pasztor's (2015) assertion that international students possess differing degrees of socio-economic, cultural, and institutional status along a continuum.

Joaquin's experience mirrors this pattern, with the scholarship arriving as an unexpected opportunity during a period of personal and national crisis:

"The turning point when I decided like the oh, it's about time that I need to do it as well was during the COVID when it was like the country is like in a pretty terrible situation the time... it was actually like the political situation in the Philippines and like the COVID-19 thing, but triggered me to do that." (Joaquin)

For many participants, Hungary was not a destination they had romanticized or even seriously considered prior to discovering the scholarship opportunity. Jacobe admits:

"I did not expect that I'll be studying here in Hungary because before it's just like a lucid dream." (Jacobe)

Geronimo describes a process of discovery typical of many:

"I attended this study fair organized by European Union in the Philippines, so I found Hungary is one of the participants there, so the offer, scholarship, full tuition." (Geronimo)

The opportunity to go abroad as a student may become available to many who would otherwise not have had the means to achieve this through the awarding of scholarship funds. Therefore, students receiving this funding may not fit into the definition of "elite." At the same time, the continued state of precarity that results from the funding not being enough to fully support them causes students to have to take steps on their own behalf to continue being partially enabled. As Alisa observes:

"Actually, if you focus on being a student, then yes, kind of it's enough. But if you're like a Filipino student, so usually send money to the Philippines, not really because you know, as a Filipino student or as Filipinos usually one of our traditions, or a part of our culture, is always giving to the family, even if you don't have enough for yourself." (Alisa)

This observation makes clear that transnational obligations, as Levitt and Schiller (2004) define them – that is, "ways of being" in transnational social fields – create the material conditions of life for students. The inadequacy of this scholarship must be viewed in the larger context of the obligation of families to remit money to children for educational purposes.

4.1.3 The Transformative Encounter with Academic Autonomy

The "calculated leap" immediately confronts students with a new and often disorienting academic culture. The major discontinuity is the educational transformation from a structured, didactic system in the Philippines to one that demands a radical amount of self-direction and autonomy. This radical change represents a 'habitus-field' mismatch (as it has been classified by Bourdieu, 1977), because students' dispositions developed in one educational context do not have the same application in the other.

Raymundo explicitly contrasts the two systems, articulating the fundamental difference in pedagogical philosophy:

"In the Philippines in my university everything is spoon fed... but here in my university here in Hungary we are [to] study by ourselves." (Raymundo)

This study provides a strong endorsement of the argument that international students' learning experiences result from the convergence of the students' pre-existing educational dispositions and the norms of Western academia. This "habitus clash" suggests that this attracts attention to

other national contexts and demonstrates an overarching pattern of epistemological tensions associated with the migration from South-to-North for educational purposes.

Louisiana elaborates on this contrast, emphasizing the loss of the interactive, dialogical classroom dynamic characteristic of Philippine higher education:

"In the Philippines, they're so good actually like... there is an interaction between the students and the professor... But here, there's nothing like that." (Louisiana)

Alisa confirms this disorientation:

"The Hungarian educational system doesn't really spoon feed you in terms of learning. So it's kind of new to me." (Alisa)

The absence of structured academic requirements produces unexpected consequences for students accustomed to constant evaluation. Mike confesses to experiencing a form of academic drift previously unknown to him:

"I've experienced procrastination, which is I haven't experienced in the Philippines because I've always, you know, I always delve in studying, but in here I'm actually experienced procrastination." (Mike)

This paradox, which coexists with dysfunctional development arising from pedagogical freedom, is an example of how habitus is embodied and how obtaining new academic dispositions can be problematic. Furthermore, it complicates the idea of educational "progress" or "development," as the same pedagogical "advances" can be disorienting and even damaging in different contexts.

Shaina found the passive teaching style so antithetical to her learning preferences that her body physically rejected the new mode:

"I would have a hard time focusing because mainly because of the voices of the Professor, I swear they're really soft. Like please... It's like they're singing a lullaby to me. So me being me, it will become a lullaby to my ears and end up sleeping." (Shaina)

Joaquin's critique is the most pointed, expressing "disappointment with teaching style" and describing his courses as "pretty much of an undergrad thing":

"I was like expecting kind of a like knowledge environment where you can like more academic support... it didn't turn out like that. It turned out like it was like super like a high school thing for me." (Joaquin)

The narratives provided by the participants in this research not only serve to demonstrate the "adjustment problems" that they experience but also indicate that these individuals are actively negotiating within an academic area that has historically negated their prior successful behaviors. This represents a clear example of the "epistemic tension" (see Mohebbi & Jangjou, 2025) and "symbolic violence" (see Liu et al., 2025) that have been outlined in academic literature, whereby traditional forms of knowledge/experience are systematically negated within mainstream educational settings.

4.1.4 Economic Precarity and the Struggle for Independence

The changes caused by mobility are felt in all aspects of life, not just academic. Students often discuss the insufficient stipend they receive, thus requiring them to participate in the labor market and creating additional elements to their transnational experience.

Glenda states with characteristic directness:

"It's not enough. Special, especially for the expenses in food and also the accommodation things and living in a flat." (Glenda)

Alejandro confirms the inadequacy:

"Of course not." (Alejandro)

In alignment with Suchi's (2025) investigation into the political economy of Bangladeshi student migration within and to Hungary, which indicates "economic precarity and cultural dislocation," these findings suggest that financial difficulties are also an issue for international students attending school in Hungary who were from sending countries, such as the Philippines, and that the existence of financial difficulties across the board among international students can be seen as evidence of economic vulnerability among all international students in Hungary who came from the Global South.

Relando describes the difficult calculus underlying employment decisions:

"After a year, I had to make a big decision of work, of looking for a job, a part time job here in Hungary to help both ends meet." (Relando)

Mike recounts his experience at McDonald's, a job he found physically punishing:

"I'm not used to hard labour and at least 8 hours of hard labour and repetitive tasks. It bores me. So I got sick as well every after shift because especially when the kitchen, especially during winter, the kitchen is too hot and when you get out it's snowing. It's very cold." (Mike)

Relando worked as a waiter, describing the experience as "a very humbling experience":

"I work as a waiter in the service industry and I'm although this is a bit a totally different kind of work that I do back in the Philippines... it's a very humbling experience to be working at service industry." (Relando)

Rina's experience was even more extreme, working multiple jobs simultaneously while pursuing her degree:

"There was one time, one semester I was working with three jobs... I was able to work with a lot of jobs. I found a lot of jobs here... my mindset was really like a grind, grind, grind, grind." (Rina)

Economic insecurity represents a key dimension of stratification among students who are part of what appear to be similar groups of scholars. For example, students with family support (e.g., James) are able to construct ongoing academic paths different than those who must work to support themselves while pursuing their studies.

"I am lucky to have parents that can actually provide for me. And when I need money, I just ask and they will give it to me immediately... I can feel for those students who are here and they can't rely on any parent to give them something." (Jaime)

This study supports its primary objective through this finding – the existence of a "contested terrain" with students in "unequal positions" (Pásztor, 2015) in that area. Additionally, the "struggle for independence" is not the same for all; rather, it is a diverse experience depending on the available resources provided by different forms of capital (e.g., economic, social, and cultural) in a Bourdieusian interpretation.

4.1.5 Transformation: The Emergent Self

Despite—or perhaps because of—these accumulated struggles, students undergo profound personal transformation. Alexis's declaration is emblematic:

"I'm a changed person... the way that Hungary shaped me... It's really different now." (Alejandro)

According to Tran's (2016) conceptualization of mobility as "becoming", embodies fundamental identity transformation in addition to skill acquisition. That is, mobility entails a transformative process of ethical self-formation rather than simply reproducing one's class position.

Joaquin reflects on how the experience expanded his worldview:

"It's a different kind of experience for me and experiencing a different kind of culture, you know, opening a different perspectives... being able to like become more... having this globalised perspective." (Joaquin)

Jaime emphasizes the cognitive dimension:

"It changed my life in a way that I see the world like... I get to break my stereotypes when it comes to other cultures." (Jaime)

Marco locates the transformation in his developing independence:

"Studying abroad really changed me as a person big time... studying abroad made me independent as I am today. If I were just sitting, sitting down in or or just chilling in the Philippines, I wouldn't be independent as I am today." (Marco)

Louisana connects the transformation to emergent independence:

"I became more independent and more in a sense that I can just handle myself." (Louisana)

Nicole provides a particularly poignant reflection:

"It changed me... in what way? Probably first is being independent like it's one of the greatest thing that I've learned here... I didn't know how hard it is to be living alone." (Nicole)

Relando connects the transformation to an emergent sense of agency:

"I'm always say to myself that when I decided to study in Hungary, it is like my decision. So I have to stand by my decision." (Relando)

Although this change is consistent with Tran's (2016) framework for understanding transformation, it also expands upon it by highlighting that struggle is at the core of the transformative process. The students in this study do not simply "become" through an accumulation of capital but by negotiating, actively, with constraints, failures, and disruptions. This implies that transformation is less a linear model of "development" or "growth"; rather, it

appears to be more dialectical, arising from conflict between aspiration and impediment, disposition and field.

The "calculated leap" therefore culminates in an unexpected outcome of reconstructing one's self. What begins as instrumentally driven decision-making develops into a journey of self-discovery and forming an identity that cannot be reduced to economic approaches to the accumulation of human capital.

Chapter 4.2: Navigating the Invisible Walls — The Experience of Being an 'Other'

4.2.1 Overview: The Condition of Sustained Outsideness

RQ1's second dimension describes how students negotiate multiple intersecting barriers daily, preventing them from fully integrating into Hungarian society. Barriers exist at four different levels: linguistic, social, institutional, and embodied, all of which create a state of prolonged *outsideness*. The best way to conceptualize this experience is by utilizing the notion of liminality (Van Gennep, 2022; Turner, 2017) as a theoretical framework.

According to the literature reviewed in this study, liminality can be described as an 'in-between' state where one is in a condition of transition and therefore experiences uncertainty, difference, suspension, or lack of identity, and can simultaneously experience the possibility of establishing a sense of community (or solidarity) as well as having conflict with others. Students find themselves in a constant liminal state, being neither fully integrated into the social fields of the Philippines nor yet fully accepted into the society of Hungary. This liminality does not occur on a temporary basis; rather, it is experienced as a permanent status, approximately what Ybema et al. (2011) call 'perpetual liminality', as a result of the limitations imposed upon them by structural constraints that are outside their own control.

4.2.2 The Language Barrier as Primary Mechanism of Exclusion

The most immediate and pervasive "invisible wall" is the language barrier. Mike states with stark simplicity:

"The only worst thing... the language barrier." (Mike)

Beyond being an inconvenience, this barrier is also a significant, fundamental source of social exclusion and emotional distress. Alisa's traumatic experience trying to get emergency medical care illustrates this point.

"You go to hospitals... If you don't speak the language which is Hungarian, then they can't help you... There was a time that I was almost dying, like really dying, that I really needed the ambulance and go. I really needed to go to the emergency." (Alisa)

Her survival depended entirely on a Hungarian friend's intervention:

"She kindly she was very kind. She was kind enough to accompany me. And she spoke Hungarians to the people who couldn't speak English." (Alisa)

This study's results are consistent with the findings of Pabingwit (2025), whose research into the "multifaceted challenges faced by international students studying in Hungary" found that the language barrier is a major hindrance to integrating and using services. Kate has a similar experience:

"I had a friend who needs to go to emergency. So we went to the hospital for an emergency and we were turned. We were told that we cannot have any checkups because we should have an Hungarian speaking person with us when we go for checkups." (Kate)

The predominance of literature relating to the mobility of international students has focused upon the ways in which they integrate with their academic and social environments. However, the findings from this study demonstrate that a crucial aspect of international student mobility is the inability of many students to access services, as well as emergency medical care. In addition, the findings indicate that, for many students, linguistic exclusion can lead to life-threatening situations; therefore, there is an additional component of precarity associated with international student mobility, which has not been examined thoroughly in the mainstream literature on international student mobility.

Due to the language barrier, ongoing vigilance and flexibility are constantly required. Arnolfo's experience with local communication is that it is a "hit or miss" probabilistic matter, and Geronimo indicates that almost every ordinary transaction must be negotiated.

"When you're buying your stuff in the shops or grocery, some.. some locals do that speak English, but I don't blame them so... as I live here so I'll I need to learn some of their words." (Geronimo)

Rina's experience in the service industry revealed the social dimensions of this exclusion:

"When you speak English to them, they don't really. They just ignore. They just ignored me. Even if I ask like as a waitress, I was like, hi. Can I help you? When they enter the restaurant that I worked in and then they would completely ignore me." (Rina)

4.2.3 Cultural Distance and Differential Interactional Norms

The mismatch between language and perceived cultural distance appears to be an interactional norm discrepancy as well. The students repeatedly report that interactions in the Philippines are characterized by warmth, openness, and hospitality, whereas in Hungary, social interaction is more formal, reserved, and distant.

Jaime offers a memorable analogy:

"I can say that here in Hungary they have this... social barrier that you cannot reach through immediately like they have this wall to get too warm to you... In the Philippines, we're usually warm already." (Jaime)

Jacobe's first "notable culture shock was the silence":

"It's very quiet not to the point that your neighbours will get mad... to get mad at you if you create a certain amount of noise and for me that's like a cultural shock coming from a country where in there's noises everywhere and we're very talkative as a people, as a nation." (Jacobe)

Raymundo echoes this observation:

"Europeans, no, I cannot say Europeans, Hungarians in general, they are a bit cold and it's hard to really approach them." (Raymundo)

Jenny offers a more nuanced interpretation, suggesting that Hungarians simply require more time to establish rapport:

"I won't say that they're not friendly. I think they're not just I think comfortable for at first, the Hungarians of interacting with international students. It gets them some time to warm up." (Jenny)

Cassius provides the most elaborate cultural metaphor, describing Hungarians as "onions" requiring patient peeling:

"Need to peel the layers before they open up. That's how I explain it. They're like onions. You need to peel the layers before they open up... you cannot expect that they will loosen up. Like

how Filipinos, how Latin Americans. You know, like, like loose in general. So you need to have time." (Cassius)

The cultural comparisons (thermally defined as warm versus cold) create a primary theme in the data and provide not a judgement about the Hungarian character, but rather a phenomenological description of two social fields which each function according to an implicit set of rules. The effort required to 'peel' is time-consuming, as well as requiring significant language ability. Because of the great amount of energy needed to 'peel the onion', many students perceive this effort as out of proportion in relation to any potential returns and therefore consider putting their limited social energy in some other way.

4.2.4 Overt Exclusion: Encounters with Discrimination and Racialization

In addition to the subtle barriers of language and social norms related to how people interact with each other, many students face more obvious forms of exclusionary treatment. These experiences have destroyed any last hopes for a cosmopolitan or post-racial Europe, providing strong evidence for the continuing importance of race and phenotype in shaping daily life.

Jacobe's account of being called "Kinai" (Chinese) by a group of students constitutes a clear instance of racial othering:

"I heard the word Kinai because, you know, Kinai means Chinese, right. Although I have Chinese blood. But I'm not Chinese by nationality. So I knew for a fact that they're talking about me." (Jacobe)

He also describes a more physically intrusive incident:

"I also remember when I was at Interspar, I was point, you know, buying meat. I think it's chicken or beef or something like that and I'm pointing to the to the, to the part of the beef that I wanted because I don't know how to speak Hungarian and I don't know if I offended the the butcher or what, but he slapped my hand." (Jacobe)

Mike describes being subjected to racialized mockery:

"But of course there are remarks... The usual remarks here, especially there are lots of the Roma population, the gypsy population. They're the only ones that's problematic [say this], actually there's nothing physical. But they will say 'fucking ching chong', Ching Chong, or they will just mock you." (Mike)

Aisha and Jason recount a more ambiguous but still discriminatory experience:

"There was this restaurant that when we entered, she said they're closed. But then after we went, we walked out. They accepted people... Hungarian [customers]." (Aisha)

"There's only just one instance where we went outside of Budapest, and there's this restaurant that when we entered, she said they're closed. But then after we went, we walked out. They accepted people Hungarian." (Jason)

The occurrences mentioned above are part of a larger pattern that has been categorized by the study as "discrimination or racism." They also serve as painful reminders of students' visible minority status and the accompanying vulnerability they have within a larger society that has been described by students as having a contemporary political climate that has "conservative" and, on occasion, very openly "anti-immigrant" discourse. These experiences directly oppose the "celebratory discourses of global citizenship" (King & Raghuram, 2013) and demonstrate the racialized realities of South-to-North movement.

Alejandro articulates the psychological toll of such encounters:

"You know, learning Hungarian is both a blessing and a curse. If you just look at the like the opposite way. Because sometimes I can hear I can overhear some conversations like especially this one, this one really like, you know, how do I say it like stuck with me. It's like a traumatic experience with one of my, like colleagues from the other office was like, you know, rushing to the office... And then she was so furious and she said it in Hungarian like, what are the internationals doing?" (Alejandro)

4.2.5 Systemic Barriers: Institutional Failure and Exclusion

The idea of "invisible walls" may also apply to institutional structures as well as to social interactions. All students in this program indicated that the healthcare system within the host country provides an illustration of how institutions within the host country create barriers for international students that inhibit their ability to access necessary services through formal institutions if they do not speak the Hungarian language.

Alisa's experience of almost dying has been described above, and it is a powerful example of systemic failure. These systemic failures do not stem from individual goodwill, but rather are an extension of the systemic exclusion that exists within institutions. Alisa's experience illustrates the results of acknowledging the ways in which "regimes of mobility" (Schiller & Salazar, 2013) serve to "foreground the differential valuation of movers within global systems." The Global South student is in a differential position with respect to their ability to access

mobility across borders and with respect to accessing institutional supports that are available once they arrive.

Alejandro further elaborates on the institutional dimensions of exclusion:

"When you go to hospitals or when you seek for medical care. If you don't speak the language which is Hungarian, then they can't help you." (Alejandro)

The structures of the host society are not structured around international students. Rather, the students must find their own way through the systems of these structures. If they get help, that help may come at the hands of other students who are also in precarious situations. Consequently, the process of finding one's way through these structures creates high levels of stress, takes a long time, and contributes to the feelings of being isolated from the larger community. This finding underscores the gap between policy discourses of "internationalization" and the experience of international students because international students do not have access to the structures that exist throughout the larger community.

Chapter 4.3: Building Archipelagos of Belonging — A Tiered Friendship Network

4.3.1 Overview: Constructing Home in Exile

Students create multilayered social networks that are both developed and created by them. These social networks are then seen as being "archipelagos of belonging"; separate yet interlinked islands of support in an unfamiliar place. This process is best understood through the lens of transnational social fields (Levitt & Schiller, 2004), which view migrants as being situated in multiple social fields that exist outside the nation-state.

The literature review makes clear that the use of this framework supports the analysis of international students as "actors" who "navigate multiple, intersecting arenas rather than as temporary sojourners progressing through a linear path of adjustment or assimilation" (Gargano, 2009). The findings provide compelling evidence that Gargano's adaptation of this framework is well-founded with respect to students negotiating identity, belonging, and aspirations by being engaged in multiple localities simultaneously.

4.3.2 The Core Island: The Filipino Community as Foundational Support

The Filipino community constitutes the foundational island in this archipelago—the primary source of emotional sustenance, practical assistance, and cultural continuity.

Jacobe's statement is unequivocal:

"I don't know how will I survive without the Filipino community here... They are really part of my support system here in Hungary because without them I don't know what will happen." (Jacobe)

He cautions with the story of the first Filipino student who "became very depressed and returned home" to show how important it is to establish a supportive community for mental health and psychological survival. This is compatible with Nowicka's (2020) concept of "dual embeddedness" –which is a source of both help and difficulty. The Filipino community is a source of support by providing emotional and practical assistance that enables its members to survive in an unfamiliar country.

Jaime describes how the community generates a sense of home:

"I feel at home... because of the strong Filipino communities here... we have lunch dinners that we just make Filipino food." (Jaime)

The act of sharing meals with Filipinos, through Filipino cuisine, serves as an expression of belonging to a group and is one way to make a foreign place feel like home through the shared experience of eating together and using the five senses. According to Mike, there is a seamlessness to how the community connects with each other:

"My circle is actually Filipinos." (Mike)

Alisa confirms the foundational role of co-national networks:

"I'm currently living with Filipinos, so I'm away. I always feel, you know, accepted." (Alisa)

Shared language and cultural background create immediate comfort and understanding absent in interactions with locals. The community also functions as a vital information and support network. Arnolfo describes pre-arrival communication:

"When I was still in the Philippines, I'm so... Filipinos are very I don't know, sociable?, especially if Filipinos are in another country and they meet each other there, they would be pretty close... guided us on how to conveniently go home to our new flat, or like how to adjust to Budapest." (Arnolfo)

Communities can also act as vital parts of a support and information system. Relando describes that pre-arrival communication through Facebook group chats "made it easier for us to get in touch with one another" once we got to the physical location. The "interpretive community" becomes necessary for survival by providing a location for tacit knowledge to flow and where

new arrivals may interpret and decode the "unwritten rules" within the host nation. The study's discussion of gossip helps map social terrain and navigate the host nation as a "mechanism for social cartography."

4.3.3 The Connected Islands: International Friends as Fellow Travelers

Friendships among other international students comprise a second tier to the overall structure of the archipelago. These relationships occur because of a shared identity as someone who is foreign (or resides outside one's own country) and occupies a similar position in terms of "outsiderness." The fact that individuals have a precarity in common creates an immediate connection between them, albeit at times a shallow connection, in line with Turner (2017)'s concept of "communitas," or the instant bond formed between people experiencing a liminal state.

Alisa's observation captures this dynamic with precision:

"They're also alone, so they're also pretty much looking for peers that could, you know, relate to them." (Alisa)

Joaquin describes how his international friendships developed organically through shared activities:

"I get to like attract friends because of like volunteerism... that's where I build a lot of who happen to be my the closest that I have right now." (Joaquin)

While Mike finds "intellectual diversity" in international circles that contrasts with the "homogeneity" of Filipino gatherings. He values exposure to different perspectives, even when such exposure generates frictions.

However, these friendships are often marked by awareness of their inherent temporality. Cassius notes this limitation:

"Everyone knows that we're not gonna [going to] stay here for long," which can render connections *"a little bit superficial."* (Cassius)

Both support and complicate the previous research regarding the experience of transnational social fields, since these friendships illustrate how individuals can engage across multiple national contexts at the same time (Levitt & Schiller, 2004), but also expose an aspect of endurance that is often overlooked in research. The understanding that "they (the friends) all know that none of us will be here for very much longer, anyway" informs their relationships as

being of value but temporary and meaningful, but also limited in their duration because of the longer-term limitations imposed by the student's migration system.

4.3.4 The Distant Continent: Hungarian Friends as Hard-Won Connections

Making Hungarian friends constitutes the most challenging and consequently rarest form of connection. It requires overcoming the "invisible walls" of language and cultural reserve documented in Chapter 4.2.

Alisa's personal experience demonstrates the cultural divide when it comes to being direct or indirect in an interaction with others. Her Asian friends have told her that they are often fearful of her Hungarian friend because of his directness, which is a viewpoint that would not be experienced by Hungarians, who see this type of communication as being appropriate and normal. Therefore, directness is seen as aggressive or intimidating by some cultures that come from an indirect, relational style of communication.

Cassius' metaphor of an "onion" (which was quoted earlier) represents the many levels of social connections in Hungary. Each layer of connection must be peeled away one by one; this can take time and effort. When the final layer is removed, the connection will be truly authentic and long-lasting.

Nikka's experience with her Hungarian friend Enikő provides a powerful example:

"She has taken care of me, like in terms of like going to the doctor if I needed like a translator... she gives me her like some hand me down clothes... what I've noticed is that Hungarians, once they consider you like a friend, they're very loyal and very protective of you." (Nikka)

This finding supports the previous statement of Hungarians being "hard to reach, but loyal once made" that has been observed in this study and has been supported by the general anthropological literature that describes the cultural variations of how friendships are formed, as well as requiring substantial investment and ultimately generating significant returns.

Alejandro offers an additional metaphor:

"They're like chewy candy because from the surface they would. They're like really rude, you know, if they don't care about you, then they won't give a... if you penetrate there like you know circle... they become your friends. And I think it's like one of the best things to have, like a Hungarian friend." (Alejandro)

Realizing that Hungarian friendships take time and effort to cultivate serves as a coping strategy in its own right. When students recognize this aspect of the culture, they are able to overcome the discomfort of their first interaction with the other person and keep trying to establish an authentic relationship.

4.3.5 The Role of Technology in Sustaining the Archipelago

Technology, particularly social media platforms, plays a crucial role in maintaining all three tiers of this archipelago across space and time.

Relando notes the connective power of digital technology:

"Because of technology, we were able to somehow keep in touch until now" with friends from previous study destinations. (Relando)

Kate emphasizes how technology helps maintain ties with friends in the Philippines:

"We're lucky that we have video calls right now, so we get to talk to them." (Kate)

This study's findings confirm previous research about technology's role in helping to maintain transnational relationships and therefore reinforce conceptualizing transnational social spaces as being maintained through various "networks of relationships, practices, and resources" (Levitt & Schiller, 2004).

However, students simultaneously demonstrate awareness of technology's limitations. Jacobe states firmly:

"Nothing beats the physical presence." (Jacobe)

Raymundo characterizes online friendships as "superficial" and notes they "never lasted."

This supports the study's finding that while there is an opportunity for connection through technology across distance, there is still a strong preference among students for interaction with their friends physically, emphasizing that the basis of friendship is being together; thus highlighting the importance of everyday practice (Conradson & Latham, 2005) and embodiment in being a person and living in a transnational manner.

Consequently, there are two building blocks of the archipelago: digital connection and "being together." However, being together has greater value for developing true intimacy than using technology to connect.

Chapter 4.4: The Alchemy of Mobility — Transformed Selves

4.4.1 Overview: Transformation as Emergent Property

The last dimension of RQ1 synthesizes the complete journey and shows how the totality of experience with mobility (the sum of all struggles, connections, and conflicts) functions as an alchemical process that fundamentally alters the identity and worldview of all students. The transformation occurs not passively but through the development of the student's "agency in mobility" as defined by Tran and Vu (2018); student agency is developed by "struggling, competing, colluding, and collectively contesting" in constrained fields of action.

4.4.2 The Alchemy of Struggle: From Disorientation to Self-Knowledge

The transformative process originates in the very struggles documented throughout Part One. The "shock of academic autonomy," the "struggle for independence," and overcoming the "invisible walls" are not just things we need to get beyond; they are the elements that define who we are becoming.

Alejandro's declaration, *"I'm a changed person... the way that Hungary shaped me,"* speaks directly to this process. The "shaping" is not gentle molding but forceful adaptation and growth.

The findings of this study add further weight to the idea discussed by Lehmann (2007) regarding the concept of "habitus clash" and the potential for these experiences to create change. The problem is how people experienced devaluation; however, this research indicates that habitus clashes can positively and negatively change people's lives, not just in spite of the difficulties associated with living through these experiences but as a result of encountering these types of events.

Joaquin's reflection that studying abroad "changed me... in terms of my, the path that I'm like taking at the moment" illustrates how the experience can reorient even fundamental professional aspirations.

Louisana connects the transformation to emergent independence:

"I became more independent and more in a sense that I can just handle myself." (Louisana)

Mike echoes this, describing the challenge of learning to "juggle my time" between work, study, and daily maintenance.

Nicole provides a particularly poignant reflection:

"It changed me... in what way? Probably first is being independent like it's one of the greatest thing that I've learned here... I didn't know how hard it is to be living alone." (Nicole)

4.4.3 The Widened Perspective: Breaking Stereotypes and Cultivating Empathy

A core component of this transformation is the development of a "widened perspective" enabling students to see the world, and their place within it, differently.

Jaime captures this dimension with characteristic clarity:

"It changed my life in a way that I see the world like... I get to break my stereotypes when it comes to other cultures." (Jaime)

The "breaking of stereotypes" is produced from negotiating the multiple social worlds throughout the archipelago and challenging unexamined beliefs. This finding aligns with the study's discussion regarding how transnational mobility creates "cosmopolitan" worldviews, as well as "epistemic humility" (i.e., an awareness that one's knowledge is limited and located).

Alena describes learning to listen to, rather than judge, friends with *"very, very different"* beliefs. This capacity for epistemic humility represents profound personal transformation, directly countering the "symbolic violence" of having one's own knowledge systems devalued.

Felipe reflects on how his perspective on material wealth shifted:

"It has changed the way I value stuff so people experience in general. So for me, I think I've shifted more towards valuing people and family more than the physical stuff." (Felipe)

Joaquin connects his transformed perspective to his study of anthropology:

"Being able to expose the different cultures, you became more like understanding to the cultures... it gives you an opportunity to explore the world in a way." (Joaquin)

JC connects his transformed perspective to his study of anthropology:

"Being able to expose the different cultures, you became more like understanding to the cultures... it gives you an opportunity to explore the world in a way." (JC)

4.4.4 Forward-Looking Wisdom: The Legacy of the Journey

The most important product of all of this work is the creation of forward-thinking wisdom from students. The advice provided to future overseas students should not just be treated as common sense; rather, it should be considered the distilled form of the significant and hard-earned experience that these students have acquired.

1. Be Prepared (Mentally & Financially) - This pole reflects the pragmatic, calculated dimension of the journey, the lessons learned from struggle.

Felipe's advice is comprehensive:

"Prepare mentally and emotionally. If you're planning to stay long term... you'd have to prepare yourself and find coping mechanisms." (Felipe)

Nicole advises future students to *"be mentally, physically, financially prepared."* Glenda counsels: "be prepare, emotionally and mentally."

Nicole offers a particularly layered perspective:

"Prepare as much as they can because I told you, like in the first part of this, that when I graduated, I already had this vision, but I don't know how to execute on it, but subconsciously I was preparing. I was really preparing for the moment that I got this opportunity, you know, I was saving up... I don't even know why I'm saving up and just yeah, and it all made sense when I got here that I was really preparing myself for that." (Nicole)

The importance of being prepared correlates with what this research stated about needing "coping mechanisms" and "systems of support" to deal successfully with the challenges of living outside one's country (Harris et al., 2018). For the successful student, their mobility does not solely rely on having academic qualifications; it requires the psychological and practical preparation required for being able to become mobile.

2. Embrace the Leap - The second pole of wisdom balances the first. It constitutes a call to action, a refusal to permit fear to dictate life trajectory.

Kate's advice is the most evocative:

"Step out of your comfort zone. Fly, book that ticket and fly." (Kate)

This is not naive optimism but hard-won conviction that the rewards of the journey—the transformation, the widened perspective, the emergent self—are worth the attendant risks.

Aisha's advice to *"talk to strangers"* because *"everyone is a stranger"* provides a more concrete specification of this principle—a practical strategy for building community in the face of isolation.

Cassius offers another dimension:

"When in Rome, do what the Romans do. I think that's one thing that I always came to my mind that I'm on one place that is not my home. And I'm here to adapt and they should not adapt on me." (Cassius)

This philosophical approach to adapting to and accepting differences rather than opposing differences demonstrates an evolved way of dealing with the difficulties within the process of transnational experience.

The majority of the critical ISM literature emphasizes inequity, limitation, and hardship in their writing, while the results of this study also indicate that students develop a form of "affirmative wisdom," which is practical knowledge to enable students to effectively function in, persist in, and, to a certain extent, develop personally in an environment that is not conducive; therefore this supports the research's emphasis on "tactical agency" as described in Németh and Váradi (2018), and the idea of "negotiated resilience" as developed by Harris et al. (2018), within structures that are characterized by inequity.

Having both "prepare" and "leap" as poles that can exist together creates an ultimate expression of students being transformed into their new selves through internalizing both structural constraints associated with migration regimes and their ability to exercise tactical agency within those same constraints. They understand what is at stake while recognizing their own power to make things happen. Their knowledge is a testament to the magic of mobility—having started their journey with a "calculated leap," they now realize that much of what is important in life ultimately requires faith in yourself before you make a "leap".

PART TWO: COMMUNITY DYNAMICS

Chapter 4.5: Formation — The Emergence of Community as Strategic Response

4.5.1 Overview: Community as Survival Infrastructure

The second research question asked: *How are Filipino student communities in Hungary formed, fragmented, and reconciled within the context of transnational mobility?* The findings indicate that the formation of communities is not simply an automatic byproduct of shared nationality but rather an intentional strategy used to respond to the particular vulnerabilities associated with an individual's ability to move internationally. The theory of stratified knowledge migration maintains that all students who cross borders do so with resources that differ from one another, and that this difference creates a necessity (not just a desire) for providing collective forms of support in order to enable each individual to survive.

4.5.2 Anticipatory Formation: Community Before Arrival

It is noteworthy that the establishment of a community commences prior to actually arriving; much of this bonding occurs through connections made during the application period via online sources. The functions fulfilled by this type of bond can be further explained using the transnational social fields framework (Levitt & Schiller, 2004). According to them, transnational social fields are maintained through networks of relationships, practices, and resources that are maintained and flow through multiple borders. The Filipino student community does not come into being out of nowhere upon arrival, as it has been developing/developed over several months of utilizing digital applications to connect with one another pre-departure.

Glenda's account exemplifies this pattern:

"Even in the before going to Hungary, we have known each other because during the application process we met." (Glenda)

This experience is echoed by Mike, who describes how these early connections facilitated the transition:

"When I arrived in my dorm, I have met my dorm mates and... the girl on the other room, she and I just vibe a lot. Like, really, really vibe and all that. So I'll be like this girl. She and I will be friends because we have same interests and... she's also Asian. She's from Japan." (Mike)

Joaquin similarly describes how digital platforms enabled community formation:

"Even before that and I have already made friends, especially if those I know who are also studying at Corvinus. So we already make [made] this Facebook group chat and on a daily basis, while waiting for the results, we have already been communicating a lot and it somehow made it even easier for us to interact with each other by the time we were already meeting each other in person." (Joaquin)

Relando confirms the centrality of these pre-arrival networks:

"It was really made easier because of the access to Facebook... group messages and at that time of the application we were also were able to get access to information at first hand information of students who are already here." (Relando)

Anticipatory processes challenge methodological nationalism by questioning the notion that all social and cultural systems are contained within a national context (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002).

The Filipino student community in Hungary is made up of the social and cultural practices which are based in/connected to the Philippines, Hungary, and the digital world. Therefore, this community cannot be reduced to a single country but exists outside of any one country as a transnational community.

4.5.3 The Safety Net Function: Practical and Emotional Support

Upon arrival, the anticipatory community transforms into an active support system. Students describe receiving assistance that proves essential for navigating an unfamiliar bureaucratic, linguistic, and social environment.

Jacobe's testimony captures the depth of this dependency:

"I really don't know how will I survive without the Filipino community here. You know, it's really a really... They are really part of my support system here in Hungary because without them I don't know what will happen." (Jacobe)

Arnolfo similarly emphasizes the foundational role of the community:

"When I was still in the Philippines, I'm so... Filipinos are very I don't know, sociable?, especially if Filipinos are in another country and they meet each other there, they would be pretty close... guided us on how to conveniently go home to our new flat, or like how to adjust to Budapest." (Arnolfo)

Raymundo describes how the community provided both practical and emotional continuity:

"Since I arrived here, I've been with Filipinos and almost every week there's an event like, not event, but there's always like gathering like a dinner with them. That's why I never, ever felt homesickness at all." (Raymundo)

Alena's experience with her Vietnamese roommate, while not Filipino, illustrates the broader pattern of co-national support that characterizes the Filipino community:

"It would be my roommates, and, and she's Vietnamese, she's Asian, so we can relate so much. We used to hide rice cookers indoors because it's not allowed... I think that's a common ground that that we really that's really, you know broke the tension or the awkwardness." (Alena)

Stratified knowledge migration creates the framework for understanding this testimony. Non-elite students, as documented by Yang (2018), navigate through 'class disadvantage and resource inadequacy' to achieve elite transitions, but not without 'compromise and complicity.'

The Filipino community, therefore, constitutes an informal infrastructure of survival via collective, reciprocal support in compensation for formal institutional deficiencies.

4.5.4 The Role of Shared Culture: Food, Language, and Habitus

The importance of shared cultural customs (especially dietary) in uniting the community is regularly highlighted in the data. These customs represent more than just personal preferences; they can also be seen as an example of habitus, which is the habitual, deeply ingrained, and embodied dispositions of individuals that develop through primary socialization and influence our perception, evaluation, and action in the world.

Alisa's account is paradigmatic:

"We usually eat. 'Cause I think this is the activity that we mostly are like, majorly missed in the Philippines are food." (Alisa)

Jaime elaborates on how food creates connection:

"What bonds people together is usually food too. So yeah, it's fun. It's really interesting statement. What usually bonds people is food." (Jaime)

Raymundo similarly notes the role of food in community formation:

"We share the same culture and language... we also share the same food." (Raymundo)

Mike provides a vivid account of how food practices facilitate cross-cultural friendship:

"I'm a kitchen person, like 50% of my day I'm in the kitchen preparing my food, and it's because I eat three times a day, sometimes four times... and they always see me. And I always let them taste my food. And I think that's the good thing because the food connected us." (Mike)

Filipino students have the opportunity to not only eat and satisfy physical hunger when they gather to cook and eat together in Hungary, but also to recreate and re-establish their cultural habitus as they practice this in a different field. Rice is the preferred grain, sharing of meals is the expectation, and food plays a central role in social gatherings. All of these elements represent an embodiment of socialization based on one's class and nationality. The manner in which food is eaten in Hungary varies greatly from how it is traditionally done in the Philippines, and as a result, when the Filipino students gather to eat in Hungary, they are collectively validating and reaffirming their cultural habitus.

4.5.5 Formalization: From Informal Network to Organized Association

The community's importance is underscored by its formalization into an official association. Arnolfo, one of the founding members of the Association of Filipino Students in Hungary (AFSHU), describes this process with evident pride:

"We were formally established like two years ago [2022] with the Association of Filipino students in Hungary. I never thought that people trust my initiative... I find it very, very fulfilling that at least I'm part of the first ones who are The Pioneers who organize the community... one of the highlights of my student life here in Hungary." (Arnolfo)

He added, provided additional context:

"When I arrive in Hungary, I have already met some a lot of like hand of handful of Filipino students, and it's really a matter of form in formal social group like it's only for for going out, for eating and and and also for dining... I think when the 2nd and the 3rd batch of the students who are much more in numbers... they realise that the number of students are getting bigger and bigger and they want to have a legacy that at least when we are done with our studies some there's already a community that will welcome them." (Arnolfo)

Relando similarly emphasized the significance of formalization:

"It's also a nice thing that we were somehow like officially created this association of Filipino students. This is always been a dream of Filipino students to really make it official... and it was a very good opportunity for us that we were here and we were part of that establishment of the Filipino Association." (Relando)

This formalization represents what Tran and Vu (2018) term "collective agency for contestation." In this way, students are not just passively gaining support from an existing community; they are going to create their own institutions to help provide them with a more organized and sustainable way of accessing mutual aid.

Chapter 4.6: Fragmentation — The "Tight-Knit" Paradox and Internal Frictions

4.6.1 Overview: The Paradox of Closeness

While formation is a response to threats outside of the community, fragmentation identifies the internal strife created among many community members by this vigorous formation process. The data show that the very elements of closeness that allow the Filipino community to be an essential form of support for community members also create the opportunity for significant

conflict between community members. This is known as the "tight-knit" paradox; as communities come together in response to similar vulnerabilities, they become places of intense emotions, scrutiny, and conflict amongst themselves.

4.6.2 Gossip and "Crab Mentality" as Social Regulation

By far the most common answer to where internal conflict stems from was gossip. Gossip is interpreted through the Filipino cultural concept of "crab mentality," where someone would pull down someone who achieves success. The tendency to bring down someone who excels is often expressed idiomatically in Filipino culture as having a crab mentality. Although this can simply be dismissed as envy, perhaps a more academic explanation would be through interdependent self-construal (see Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Cultures that have an interdependent self-view, which most collectivistic cultures do, including the Philippines, view themselves in relation to others through ingrained social relationships. Someone pulling down another can be seen as them wanting to restore equality within the group. As the Japanese saying popularized by Markus and Kitayama goes, "The nail that sticks out gets pounded down." The same can be said for Filipinos.

Viewing crab mentality through this lens suggests a reframing of such behaviors as individual-level jealousy or envy, which will be highlighted below by Alisa and Rina, and more as a culturally ingrained practice of communal equilibration. Perhaps anti-success sentiments are indicators of a greater Filipino cultural framework for what kind of relationship should exist between individuals and their community. It can become especially toxic in the Hungarian context because these students have limited social circles and Filipino communities become hyper-significant in their lives. If someone in that small community reaches a certain level of success, it can feel like a larger threat to the community.

Alisa's account is particularly vivid and painful:

"There's this characteristic of Filipinos that are... negative, like crab mentality when someone is getting promoted or when someone is... being praised in the workplace as compared to others. They would make fun of that. Or maybe because of the envy... they would become envious of that person so they would show crab mentality." (Alisa)

She continues, describing a specific experience of betrayal:

"I have two experiences. The first one was when I made a really close friend... we were really close. But then because we were from the same culture, we had the same language, but then it

didn't turn out nice because there was a misunderstanding... our intentions were not the same anymore." (Alisa)

Joaquin provides additional context on how these dynamics operate:

"Filipino friends are like, they're the ones that you can easily attract to because you have similar[ities]... I live with Filipinos in my first day here. But it's just that sometimes it can get like super overwhelming as well because, you know, you're very familiar with the problems in the Philippines. That's why you move away from the Philippines to move away with the problem." (Joaquin)

The study theorizes that gossip serves as a form of social cartography, and this testimony must be viewed within this context. When formal forms of recourse are limited because student migrants tend to exist in small and restrictive groups, informal communication serves as a critical method for regulating their lives on a day-to-day basis. Gossip is used not only as a way of creating interpersonal drama but also as a means to enforce social norms, establish hierarchies, delineate boundaries, and distribute resources.

Rina's experience in the workplace further illustrates these dynamics:

"I there was this person who I trusted so much, like there were three of them, actually, but I'm not sure what they thought... and I think they thought it was only a joke and it was funny that I was being favoured by our boss, but like they were making fun of me because of that." (Rina)

4.6.3 Life Stage Divergence as Structural Fragmentation

Beyond overt conflict, the data revealed that community fragments through natural processes of life stage divergence. Alejandro, a PhD student, explains how academic progression affects community participation:

"My responsibility as a PhD student doesn't, you know, doesn't give me the same time as I had last two years ago to organize these parties and stuff. So personally I can't, you know, continue the legacy of like keeping the Filipino community together." (Alejandro)

He elaborates on how this affects community cohesion:

"It's now a loose it's not a tightly knit community. It's like a community like loose threads and everything because I think... my responsibility as a PhD student doesn't, you know, doesn't give me the same time as I had last two years ago [when still MA student]." (Alejandro)

Gary similarly describes how life stage differences create social distance:

"There was a thing, especially this is where I realized age really does come into a part. The age difference and the experience difference. It actually does make it so that the personality will start clashing to a certain degree." (Gary)

One aspect of transnational community relationships is a transnational community's temporality—that is, the way in which members of transnational communities are not always involved in their community in the same way. For example, typically the most engaged person in a transnational community is a new member (i.e., someone in their first or second year of university), while at later stages in the university process (i.e., during thesis writing, working at a job, searching for a job), the ability of community members to contribute time and resources will decrease.

4.6.4 Social Class as a Hidden Fault Line

The data reveals that social class differences—often unspoken—constitute a significant source of friction. Aisha's analysis is remarkably sophisticated and direct:

"I think also when it comes to social class difference too. I think that's where the conflict is really. That's why we don't bond as deep as my other friends where, you know, we have this real connection." (Aisha)

She continues, explaining how class shapes social dynamics:

"With my international friends, they actually helping me about the academics when I have some trouble, they give some help when they have trouble. I have them so yeah. For Filipino friends, some Filipino are well-off... could be a thing because I'm the only Filipino here in the university, so it's not often I speak Filipino, so I only speak English here." (Aisha)

The importance of this evidence lies in its theoretical support in demonstrating how class-based differences do not disappear through mobility, but instead are moved, refracted, and at times, amplified by transnational spaces. In this example, the Filipino community reproduces class distinctions through their everyday relationships to one another.

Jaime's awareness of his privileged position further illuminates this dynamic:

"I am lucky to have parents that can actually provide for me. And when I need money, I just ask and they will give it to me immediately... I can feel for those students who are here and they can't rely on any parent to give them something." (Jaime)

This acknowledgment of differential economic capital—and the empathy it generates—reveals the stratification that exists even within a community united by shared nationality.

4.6.5 Political Polarization as Ideological Fracture

The prominence of politics among members of the Filipino community is probably the most alarming discovery. It appears that students in the community show clear evidence that differing political ideologies—specifically, those concerning the political situation in the Philippines—are a potential source of considerable division between them.

Joaquin observes:

"The Filipinos are like, they're also, like, divided with political beliefs... sometimes it get it super like... very hard to navigate that experience and having that kind of like dynamics can be like super... can be a struggle for someone to be to connect to Filipinos." (Joaquin)

He elaborates:

"Having Filipinos having Filipino friends is actually like some sort of like... but the family for you. Right. Because they're there. They're like, talking terms of, like, we have encountered problems that are, like, more that's like relevant to the Philippines, for example, like, because they understand your situation, they're Filipinos too. But in terms of like... sometimes, like Filipinos can be like, yeah, like, it can be like overwhelming as well. Turn to international because there is like you are detached with like the politics of the country." (Joaquin)

Nikka shares a specific experience of friendship dissolution based on political differences:

"I was also surprised that what's this that we had very different public opinion or political inclination. There was a huge difference." (Nikka)

The findings of this research expand the framework established by the previous literature review, which identifies both class-based and gender-based divisions within the Filipino student population, by examining the degree of political polarization among this population as an underexplored area of transnational community dynamics.

Jenny's experience with Filipino flat mates who held different religious beliefs illustrates another dimension of this ideological fracture:

"I think I struggled with dealing with them because two of them were in a different religion. So it was my first time to deal with that kind of religion in them. They don't celebrate birthdays, Christmas. So it was a struggle for us." (Jenny)

4.6.6 Academic Attainment as a Dimension of Stratification

In addition to social class, generational gap, and political division, educational level further distinguished participants' placement in the Filipino community. Students at different academic levels—whether undergraduate, master's, or doctoral—placed them in different positions that held different types of academic capital.

Alejandro, one of our PhD students, stated very clearly how his academic advancement impacted both his participation and his position within the community. Saying that he has less time to actually be part of parties or organize them for the Filipino student community, given that his doctoral studies are making him way too busy. As a PhD student, he also holds a leader-like role.

Graduate students, particularly those pursuing their doctoral degrees, seemed to hold positions of symbolic power within the community. As holders of more education, they had cultural capital that converted to social recognition from other community members. This recognition was sometimes paired with feelings of PhD students being perceived as aloof or removed from the undergraduates' experiences.

Conversely, undergraduate and master's students sometimes viewed doctoral students with a mixture of respect and distance. As Gary explained, the age difference and the experience difference of these students matter.

Academic achievement, the reward for completing the mobility trajectory, therefore became something that separated participants. Participants who reached higher levels of education had more symbolic capital but also faced another dilemma in terms of staying connected to the community. This study adds to research regarding stratification within communities by showing how these academic trajectories become tools of differentiation.

Chapter 4.7: Reconciliation — Strategic Diversification and Personal Growth

4.7.1 Overview: Reconciliation as Individual Evolution

The third dimension of RQ2 addresses how students navigate the tensions documented above. Reconciliation for these students means not only repairing their friendships but also incorporating their friends into their overall social network differently than before. In creating parallel systems of support within the complexity of the Filipino community, students develop as individuals through this process.

4.7.2 Strategic Diversification: Building Parallel Networks

The most significant coping strategy is the formation of friendships with international students from other countries.

Gary's testimony is paradigmatic:

"I feel actually a lot more settled [with the international community]... Honestly, if we're talking about like which community I like more, I still like the Asian community, the best. But International is a bit more closer." (Gary)

He elaborates on why international friendships feel different:

"International is a bit more closer. It's more about awareness of their own faults compared to a lot of the Hungarians [and Filipino] here, which is quite problematic." (Gary)

This quotation also illustrates a significant change in Gary's life; that is, while he did not give up his preference for Asian culture as a connection, he experiences a deeper 'settledness' through a more diverse network. The international community, as it is free of the particular cultural characteristics and dynamics of the Filipino community (i.e., the gossip, the crab mentality, the political division), provides a sense of belonging that Gary perceives as being a more secure and stable environment.

In the Bourdieusian perspective, these students are accumulating new social capital, in the form of a peer network, through shared transnational experience; one that is not characterized by the same longstanding relationships of intense conflict. This peer network creates new forms of emotional support and social and cultural capital for these students.

4.7.3 Selective Engagement: Managing Community Intensity

Concurrently with diversification, students develop more selective engagement with the Filipino community.

Louisana articulates a common sentiment:

"It's better to have like a one... A. A few friends... Then having a lot." (Louisana)

She explains why this selectivity is necessary:

"Because you don't know. You don't know if... You don't know exactly who they are... That's it." (Louisana)

Jenny similarly describes her preference for limited, deeper connections:

"I try to be independent, but even my my colleagues back in the Philippines would even tell me that I'm a maverick person because I try to be really be with my own self. Yeah... I'm a weird one, I'm sorry." (Jenny)

Jenny's experience exemplifies this selective withdrawal:

"I don't usually go with them when they have, like, outings in my room because I'm not. I'm not working as part time student, I just kind of distance myself. So I think every day they used to eat together. But for me, I used to be just with myself because I'm, I'm that kind of person. I don't really go with them. I I prefer to be alone." (Jenny)

This strategy helps Filipinos cope with their culture's intensity by forming smaller social groups of people they can trust (i.e., people who have similar values and life conditions and are willing to tolerate the issues of the community).

4.7.4 Reconciliation as Personal Growth, Not Friendship Repair

Strikingly, when students do describe reconciliation with former friends, they frame it as an achievement of personal maturity rather than the restoration of the original relationship.

Louisana's account is particularly instructive:

"That was actually made me so mad, but I tried to be civil because I'm also the first one who tried to understand him. When it comes to his mental health. I tried to explain it to other people, like maybe because he's he has this mental health issue, let's just understand." (Louisana)

This testimony illustrates a significant transformation: Louisana transitions from blaming to contextualizing, from anger to understanding. Although she does not assert that the friendship has returned to its previous level, what she does recite is the development of herself; the person who has learned "to be civil", "to understand", and "to explain to others."

Alisa similarly notes with a wisdom born of experience:

"I think we've already reconciled actually, but I think it will never be the same again." (Alisa)

Jason describes a similar process of reconciliation with a long-term friend:

"We met each other in one of the international conferences I attended, and so it was so emotional that we talk to each other trying to patch things... it's not a big, big issue. It's just, you know, some feelings fall apart." (Jason)

In liminality theory, this acceptance that relationships can be transformed and repaired, without necessarily going back to their original form, indicates a form of adaptation to perpetual liminality. However, according to Ybema et al. (2011), transitional liminality has a defined beginning and end (transitional liminality), meaning that the relationship will eventually be able to be considered to have completed its transitional phase and will return to stable reintegration. On the other hand, students realize that relationships, similar to identities, are not necessarily fixed and stable and may be different from their original form.

4.7.5 Philosophical Acceptance of Transience

Through repeated experiences of community formation, fragmentation, and selective re-engagement, students develop a philosophical acceptance of relational transience.

Alisa reflects with hard-won wisdom:

"People come and go like they're really here temporarily, so you have to accept that fact." (Alisa)

Joaquin similarly describes how he has learned to navigate temporary connections:

"The ones that are part of my core friends are like the ones that are like linked or somehow like we have like the same values, the same core... And the ones that I can like easily talk to even if I can like they know. Like what I do? They know me as a person 'cause they know my core." (Joaquin)

This statement revealed that transnational life requires a new understanding of relationships being temporary, as is the sojourn. The students are able to develop connections yet understand that those connections may cease to exist as people move on, whether due to graduation, employment opportunities in other locations, or to different stages of life.

Cassius' observation about international friendships captures this temporal awareness:

"I have international friends, mostly expats... but to be honest, I feel like sometimes it's a little bit superficial because everyone knows that we're not gonna stay here for long." (Cassius)

This awareness makes it possible to connect with each other; it provides a different quality of connection. The relationship can be interpreted as both meaningful and temporary as it is based on the time limit set out by the student migration program.

Chapter 4.8: The Role of Gossip in Shaping Community Dynamics

4.8.1 Overview: Gossip as Social Cartography

The sub-question RQ2a asked: What role does gossip play in shaping group boundaries, conflicts, exclusions, and reconciliation among Filipino student groups? The data support that gossip is not peripheral social noise, but the primary means by which the Filipino student community is mapped, monitored, and contested. Gossip is social cartography; a way of navigating fragile forms of transnational belonging and of establishing and eroding trust within a community; drawing and redrawing group boundaries.

This finding supports Dreby's original work (2009) called "Gender and Transnational Gossip," where he talks about how gossip helps maintain social networks and family relationships between geographically separated families. Drotbohm's (2010) research on "Gossip and Social Control across the Seas," which looks at how gossip functions in Cape Verdean transnational families to cement social inequalities and regulate behavior (especially about gender and resource exchange), also illustrates that the concept of an interpretive community exists across distances.

4.8.2 Gossip as Boundary-Drawing: Who Is "In" and Who Is "Out"

The data revealed that gossip plays a crucial role in establishing and policing group boundaries. Through gossip, students collectively create maps showing who belongs or does not belong, who is trustworthy, and who should be excluded from the group.

Alisa's account of workplace gossip illustrates how these dynamics operate:

"There's this characteristic of Filipinos that are... negative like crab mentality when someone is getting promoted or when someone is... being praised in the workplace as compared to others. They would make fun of that." (Alisa)

She continues, describing how this created exclusion:

"I there was this person who I trusted so much, like there were three of them, actually, but I'm not sure what they thought... and I think they thought it was only a joke and it was funny that I was being favoured by our boss, but like they were making fun of me because of that." (Alisa)

This testimony reveals how gossip functions to regulate success and ambition. When a member of the community reaches a point of recognition (e.g., in academic achievement, in obtaining a highly desired position, or in receiving praise from superiors in the workplace), the use of

gossip can also be employed to diminish their stature. The underlying message in these circumstances is that if you rise above other members of the group, you will ultimately become a target of that group.

This conclusion is consistent with Clawson (2005), who demonstrates how gossip supports the preservation of valuable work-related networks by reinforcing connections among individuals and helping to circulate reputational information, which promotes social cohesion.

4.8.3 Gossip as Conflict Generation and Amplification

Gossip does not merely reflect existing conflicts; it actively generates and amplifies them.

Nikka's account of friendship dissolution illustrates this dynamic:

"I was also surprised that what's this that we had very different public opinion or political inclination. There was a huge difference." (Nikka)

Jacobe describes a situation where gossip about a classmate led to collective exclusion:

"One of my classmates? No, basically the entire class severed ties with this person... Because she's very different. This person is very different from us in terms of how you know how this person perceive things racially, ethically... the perception of this person is very different and sometimes during in class, if our opinion is different from this person's opinion, this person would, you know, would heckle us or something like that... we decided to, you know, to severe ties with this person." (Jacobe)

This testimony doesn't directly mention gossip, but it shows how political differences come out into the open through informal ways of communicating. Students learn about each other's political opinions via conversation, through group commentary, and through stories about who supports which candidate or party.

Besnier et al. (2009) point out that gossip amplifies, negotiates, and can sometimes change social differences. Gossip reflects and also produces hierarchies while distributing symbolic capital through the circulation of narratives.

4.8.4 Gossip as Exclusion: Mechanisms of Social Marginalization

The data reveals specific mechanisms through which gossip produces exclusion. Alisa's account of workplace gossip hints at these dynamics:

"They would make fun of me because of that... they would show crab mentality." (Alisa)

Being "made fun of" in some way isn't just something that is discomforting; it actually is a type of social exclusion. Through ridicule and negative remarks, people are put in an outsider position, as someone who is deserving of ridicule rather than being respected. This way of positioning people can have tangible outcomes, impacting access to information, invitations to social gatherings, and the extent to which people will provide help to them.

There are several ways in which exclusion takes place through extrinsic mechanisms of exclusion, including: (1) withholding of information, as a result those persons mentioned in gossip may become isolated from the information-sharing network; (2) omission of invitations, as those persons may not be invited to social events at which social ties within the community are strengthened; (3) erosion of trust, as the reliability and integrity of those persons is subject to doubt; (4) withdrawal of solidarity, as members of the community become less willing to provide assistance or support to those persons.

These mechanisms are rarely explicit. Typically, people do not typically announce exclusion by stating, "We are excluding X." Rather, exclusion from a group occurs through cumulative effects from many small decisions to not share information about the excluded person, to not offer invitations to the excluded person, or to not extend assistance to the excluded person. The use of third-party accounts to provide justification for exclusion occurs through the use of gossip, where stories about the excluded person circulate, providing a "rationale" for their exclusion.

This supports Vaidyanathan et al.'s (2016) conclusion that when formal recourse is limited, people will rely on informal gossip to govern actions and to safeguard group interests in constrained fields.

4.8.5 Gossip as Reconciliation? The Ambivalent Potential

The data on gossip's role in reconciliation is more complex and ambivalent. Louisana's account of moving from anger to understanding suggests that gossip's effects can sometimes be mitigated:

"That was actually made me so mad, but I tried to be civil because I'm also the first one who tried to understand him. When it comes to his mental health. I tried to explain it to other people, like maybe because he's he has this mental health issue, let's just understand." (Louisana)

This testimony gave evidence of how her viewpoint has changed. She went from being involved in or subject to negative gossip to reversing the script and using positive examples.

She also said that she has "tried to clarify to others" her own style of explaining by looking at negative examples of gossip through a different lens.

Guerrero (2022) notes, stories of struggle, kindness or shared discrimination, spread through community circulation can create connections as barriers between people begin to dissolve and focus goes from division (within groups) to being part of a larger, less stable group, (collectively) than was initially thought. Driel and Verkuyten (2022) found that gossip within a multi-ethnic Italian community "facilitates strong community relationships by sustaining local norms and promoting trust relationships and shared narratives."

However, the data also reveals the limits of gossip's reconciliatory potential. Alisa's observation that reconciliation *"will never be the same again"* suggests that even when relationships are repaired, the damage gossip has done cannot be fully undone.

While gossip does serve a function of exclusion, it can also allow for eventual re-inclusion. There is not as much data on re-inclusion as there was about exclusion, but some patterns emerged. Conditions for re-inclusion usually included: (1) admission of wrongdoing or the behavior that got the person ostracized in the first place; (2) proof that the person had changed their behavior over time; (3) someone in leadership or another community member willing to stand up for that individual; and (4) enough time passing so that emotions die down and the community can rethink.

Louisiana's account suggests that the person who initiates reconciliation is often the one who has grown personally through the experience, while for Alisa, re-inclusion typically does not restore relationships to their previous state. This can create a cycle that implies gossip can help reduce conflict, but the costs incurred from gossip, especially regarding trust and reputation, cannot be recovered.

4.8.6 Gossip as Social Cartography: Theoretical Synthesis

The collective evidence demonstrates the study's theorization of gossip as social cartography. Filipino students in Hungary use gossip to create maps of their social worlds by identifying trustworthy insiders (those who share information appropriately and can be relied upon), untrustworthy outsiders (those who violate norms, cannot be trusted, and deserve exclusion), hierarchical spots (who has status, who is going up, who is going down), normative boundaries (what kind of behavior is acceptable, what kind of behavior warrants sanction), and political alignments (who shares their views and who is dangerously different).

This mapping is not a neutral observation but an active construction. Gossip is more than a tool for students to inform others about what is happening in their social world; it is also a way for them to create that social reality. By telling stories to each other, students create the categories they use to evaluate themselves and how they relate to one another.

The finding connects with Guendouzi's (2020) view of gossip as part of "practice communities," where common practices do more than share; through day-to-day conversations, they define and contest collective values. Looking at gossip from a Bourdieusian perspective shows that gossip is a means of symbolic power used in a stratified transnational field. In this light, gossip is used to distribute reputation capital, refine social differences, and ultimately provide access to scarce resources like housing information, emotional support, mentorship in academia or embassy assistance.

Through the use of social, cultural, and informational capital, tightly knit migrant groups create a network of how they discuss each other, and this provides them the means to reproduce hierarchies. This is done through the use of gossip, and it serves to create division between people such as scholarship recipients/self-funded students, PhD students/undergraduate students, city rural based students/as students who are "too" westernized, and those who are considered to be authentic and belonging to a certain community. These "minor" social infractions can grow quickly to cause reputational damage that results in tangible economic consequences. Clearly demonstrates the functioning of power in a subtle yet effective way through normal daily interactions.

Gossip has a greater potential for effecting change in the context of liminality. International students exist in a state of "betwixt-and-between"; they have lost stable feelings of belonging in their sending country while also not yet having fully integrated into the academic and social life of the host country. During these times of uncertainty, people seek ways to orient themselves in their changing social environment. Inadequately formed, the use of gossip serves to guide people by identifying who is trustworthy, who holds relevant institutional knowledge, who is going against the sociology of the community, and who has a build-up of valued resources. Anthropology supports this view, showing that gossip serves as a low-cost yet effective mechanism of norm enforcement in small communities (Giardini & Conte, 2012; Wiessner, 2005).

Gossip has both a dividing and unifying function and exposes the instability of belonging within a transnational context. In vulnerable migrant environments without anonymity and

limited options for leaving, the potential for reputation damage is exacerbated, demonstrating how hierarchical global structures and local precarity are manifested in the personal realms of transnationalism.

PART THREE: COPING STRATEGIES

Chapter 4.9: Navigating Academic Pressures — From Rigor to Autonomy

4.9.1 Overview: The Pedagogy of Autonomy

The third research question asked: *How do Filipino international students cope with the challenges and contradictions of their transnational experiences in Hungary?* The difficulty of the challenges students had was not due to difficulty alone, but rather that the students had come from an educational system in the Philippines that was based on a completely different philosophy of education. The students who had come from the Philippines were used to and expected a system that provided constant supervision, daily assignments, and one opportunity to succeed through a high-stakes or single-chance test, and now were in a system that assumed they had the ability to learn on their own and could achieve success in multiple ways.

4.9.2 The Shock of Pedagogical Difference

Students consistently described the Hungarian system as "easier" or "lighter" than what they had experienced in the Philippines, yet this characterization was always qualified.

Louisana's comparison captures the complexity:

"In the Philippines, we have like a weekly known everyday assignment, not the weekly. You have the everyday assignment, right? Like homework, like a paperwork, do an essay, do a research and stuff... here we don't have any assignment." (Louisana)

Having no daily homework assignments may seem freeing from the sense of constant stress, but it would also take away the external structure that many students rely on to succeed academically.

Aisha described her first-semester struggle:

"I was having a hard time focusing because mainly because of the voices of the Professor, I swear they're really soft... It's like they're singing a lullaby to me. So me being me, it will become a lullaby to my ears and end up sleeping." (Aisha)

Aisha's response—sleeping through lectures—was not laziness but a failure of adaptation. She has developed a coping strategy, for example, through her early years of schooling in the

Philippines she has found comfort in listening to clear, audible, authoritative, and well-enunciated presentations delivered by experts; this presented an absence of auditory cue to which she responded not having any alternative strategies, but rather formulated a strategy over time: "I will study this at home or at a library...now I work independently rather than in the classroom" (had to learn new self-regulatory skills).

This finding aligns with Lehmann's (2007) analysis of "habitus clash" in that they feel the inability to "fit in the university", where prior dispositions prove maladaptive in new academic fields.

4.9.3 The "Three Chances" as Coping Resource

The most frequently cited academic coping resource was the policy allowing multiple exam attempts.

Relando described his astonishment:

"If you wanna get a good grade you can take the exam like up to three times and that is something that is very unusual for a student coming from the Philippines." (Relando)

The academic anxiety experienced due to being used to the Philippine system of having one failed exam could mean a student has to repeat the course completely, was reduced for students through the implementation of this policy. This policy can be viewed as an institutionalized coping strategy; it is a structured means of relieving some of the stress that students would normally have to relieve on their own.

Aisha elaborated on this advantage:

"They actually hungry, I think in general they actually have this general rule where they give three chances to for students to pass an exam, which we don't have in the Philippines. Because if you fail your exam, your finals in the Philippines, you're done. You you need to repeat the subjects." (Aisha)

Yet students' relationship to this policy was complex. Nicole observed:

"I like the way how they how they teach... But for the over for the units and for yeah. It's not good... here it's 36 or 39 per semester and then subjects per semester and it's it's quite difficult to to manage." (Nicole)

While students can take multiple exams and have access to examination resources, the additional course load and greater intensity of the course also was a trade-off with flexibility

of the assessments. As a result, students had to develop skills to manage their time and ability to prioritize coursework, identifying which course required continued investment in time and which could be done with a more focused on preparation for exams.

4.9.4 Self-Directed Learning as Acquired Competence

Over time, students developed the capacity for self-directed learning that the Hungarian system presumed but did not teach.

Jaime articulated this adaptation:

"In the Philippines, it would, they would really make sure to put a nail in your head and struck all the information in it. But here, if you didn't learn, it's up to you. So you have to learn by yourself and learn how to be comfortable learning without the help of the teacher." (Jaime)

The use of a metacognitive perspective indicates that students are not just gaining content knowledge, but are also gaining the ability to learn in an alternate pedagogical mode. In doing so, they developed new study habits, began forming peer study groups, and learned to effectively utilize online resources as supplements to lectures.

Mike described this adaptation:

"When I first started, it was just a culture shock that it was easy, easier... comparing to the nursing schools in the Philippines, I could pass this one easier because there's less workload, there's no assignments. Oh, no paperwork, no case studies." (Mike)

4.9.5 Peer Learning as Collective Coping

A crucial collective strategy for managing academic pressures was peer learning within the Filipino community.

Raymundo described this practice:

"We usually share our notes... things like this with each other mainly because some of my classmates do not really want to share things like this, so we just keep it in our circle." (Raymundo)

A safe and secure space for academic interchange has been created for Filipino students through the use of the "circle." This space provides an avenue for the academic community to develop, discuss, and share their notes, methods, and understanding of academic subjects without the generally perceived competitive nature found in the typical classroom, thus alleviating much

of the stress associated with independent study and enhancing the development of friendships among classmates.

Mike described a similar dynamic:

"For my friend's international friends, they actually helping me about the academics when I have some trouble, they give some help when they have trouble. I have them so yeah." (Mike)

The reciprocal flow of academic support among peers through friendship networks is important. The peer-to-peer support system is informal and unstructured. Rather than serving as a substitute for the lack of formalized academic support provided by institutions, academic assistance was considered both functional and crucial.

Chapter 4.10: Navigating Language Barriers — From Shock to Strategic Multilingualism

4.10.1 Overview: The Pervasive Barrier

Language was possibly the biggest barrier and challenging issue faced by students. Students' academic pressure can be dealt with by employing appropriate study techniques. However, it caused difficulty in all other facets of their lives: understanding the classroom; grocery shopping; and accessing their healthcare provider. Students began to develop strategies to cope with language barriers that transformed from shock to increasingly sophisticated levels of language navigation.

4.10.2 The Shock of English Exclusion

Students arrived with the expectation that English would serve as a reliable medium of communication in Europe. This expectation was systematically disappointed.

Alisa's experience as a waitress was particularly stark:

"When you speak English to them, they don't really. They just ignore. They just ignored me. Even if I ask like as a waitress, I was like, hi. Can I help you? When they enter the restaurant that I worked in and then they would completely ignore me." (Alisa)

The experience of being "ignored" when speaking English constituted a form of symbolic violence—a devaluation of linguistic capital that students had spent years acquiring.

Mike described his initial shock:

"I was expecting that... maybe they could speak English. I mean, it's Europe and I was like, OK, maybe this is Europe and from the from what I know what I saw English is actually the second major language here in Hungary. But it was it was very shocking." (Mike)

4.10.3 Technology as Linguistic Prosthesis

The most immediate coping strategy was technological. Students turned to their phones as essential tools for navigating a Hungarian-speaking world.

Raymundo described this adaptation:

"I always open my phone and use Google Translate because we cannot really blame them for not speaking good English." (Raymundo)

The word "always" indicates a habitual action, performed unconsciously. For Raymundo, translation technology functioned as a permanent part of his life; it did not simply assist with specific instances; it was part of every transaction in which Hungarian would be the relevant language. His statement of "we can't really blame them" indicates the emotional labor involved with this approach — students had to overcome the urge to be offended by being excluded from English discussions and instead view such an exclusion as a neutral occurrence, as opposed to being rejected personally.

Nikka, who had prior exposure to Hungarian through an ex-boyfriend, was able to move beyond basic translation:

"I managed to retain some basic words, phrases, sentences that are crucial in like communicate communicating with like people on the street. I think I have a very good rapport, especially with like grocery ladies or like the janitors or service staff, because like I integrate as much language as I can." (Nikka)

Nikka's strategy of 'integrating as much language as I can' exemplifies a sophisticated implementation of linguistic compensatory strategy and has allowed her to use her knowledge of Hungary's language, albeit imperfectly, to provide herself with many areas of excellent social interaction with people she comes in contact with.

4.10.4 Hungarian Language Classes: Required but Insufficient

All students were required to take Hungarian language courses, generally for the duration of two semesters, but these courses were limited in scope and provided basic vocabulary.

Insufficient amounts of time spent learning the Hungarian language led to inadequate amounts of proficiency necessary for true integration.

Rosa described the limitation:

"We take Hungarian language since first year, so we had like 4 courses of Hungarian. Did we take it that seriously? Not really, because it's locally really hard and we're not. We're we're just not planning to stay in Hungary for long, so there's not really a point for us to really know the language." (Rosa)

Rosa's strategic calculation regarding the investment of limited time and cognitive resources in learning a foreign language for possibly only a short period of time demonstrates a pragmatic approach to language acquisition. All students learned enough of the target languages to be able to undertake basic activities in the target country (e.g., shopping, using public transport and understanding simple directives), but not enough for meaningful social interaction or to obtain employment in Hungary.

Louisana offered a similar assessment:

"We have to, like, two years... Oh, it's weak, actually. I just tried to like study it for for the scholarship of course." (Louisana)

4.10.5 Peer Translation as Collective Resource

When technology and classroom learning proved insufficient, students turned to peers for translation assistance. This was particularly crucial in high-stakes situations like healthcare.

Kate described a friend's emergency:

"We went to the hospital for an emergency and we were turned. We were told that we cannot have any checkups because we should have an Hungarian speaking person with us when we go for checkups." (Kate)

The hospital did not implement a new system-wide policy or procedure; instead, the students were able to build relationships with Hungarian-speaking friends, other Filipinos who were fluent in Hungarian and/or faculty and staff members at their universities to obtain help with accompanying them to medical appointments. Using the personal networks of these relationships resulted in both coping and a source of vulnerability for the students, as students having no such networks could have faced considerably more barriers than those with networks.

Chapter 4.11: Navigating Cultural Differences — From Shock to Strategic Distance

4.11.1 Overview: The Coldness of Hungarian Sociality

The basic differences in the cultures caused by more than just language manifested themselves through diverse social interaction styles, different norms, and varying values. The manner of coping employed by each student was determined by both circumstance and disposition and ranged from active engagement in the culture to strategic distancing from it.

4.11.2 The Experience of Cultural Reserve

The most frequently noted cultural difference was the perceived "coldness" or reserve of Hungarians, particularly in contrast to Filipino warmth and sociability.

Raymundo articulated this contrast:

"I can't say Europeans, Hungarians in general, they are a bit cold and it's it's hard to really approach them." (Raymundo)

This "coldness" was not interpreted as personal hostility but as a cultural difference requiring adjustment. Yet knowing it was cultural did not make it easier to navigate.

Rina described her initial reaction:

"I've never seen someone especially in the Philippines that doesn't smile in the counter like in McDonald's or the bus... we are always smiling... and they were not. So they're not so happy to serve me, you know." (Rina)

The lack of smiles—a commonplace occurrence of service interactions in the Philippines—was foreign to Rina. Her initial reaction was to reciprocate that lack of emotion; she wanted an “attitude” back. As soon as she realized that responding that way would lead to conflict, she changed her focus and used cognitive reframing as a coping mechanism. Rina understood that the Hungarians' emotional restraint came from a culture with a different set of expectations than those she had grown up with.

Aisha found this cultural difference liberating in some contexts:

"They don't care. They're they're just gonna mind their own business. They don't care. Whatever you're gonna do." (Aisha)

Because of the lack of the evaluative gaze that Aisha felt while in the Philippines (since "everyone's going to look at you"), she was largely free to present herself without external

influences as to how this should be done. The use of a cold gaze in one culture, therefore, represents a lack of freedom, while in another culture, the use of a cold gaze conveys freedom. The ability to cognitively reframe, or choose to see cultural differences in a positive light, was a strategy used by Aisha to cope with differing cultures.

4.11.3 The Slow Path to Hungarian Friendship

Students who successfully formed friendships with Hungarians described a distinctive pattern: initial reserve gradually giving way to deep loyalty.

Alejandro offered a memorable analogy:

"They're like chewy candy because... from the surface they would. They're like really rude, you know, if they don't care about you, then they won't give a... if you penetrate there like you know circle... they become your friends. And I think it's like one of the best things to have, like a Hungarian friend." (Alejandro)

The knowledge that maintaining Hungarian friendship takes both time and endurance also helped to buffer the students. For those who understood the logic behind this cultural relationship, the awkwardness of trying to create friendship initially was a temporary impediment, trusting that real friendship would develop.

Nikka's experience with her Hungarian friend illustrated the rewards of this persistence:

"She has taken care of me, like in terms of like going to the doctor if I needed like a translator... she gives me her like some hand me down clothes... what I've noticed is that Hungarians, once they consider you like a friend, they're very loyal and very protective of you." (Nikka)

4.11.4 Strategic Distance and Selective Engagement

Not all students pursued Hungarian friendship. Many adopted a strategy of selective engagement, focusing their social energy on international and Filipino communities while maintaining only functional relationships with Hungarians.

Geronimo explained his approach:

"There's a part of me that I don't want to adopt to their culture. Like, I don't want to understand everything. Like, I don't want to adjust to everything. So if you don't want to be friends because of my nationality? Then so be it. I don't care." (Geronimo)

Carlos' position of "I don't care" was a way of protecting himself from disappointment by reducing his expectations for building friendships in other cultures as well as relieving himself from the burden of continuously having to adapt because of his difference.

Jenny described a similar orientation:

"I treated this this myself today that we could be mechanism, yeah... So I don't usually go along with them actually." (Jenny)

Coping strategies were used by Jenny to minimize the possibility of being intimidated by an individual from a cultural background that is different from hers. This enabled Jenny to conserve her energy for the more stable relational connections with those of her own cultural background while simultaneously safeguarding herself against potential feelings of rejection.

Jenny articulated a similar position:

"I never really considered them as friends, just colleagues, you know, civil." (Jenny)

Chapter 4.12: Navigating Material Precarity — From Insufficiency to Multiple Streams

4.12.1 Overview: The Universal Insufficiency

The most tangible and pressing aspects of life in Hungary were related to the financial issues faced by students. Students faced challenges with their scholarship stipend, described by all participants as not being sufficient to meet their basic needs, and needing to develop complex strategies in order to manage their finances effectively, to earn additional income, and to obtain and access resources through collective arrangements.

The consistency with which students described the stipend as insufficient is striking. The phrase appears across nearly every transcript:

"The stipend was not enough." (Cassius)

"No, of course not." (Alejandro)

"It's not enough." (Glenda)

"The allowance is not that high." (Geronimo)

"It's not really enough." (Jason)

This was not complaint for its own sake but a factual assessment of the gap between the scholarship's contribution and the actual cost of living.

Cassius noted that the scholarship itself framed the payment as a "contribution," managing expectations from the outset:

"They also mentioned it's just a contribution. So it makes sense. So I don't fully give the responsibility to the scholarship itself that they could provide for me, you know, in a very relaxed way because they mentioned that it's just a contribution." (Cassius)

This acknowledgment did not eliminate the material challenge but reframed it. Students understood that they were expected to supplement the stipend; the question was how.

4.12.2 Part-Time Work as Necessity and Strategy

The most common response to material precarity was part-time employment. Students worked in restaurants, shops, tutoring, and other service jobs.

Relando described his experience:

"I work as a waiter in the service industry... although this is a bit a totally different kind of work that I do back in the Philippines... it's a very humbling experience to be working at service industry." (Relando)

"Humbling" conveys a sense of class dimension present in this work, with students having professional backgrounds or aspirations finding themselves working in jobs viewed as lower than their educational level due to the context of the Philippines; therefore, psychological and material adjustments were required to achieve this new level.

Marco described how he balanced work and study:

"I applied there because you can actually request for your schedule so. It doesn't. It doesn't have any problem with academic schedule?" (Marco)

Students had originally chosen jobs based on whether they could get a shift that did not conflict with their other class schedules. As a result, students were able to get a job that helped them with their studies, rather than constantly being in competition with themselves to complete their studies.

Rina's experience was more extreme:

"There was one time, one semester I was working with three jobs... I was able to work with a lot of jobs. I found a lot of jobs here." (Rina)

Having to juggle three jobs with a master's program is far beyond the outermost limits of sustainability. As Ri recalls, he had "that grind, grind, grind, grind mentality" and maintained a strictly survival-oriented perspective—his sole focus was earning money.

Alisa, who worked as a waitress, described the additional burden of supporting family in the Philippines:

"As a Filipino student or as Filipinos usually one of our traditions, or a part of our culture, is always giving to the family, even if you don't have enough for yourself... Even if their students in other or international students in another country, they would always send money to the Philippines or send financial support to their siblings." (Alisa)

4.12.3 Family Support as Essential Supplement

For many students, family support was essential to making ends meet.

Jaime was unusually fortunate:

"I am lucky to have parents that can actually provide for me. And when I need money, I just ask and they will give it to me immediately." (Jaime)

Jaime's consciousness of his advantages over others—"I can feel for those students who are here, and they can't rely on any parent"—demonstrates the disparities that exist in the student population. The pressure faced by those who rely financially on a family member is far less than what those who must self-generate all supplemental income face.

For students whose families could contribute, this support was often given reluctantly or with emotional cost.

Nicole described asking her mother for help:

"I asked my mom to kind of help me a little bit when it comes to financial... I opened it up when I came I when I have had a vacation in the in the Philippines that I'm kind of having struggles. So I literally like personally asked them to help me a little bit." (Nicole)

The need to ask—to admit struggle—was itself a source of stress. Nicole's coping strategy was to be direct about her needs while also working to reduce her dependence over time.

4.12.4 Collective Economic Strategies

Beyond individual employment and family support, students developed collective economic strategies that leveraged the Filipino community.

Shared housing was the most common. Raymundo described his flat-sharing arrangement:

"I think it's better if you rent a flat. So it's been three years since I'm renting a flat." (Raymundo)

Flat-sharing with other Filipinos reduced individual housing costs while providing built-in social support.

Jacobe described the daily rhythm of his shared flat:

"Every six O clock in the evening we sat together and you know we have. We have supper. We have dinner together... That is something that we we do every day." (Jacobe)

This daily collective meal was simultaneously economic (reducing individual cooking costs) and social (building community). It exemplified the way Filipino students integrated material and relational coping strategies.

Jacobe described how his flat mates divided cooking responsibilities:

"We divided each day. Know if you're assigned to cook for that day, then you have to cook. So yeah... I cook a meal for them and other days they will be the one to cook for, for all of us." (Jacobe)

Other collective strategies included sharing information about part-time jobs, pooling resources for bulk purchases, and even informal economic exchanges like Rina's baking:

"I'm baking also for Gabby's, for anisa's working and where the other guys are working. So I'm baking stuff... Give them the cake and they give me the money." (Rina)

This informal economy, operating within the Filipino community, allowed students to generate income using skills that might not be marketable in the broader Hungarian economy.

Chapter 4.13: Navigating Emotional Distance — From Longing to Routinized Connection

4.13.1 Overview: The Personal Challenge of Distance

Being separated from family and not being able to celebrate birthdays, holidays, and normal routines with them is probably the largest emotional difficulty in the student experience and the most individualized and variable. To offset this distance, various strategies were employed by the students, from frequent communication to the intentional avoidance of emotional attachment.

4.13.2 The Rhythm of Family Connection

For most students, regular communication with family was essential to emotional survival.

Mike described his daily practice:

"I talk to them every day without fail, really. That's why that's why. Maybe I don't feel that much of homesickness like like other people who sink into depression or something, because at least every day I talk to my mom." (Mike)

"Everyday" created a rhythm that mitigated the sense of absence. Mike's communication was not merely informational but relational—a way of maintaining presence across distance.

For others, the rhythm was different.

Aisha explained her approach:

"I call them every Sunday like a video call because... I just discovered that apparently I am not a type of person who would type a lot like I would rather talk to them. Say my words, because for me, when you do that, it feels just more connection and it feels more authentic." (Aisha)

In Aisha's case, synchronous audio-visual forms of communication were preferred due to her "love language" of physical affection (i.e., touch). By communicating synchronously in this manner with Aisha, it provided an opportunity to build a solid connection with her through the most available medium. Weekly video calls, though not the same as being together physically, allowed for a reliable means of being able to build an authentic relationship.

Alena described the evolution of her feelings over time:

"During the first year. Like I just enjoy like everything that here. But now like the second year of staying here, I started missing them more frequently. And sometimes I have this guilt of not being with my family on the important occasions." (Alena)

4.13.3 The Limits of Virtual Connection

Yet students also acknowledged the limits of virtual connection. Something essential was lost in translation across screens.

Nicole described the difference:

"It's it feels like it's different when you when you have them personally, instead of like video calling or something." (Nicole)

Realizing that video conversation, no matter how many times it's done, cannot make up for being in the same place at the same time has caused students recurring, continuing low grade

grief. To cope, they have accepted the limitation, valuing the connection possible while acknowledging the connection can't be achieved through video.

Shaina articulated this challenge with particular clarity:

"I'm having a hard time maintaining my connections with my family and friends in pH while adjusting and you know making new ones in here... it's different when it's online and it's physical because my love language is actually physical touch." (Shaina)

4.13.4 Creating Home in Exile

Aside from communicating directly with their families, students dealt with emotional separation through establishing a "home" in Hungary by making physical spaces and establishing relationships that would give them some semblance of what they had with their family. The Filipino community was an important aspect of this effort.

Jaime described:

"I feel at home, actually because of the strong Filipino communities here in the britsen, I feel at home like I I don't feel homesick at all." (Jaime)

While Jaime's assertion, "I don't feel homesick at all" may appear to be at odds with the feeling of being emotionally distanced from loved ones and the experience of separation, it implies that homesickness is not an absolute reaction; it can be addressed through establishing a new sense of "home" in the country in which one is living. The Filipino community, in this framing, does not merely compensate for the absence of family but partially substitutes for it—providing some of the warmth, familiarity, and unconditional acceptance that family provides.

Jacobe made this substitution explicit:

"I'm just so lucky that we have a big community of Filipino students here... they are at least lessening my anxiety or or my state." (Jacobe)

The community's function was not merely social but therapeutic—"lessening my anxiety." This is emotional coping at the collective level.

4.13.5 Strategic Emotional Distancing

Some students adopted a different strategy: deliberate emotional distancing from the Philippines itself.

Nikka explained:

"I do not aside from my family and friends, I do not hold a affinity, a strong affinity to to the Philippines, or to be even Filipino. So like to me what's important is that I have AI finish my my degree. I find a good job." (Nikka)

Nikka's detachment from how she identifies with the Philippines diminished her sense of loss due to how far apart she was from there. Rather than being tied to feelings of nostalgia for what she once had, focusing on creating future connections helped her cope with the emotional weight of distance created by being away from home.

Cassius described a similar evolution:

"I no longer like in the Philippines, is more of like traditional like I'm the men and women like how it function and in here I no longer believe in that... I no longer like, interfere or enjoy that much... So this stuff, you know, like also how the mindset like the Filipino mindset, Filipino mindset, I no longer identify with that." (Cassius)

For Cassius, the alteration of self wasn't simply a consequence of being mobile, but an active mechanism of coping with his area of resettlement by choosing to disassociate from parts of his home culture. Rather than rejecting these things about himself, he was reconceptualizing them.

Chapter 4.14: Synthesis — Coping as Negotiated Resilience

4.14.1 A Typology of Coping Strategies

Regarding the multi-faceted challenges faced by students (academic, linguistic, cultural, material, emotional), the coping strategies employed by students to address those challenges generally indicate important similarities in how their coping strategies were developed: they were negotiated rather than imposed; adaptive rather than transformative; relational, rather than just individual. Individual strategies used by students were as follows: (1) Cognitive Reframing — Students consistently attempted to view challenging situations in a new way that could reduce the difficulty of the situation. For example, Raymundo illustrated this point when he said, "we cannot really blame them", which allowed him to change the feelings of potential frustration that he had because of the language barrier into a neutral fact. (2) Strategic Prioritization — Students learned how to prioritize their limited time and energy in a strategic manner by spending time and energy on what was most important and/or necessary and releasing time and energy that was not important or necessary. An example of this is Aisha's approach to Hungarian language classes, by passing her classes but not really putting a great

deal of effort into them. (3) Independent Learning — The development of independent learning ability resulted from both the necessity of the Hungarian system as well as independent achievement by the individual. (4) Emotional Regulation — The regulation of one's emotions was necessary in order to manage the emotions associated with distance, disappointment, and uncertainty, which required the ongoing internal work of calling family members regularly as well as consciously distancing oneself from things that make you nostalgic about home.

With regard to Collective Strategies: (1) Information-sharing was the dominant mode of collective strategy; for instance, WhatsApp groups, Facebook communities, and personal networks circulating information on housing, part-time jobs, bureaucratic processes, and academic requirements among students. (2) Material pooling by sharing housing and shopping collectively for food and other material resources, being an informal economic exchange, allowed students to make their limited resources stretch further than would otherwise be possible on their own. (3) Accessing emotional support from the Filipino community was important to students by giving them places to express their vulnerability (darkness), share their experiences, and receive validation from others. (4) Peer-learning was prevalent in academic-related supports being shared amongst each other such as notes, study strategies, or interpretations of course material. (5) Actively building networks where one can draw upon in their studies as well as out of them.

4.14.2 The Interplay of Individual and Collective Strategies

Individual and collective strategies were not distinct but were highly interconnected. Collective approaches relied on individual contributions; for example, someone must share information, organize a gathering, or provide emotional assistance in order for the group to function. Individual approaches were also often supported by collective resources, for example, the student who learned how to navigate the system partially did so by using information provided in a group chat.

Coping is inherently a social interaction between many students, rather than just a student who copes independently from others within static communities. Students simultaneously created the collective resources that were then used by individuals when coping.

An example of this shared experience is demonstrated through Alisa's willingness to provide her international colleagues with her research proposal, which was a gift of one from an individual to others that contributed to the enhancement of the collective and generated support

with respect to collective efforts by all. Therefore, coping demonstrates the mutual constitution of an individual with others rather than one providing unilateral assistance to others.

4.14.3 Coping as Negotiated Resilience

Harris et al. (2018) propose the notion of "negotiated resilience," allowing an understanding of how students cope as a function of the ongoing negotiation between the structural constraints imposed on them and the individual and collective agency exercised by the student. Each of the structures, such as insufficient funding for scholarships, barriers due to language, and employer and labor market requirements, have been put into place by others, not the student themselves and therefore cannot be changed by their efforts to do so. However, there are opportunities within the existing structures that allow students to navigate through to adjust and survive despite these limitations.

The presence of the negotiation process is demonstrated across each of the domains described above. Academically, the students cannot affect or change the Hungarian higher education pedagogical philosophy, however, they will acquire the skills of how to effectively learn within its structure. Linguistically, the students cannot force Hungarians to communicate with them in English, however, they will learn enough of the Hungarian language that they can accomplish necessary tasks in daily life, and use technology to complete any communication or task that does not currently exist in English. Culturally, the students cannot change Hungarian social norms; however, they have the option of determining their own levels of engagement, to engage when appropriate or necessary, and to select when it is best to maintain strategic distance. Materially, the students cannot increase the amount of their scholarship for participation in the program; however, they can enhance it by working part time, with the support of their families, through the use of working together, or by other forms of collaboration. Emotionally, the students cannot eliminate the emotional distance they feel from their homes; however, they can maintain connections to their families through various methods of communication, and by developing new sources of belonging in Hungary.

This does not represent the heroic perseverance of neoliberal rhetoric of the individual conquering all difficulties by simply possessing will. Rather, it is a less grandiose, more practical idea of resilience. It suggests that resilience can be demonstrated in the ability to survive, accommodate your circumstance and develop alternate routes to meet your goals even if they were not your preferred method for doing so. It is through this relational dimension of

resilience that one develops the capacity for resilience with others as part of a group that is equally affected by the difficulty.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION, SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS – *THE TRAIN CONTINUES*

The train continues. The journey is never complete.

Chapter 5.1: Toward an Integrated Model of Transnational Student Experience

5.1.1 Overview: Weaving the Threads

The previous chapters have explored several interrelated research questions, each representing a unique aspect of Filipino international students' experience in Hungary. In this chapter, these aspects are combined into a single comprehensive theoretical model that represents the dynamic, multidimensional characteristics of transnational student life.

5.1.2 The Stratified Knowledge Migration Framework Revisited

The results from all three research questions indicate strong empirical evidence to support the stratified knowledge migration framework, as stated in the literature review. Students are not a homogeneous migratory elite, but instead exist in varied; unequal positions, dependent on their differential access to (1) economic capital (i.e., family support, the ability to cover delays in stipend payments during migration, independent housing); (2) cultural capital (prior experience with international culture and English-speaking communities, understanding of Western practice); (3) social capital (connections through relatives to powerful people in their country of origin, ability to locate informational networks; having a sense of belonging to a supportive community); (4) linguistic capital (exposure to the Hungarian language before moving to Hungary; the potential for success at learning new languages) and (5) emotional capital (personal readiness, ability to cope and regain confidence).

Transnational experiences are shaped by various forms of stratified capital endowment affecting their entire process, including their decision to apply for a scholarship, their transition through academic or social challenges, their participation within a community, and their coping strategies. Students who have more than one form of stratified capital will have a different quality of transnational mobility than those who have to deal with multiple deficits at the same time.

5.1.3 The Dialectic of Individual and Collective

The dialectical nature of the relationship between the collective and individual experiences of the three research questions indicates a reciprocal aspect to their relationship, in that the

individual journey of transformation (RQ1) can't be separated from the local community where it takes place (RQ2) and the coping strategies that the students use (RQ3) are both individual accomplishments as well as a resource for others in the community.

The premise of dialectical analysis is recognized within four different areas: (1) Formation: all individuals connect and build communities that then serve as a resource for the individual and create a framework for future possibilities; (2) Fragmentation: the community has the potential to create conflict between different individuals based on their social class, political affiliations, or life experiences, which can affect the individual's level of engagement and withdrawal from the community; (3) Reconciliation: individuals can contribute to the transformation of the community and create new opportunities for themselves through strategies such as diversification and selective engagement; and (4) Coping: collective resources (such as information sharing, pooling resources, and providing emotional support) depend upon individual contributions (such as organizing events, sharing knowledge, and offering support) to create a community support network.

The concept of both individuals and groups cannot be understood independently. The transnational student experience is always defined relationally with respect to the interaction of one's goals, and the limitations imposed by others, personal agency and community dynamics.

5.1.4 The Centrality of Liminality

The idea of liminality, which was first referenced in the literature review and subsequently expanded upon in the findings, is critical to an understanding of how Filipino students in Hungary can be described as occupying a continuing state of "betwixt-and-between." Tangibly, the state of liminality involves four distinct aspects: (1) Temporally – Ability to identify with both the Philippines and Hungary but no longer fully a part of either country; (2) Spatially – Though they are physically located in Hungary, they maintain a degree of digital connectedness to the Philippines; thus, they are part of "the in-between"; (3) Socially – They have formed an academic identity with their school but are culturally marginalized; as such, they have created multiple social networks that fit various levels of integration; (4) Identitarily – undergoing changes that do not follow a process that is predictable or complete; thus, the students have no knowledge or assurance of what they will become in the future.

Ybema et al. (2011) describe "perpetual liminality," which refers to a permanent condition and not just an interim step toward a stable integration. Thus, individuals learn to exist within this

state, find meaning and create a sense of belonging in it while building meaningful lives amidst continual uncertainty.

5.1.5 The Archipelago as Organizing Metaphor

The "archipelagos of belonging," developed as a metaphor in response to RQ1, serves as a compelling lens for understanding the overall landscape of students' social worlds. Rather than belonging to one unique, concrete community, students simultaneously navigate numerous overlapping social fields. For example, students belong to:

1. The Filipino Community: This is the primary island that provides students with the foundation of their core support but also creates high levels of internecine tension
2. International Friends: International Friends can be seen as islands that are connected through shared precarity but do not have the same degree of intra-national intensity
3. Hungarian Acquaintances: A distant continent from which the students cannot reach but offer meaningful loyalty once established
4. Digital Communities: Virtual islands that span the Philippines and diaspora to maintain connections across distance.

Students have the ability to compensate for the limitations of an individual community through the geographic distribution of their social networks in this archipelagic structure. International friends help to alleviate the stress of an overbearing community when the Filipino community is stronger than what they want to find in their friends. Conversely, when their international friendships are too superficial, connecting with other Filipinos establishes a deeper connection and feels much more real. The entire archipelago serves as a more robust source of support than one island could offer by itself.

5.1.6 Gossip as Social Cartography

RQ2a produced a mechanism, the theorization of gossip as social cartography, which has implications for transnational life on all dimensions. Students use gossip to serve several purposes including:

1. Mapping the social landscape – identifying people who can be trusted, those with influence, and those whose status is changing.
2. Creating boundaries – establishing who is “in” and “out” of a group of people to whom one belongs.
3. Enforcing community norms – punishing those who violate community standards.

4. Circulation of resources – sharing knowledge on such things as housing, job opportunities, and understanding how to work with and around institutions.
5. Making meaning of experiences – developing and sharing common stories that help explain what has happened to a group of friends.

Gossip is not an additional aspect of community but a major aspect of building the fragile bonds of transnational belonging, constructing, challenging and destroying them. Understanding the importance of gossip helps one understand how a community forms, breaks apart, and comes back together in difficult times.

5.1.7 Coping as Negotiated Resilience

The term "negotiated resilience" is utilized here to encapsulate the student's essential responses to challenges in relation to RQ3. Essentially, resilience is not a personal attribute; rather it represents a relational accomplishment arising from an ongoing negotiation of competing forces including structural constraints and collective agency.

This negotiation is evident in every domain of coping:

1. Academic: While students cannot change the pedagogical system, they can learn how to navigate the existing pedagogical system while connected to peer groups that share strategies and resources.
2. Linguistic: Students cannot make members of the Hungarian community speak English, but they can use technology, learn basic phrases/survival phrases, and rely on peer translation resources while in high-stakes situations.
3. Cultural: Students cannot change/transform the social norms of the Hungarian society, but they can determine different levels of engagement, how long they persist (i.e., what type of effort), and how far away to remain from the Hungarian community.
4. Material: Students cannot increase their scholarship stipend; however, they can supplement their scholarship stipend through part-time employment, family support, and community support (i.e., cooperative arrangements).
5. Emotional: Students cannot eliminate feelings of distance from home; however, they can establish connections through various forms of communication and establish new sources of belonging within the Hungarian context.

The concept of resilience described here does not deny the presence of constraints or limitations in many people's lives and instead acts within the constraints to create some flexibility to

develop, continue living, and also be able to flourish, while at the same time acknowledging that these constraints have been uplifted.

5.1.8 Transformation as Alchemical

Ultimately, the concept of "alchemy," as defined in response to RQ1, conveys the transforming aspect of the students' experiences. Transformation can be viewed in two ways: as an outcome that arises out of a confluence of aspiration and barrier or as a function of mobility in relation to one's orientation and environment.

1. The process of alchemically transforming one's identity occurs through four primary means:
2. Struggle - the struggles a student experiences are not simply challenges that need to be addressed but rather are the crucible in which their "new" self or identity will emerge.
3. Community - Connections formed with other Filipino students, other international students and Hungarians provide students with a relational framework within which their transformation process takes place.
4. Reflection - Students create meaning out of their struggles through storytelling or the co-creation of narratives, where their transformative process begins to have coherent context.
5. Wisdom - The advice given by students to those who will be leaving for their own journey(s) represents the distilled essence of their struggle and is based on real-life experiences and/or knowledge that they have gained from being on their "journey."

The alchemical process that leads to mobility does not have a set outcome. Students do not necessarily all develop into the same type of person, nor do they all experience the same level of transformation; however, they all experience some sort of change as a result of their journey, struggles, relationships made along the way, as well as the cumulative weight of living between two worlds.

5.1.9 The Integrated Theory and Model

Synthesizing these elements, an integrated model of the transnational student experience is proposed:

Stratified Entry: Students come with different levels of economic, cultural, social, linguistic and emotional capital, which will affect their place in relation to the society in which they are located and the community of their nationality.

Liminal Positioning: Students are in a long-term "betwixt-and-between" condition in respect to time, space, social status and identity in relation to an immediate and distant past and future.

Archipelagic Belonging: Students build interconnected communities—Filipino, international, Hungarian, digital—through different community groupings that allow for partial and temporary belonging across many islands of connection.

Community Dynamics: The Filipino community develops in response to precarious living conditions, is disrupted by internal conflicts (e.g., gossip, class, political issues), and is ultimately rebuilt through the use of individual tactics and approaches towards diversification and selective participation in these fragmented communities.

Gossip as Cartography: Throughout gossip functions as a form of social cartography through which the social landscape is mapped, boundaries are drawn, social norms are enforced, resources are distributed, and meaning is created.

Negotiated Coping: Students develop both individual and collective coping strategies for the various domains in their lives (academic, linguistic, cultural, material, emotional) by negotiating between being constrained by the structure in which they live and having collective agency over the same structure.

Alchemical Transformation: Through experiencing struggles caused by friction, receiving support from others in a community, and making sense of their experiences, students are fundamentally changed, developing an understanding of the world from new perspectives; learning about themselves; and developing an outlook for the future that contains wisdom.

The Cycle Continues: New students enter this cycle; conditions surrounding them change; and individuals grow and become more mature; each time through the process is a different cycle, each producing a greater range of abilities or capacities and an increased understanding of the ways in which community, conflict, and coping are interrelated in life across borders.

Chapter 5.2: Theoretical Contributions and Implications

5.2.1 Contributions to International Student Mobility Literature

This research contributes to the existing academic literature by:

Expanding the critique of the migrant elite paradigm: Findings give solid empirical backing to Pásztor's (2015) study that international students experience multiple, unequal contexts on a continuum, rather than being categorized in unison within an elite class. The stratification

present among students through access to financial resources, language proficiency, previous international experience and family support fundamentally influences student experiences and trajectory, which is typically masked in aggregate data analysis.

The refinement of liminality: This research shows that liminality is a valuable framework for interpreting the experiences of students in a new country; it also proposes using "archipelagos of belonging" as a means of extending liminality. Instead of being positioned between cultures, students are creating their own social worlds, which are constructed of various connections that only partially represent their sense of belonging to a culture. This understanding of belonging goes beyond a simplistic notion of belonging and adequately reflects the complicated, intersecting aspects of students' experiences living in multiple locations.

Centering the dialectic of community and conflict: Transnational communities are locations for both solidarity and tension as per the findings. Gossip, judgment and exclusion occur alongside mutual aid and caring for one another. Understanding how belonging is negotiated is complicated by these factors, yet they play an important role in understanding the transnational community experience.

Theorizing gossip as social cartography: This research provides a new way of looking at gossip as a type of social mapping - a way to help people find their way around developing forms of transnational belonging, find out if they can trust someone, or discover that they cannot trust someone, and then help redefine the boundaries of a group. The development of this new framework will improve our ability to comprehend what takes place within the micro-processes that create and destroy communities.

Reconceptualizing transformation as alchemical: The term "alchemy" more accurately describes transformation than the linear models of "development" or "growth." Transformation occurs due to the friction caused by the tension between one's aspirations and the obstacles that one encounters; the tension between one's perceptions of the abilities and the situation. This tension will produce uncertain outcomes because of the unpredictable nature of the outcomes created through transformation from one form to another.

Valuing student wisdom as knowledge: The research indicates that students' foreword-looking wisdom is a valid form of knowledge—practical, embodied and learned through experience. Respecting this wisdom challenges the epistemic hierarchy that values academic knowledge more than experiential knowledge and allows for greater collaboration in research.

5.2.2 Contributions to Migration Studies

Beyond the specific field of international student mobility, this study contributes to broader migration studies:

South-to-North Mobility to Semi: The research done on Filipino students in Hungary sheds light on an under-reported migration corridor between the Global South and traditional receiving countries (US, UK, Australia). This research demonstrates the reproduction of structural inequalities through even seemingly "scholarship" migration.

The Eastern Europe as Destination: This study's results help understand mobility for students going to countries in Europe that are themselves located ambiguously "East" and "West," "core" and "periphery." The way Hungary acts as a semi-peripheral country or the "East" impacts both the opportunities available to students and how they experience these challenges.

Transnational Social Fields in Digital Age: A large body of evidence shows how digital technology allows transnational social fields to exist over great distances, but it also shows that face-to-face contact is critical to develop trust in those relationships.

Precarity and Agency: The findings support continued conversations around how structural constraints and migratory agency relate. More specifically, they show how migratory agency is not created by transcending structural constraints but rather created through a continuous negotiation of those same structures and constraints.

5.2.3 Policy Implications

The findings have practical implications for universities, scholarship programs, and support services:

Pre-Departure Preparation: Pre-departure orientations for students should stress preparing for departure from home with information about practical details and how to prepare psychologically. They could do both by creating a realistic expectation of what will happen after arriving in-country and teaching how to develop support networks.

Language Support: The life-threatening consequences of language exclusion documented in healthcare contexts underscore the need for more robust language support. Providing more translation services at important health facilities and improving the quality of Hungarian language instruction would help achieve that goal.

Mental Health Services: The emotional challenges of distance and the community's role in making anxiety “bearable” suggest that mental health services should be culturally adapted and integrated with community-based support structures.

Community Recognition: The formalization of the Filipino student association represents a resource that universities should recognize and support—not as a substitute for institutional responsibility but as a complement to it.

Anti-Discrimination Measures: The documented experiences of racialized exclusion and discrimination call for stronger institutional responses, including clear reporting mechanisms, cultural competency training, and visible institutional commitment to inclusion.

5.2.4 Limitations and Future Research

This study has limitations that suggest directions for future research:

1. **Single National Group:** This research provides detailed insight into Filipino students while sacrificing breadth, but if comparative studies are conducted, particularly with other groups in Hungary, researchers can identify which dynamics are unique to Filipinos and which are due to larger patterns.
2. **Single Destination Country:** Considering Hungary raises many questions about how results will change based on other destination countries. Looking at data from several other European countries might indicate how the characteristics of the host country shapes student experience.
3. **Temporal Snapshot:** The study captures students at a particular moment in their trajectories; a longitudinal methodology could provide insight into the experience, strategy, and identity growth of students through time.
4. **Limited Attention to Gender:** The findings highlighted gender on an intermittent basis; gender was not a primary lens for analysis. Future research may highlight how gender influences the patterns described in the research.
5. **Post-Graduation Outcomes:** This study does not include any information beyond graduation; thus, no data were gathered regarding post-study trajectory or whether or not students returned to the Philippines, moved out of the Philippines, or settled in Hungary. I realize that my research was designed to focus primarily on experiences during study in Hungary, but I find it remarkable that interviewees themselves often seemed unable or unwilling to discuss concrete next steps, dreams, or plans—even while noting during interviews that they would only be in Hungary for a few years. I

did attempt to address this topic by asking interviewees about "plans after studying," but the information they provided was much less detailed than their descriptions of life in Hungary. Therefore, additional research could help understand the long-term effects of students' post-graduation outcomes.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

INTERVIEW GUIDELINE - PART ONE

Background information of the participants

Interview No: 1

Participants Name:

Email Address:

Hometown:

Current level of education:

Occupation:

Previous _____

Current _____

Age and birthday:

Marital status:

Single

Cohabitating

Engaged

Married

Separated

Widowed

Children: Y / N

Languages:

- English
- Tagalog
- Bisaya
- Others: Please specify. _____

Religion:

- Roman-Catholicism
- Protestantism
- Born Again
- Islam
- Others: Please specify. _____

Family Background:

Partner's level of education		Partner's occupation	
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Father's level of education		Father's occupation	
Mother's level of education		Mother's occupation	

Ranking of participant / Number of siblings:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Sex (M/F)</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>HE study (Y/N)</i>	<i>PG study (Y/N)</i>	<i>Current situation (e.g. student)</i>
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					

Educational Background:

Level	Public or Private	Period of Attendance	Year Graduated	Academic Honors
<i>Elementary</i>				
<i>Secondary</i>				
<i>College</i>				
<i>Graduate studies</i>				

Higher Education details:

Degree	Field of study	Institution	Funding
Bachelor's Degree			

Master's Degree			
Doctorate Degree			

INTERVIEW GUIDE - PART TWO

Participants' general experiences

Prior to the Departure:

1. Motivation and Goals

- 1.1. Was studying abroad something you always wanted to do?
- 1.2. Why did you leave the Philippines?
- 1.3. Tell me about your motivation for pursuing higher education in a foreign country.
- 1.4. Why are you in scholarship? Can't you afford studying back in PH?
- 1.5. Benefits under the stipendium. How was the experience with the Stipendium Hungaricum?
- 1.6. What are your academic and/or personal goals for studying abroad?
- 1.7. Do you think you are privileged?
- 1.8. Is the stipend enough?
- 1.9. Some people believe international students are elite, do you think you are one?
- 1.10. Thoughts about people studying abroad.

2. Decision-Making Processes

- 2.1. Could you please walk me through your decision-making process in choosing your destination and educational institution? Why Hungary?
- 2.2. What factors influenced your decision? Was it the academic reputation of the country/institution, location, and cost or was it a recommendation of others?
- 2.3. Have you encountered challenges while making these decisions?
- 2.4. Were you aware of the anti-immigrant propaganda of Hungary?
- 2.5. What do you feel now?
- 2.6. What are your plans after the study journey?

3. Pre-departure Preparation

- 3.1. Did you have any kind of pre-departure orientation?
- 3.2. Tell me about the steps you have taken in preparation for your departure. How did you prepare both academically and practically?
- 3.3. Did you have any kind of anxiety concerning your upcoming departure? How did you address these concerns? What did you feel knowing that you're leaving the PH?

3.4. Were you aware of the anti immigrant propaganda of Hungary? Political climate.

4. Expectations and Visions

- 4.1. Tell me about your expectations for your academic experience in the destination country.
- 4.2. Have you thought of or anticipated specific challenges while studying abroad?
- 4.3. How do you plan to address these challenges?
- 4.4. How do you envision your personal growth and development during your international study experience?

5. **Arriving at the Destination:**

5.1 Student Life in the University

1. Tell me about your very first week, how was it?
2. How was the teaching style and teaching methodology
3. When was the time you felt that you were settled or adjusted or integrated?
4. How about during the time you're settling?
5. Could please share your experiences in the Hungarian educational system
6. Have you encountered any difficulties while studying abroad? Could you please share it?
7. What are your usual troubles, difficulties?
8. Recommendation or suggestion about these difficulties.
9. During the course of your study, how would you compare it to previous educational institutions in the Philippines? Is it different? If so, how?
10. How are your relationships with your classmates and professors?
11. Was the student life you are currently experiencing within your prior expectations? Was it different? If so, how?

5.2 Student Life outside the University

1. Not considering your academic life as a student, tell me about your experiences living abroad. ROutline
2. Do you have trouble fitting-in the Hungarian society?
3. How did you try to explore Hungarian culture?
4. Share your experience in Hungary community?
5. Do you live in flat or dormitory?
6. Have you encountered challenges?
7. How do you feel, knowing that you are far away from your family? Please walk me through it.
8. How many times do you talk to your parents? Frequency?
9. Have you experienced any cultural differences or surprises since your arrival? How about challenges? How did you cope?

Plans after studying.

INTERVIEW GUIDE - PART THREE

Participants' friendship experiences

6. In Narrating Personal Experiences

6.1 Memorable friendship stories

1. Tell me about your very first friend. How did you guys become friends? When was this? Where was this?
2. How about your best friend? Could you please tell me about him/her? How did you guys meet?
3. Considering that you are in Hungary now, have you made Hungarian friends? How about international friends (not Hungarians)? How about Filipino friends abroad? Please walk me through your stories.
4. Do you think language courses helped you in making Hungarian friends?
5. How would you compare friendship and friendship-making here in Hungary and in the Philippines? Are there any differences or similarities? What cultural differences have you noticed in your interactions with your international friends? Please tell me about it.
6. Have you encountered any notable experiences about a specific friendship you had made before? What happened? Could you please tell me more about it? Have you had experienced backstabbing?
7. Have you had friends that you no longer are friends with?
8. Did you feel ostracized and alienated?
- 9.
10. How about humour with friends? Misunderstandings.
11. What is your most notable encounter with friends? Can be good or bad. Feeding bad things.
12. What do you think is the most notable thing you have learned from your friends?
13. Do you think your friends helped you in the study journey?

7. In Defining Friendship

7.1 Friendship and its meanings

1. For you, what is friendship? How would you define it? How do you describe it?
2. How important is friendship for you?
3. Have you thought that there are different kinds or different levels of friendship? (casual, close, professional, etc)
4. Tell me how do you consider a relationship to be a (real) friendship? How do you think friendship should be?
5. How do you make friends? What do you usually do when you want to befriend someone? How do you meet friends here in Hungary, any leverage?
6. How are you as a friend (Name of participants)?

7.2 New age of friendship-making

1. How do you think technology influenced friendship-making?

2. What are your thoughts on online friends or communities? How is it different from offline friends? Are there advantages? If so, could you please expound it?
3. How do you think the pandemic (COVID-19) impacted friendship-making? How was it before, during, and after?

8. Reflections and Other Questions

1. Has studying abroad changed your life in any way? What are your notable life learnings as an international student abroad?
2. What pieces of advice can you offer for future international students?
3. Any additional thoughts you would like to share?

APPENDIX B:

CODEBOOK SAMPLE

Code for RQ1	Supporting Quote
Childhood Dream	"Yes, it all started when I was 17 years old... I realized that I really wanted to experience, like studying and living abroad."
Family Motivation	"Because my dad is an OFW... my parents were looking for an opportunity for us to live together."
Career Advancement	"I knew that I needed to have a master's, at least a master's degree to get ahead into the career pathway."
Escape from the Philippines	"The political situation in the Philippines and like the COVID-19 thing, that triggered me to do that."
Romanticized View of Europe	"I felt Europe was so romanticised... It's like the perfect place to live. Something like that."
Hungary as a Convenient Option	"For me, it was just for convenience, actually... it was the first to reply to me."
Scholarship as Enabler	"I saw that Hungary is one of the participants there, so the offer, scholarship, full tuition."
Advisor's Recommendation	"I was advised by my thesis advisor to consider studying overseas because she see that it's a good for advancement."
Ignorance of Hungarian Politics	"I'm not familiar with the Hungarian policies, but I'm kind of familiar with the general policies."

Code for RQ1	Supporting Quote
Political Climate Now	"I think the political climate is very similar to also my country, I guess so."
Policies Don't Affect Studies	"It has affected me? Not at all, because I'm just a student." (
Policies Create Insecurity	"The migrant policies... put us in a very precarious situation where we are really not very secured about what we're gonna do after."
Self-Directed Preparation	"I think I organised my own pre departure organisation so I contacted all of the students Filipino students here in Hungary."
Insufficient Stipend	"Special, especially for the expenses in food and also the accommodation things and living in a flat... it's not enough."
Need for Part-Time Work	"I had to make a big decision of work, of looking for a job, a part time job here in Hungary to help both ends meet."
Shock of Academic Autonomy	"The Hungarian educational system doesn't really spoon feed you in terms of learning. So it's kind of new to me."
Disappointment with Teaching Style	"Every time they have this lecture, every time start the lecture they will say like I'm not that good in English language."
Philippines as More Rigorous	"In the Philippines, they're so good actually like... there is an interaction between the students and the professor."
Comparative Advantage (EU Degree)	"Once I am already in Europe and I finish my program with the European degree, it would be an advantage."
Struggle for Independence	"In the Philippines... I didn't have to do things by myself. But here, I have to do everything."
Initial Excitement and Homesickness	"My very first week... I was so excited... But then after a month, I was really, really sad."

Code for RQ1	Supporting Quote
Cultural Comparison (Warm vs. Cold)	"In the Philippines, we're usually warm already. But here... they have this wall to get too warm to you."
Silence as Culture Shock	"The first notable culture shock would be the silence."
Language as a Barrier	"The only worst thing... the language barrier."
Discrimination/Racism	"There was one time that I... heard the word 'Kenai'... I knew for a fact that they're talking about me."
Systemic Barriers (Healthcare)	"You go to hospitals... If you don't speak the language which is Hungarian, then they can't help you."
The Filipino Community as Home	"I feel at home... because of the strong Filipino communities here... we have lunch dinners that we just make Filipino food."
Filipino Friends: Easy Bonding & Shared Struggles	"My close friends are also Filipinos. We share the same background, the same problems, and we understand each other."
International Friends: Diversity & Transience	"They're also alone, so they're also pretty much looking for peers that could, you know, relate to them."
Hungarian Friends: Hard to Reach, Loyal if Made	"I have this one Hungarian friend... but a lot of my Asian friends are scared of her... they're straightforward."
Friendship as Mutual Exchange & Understanding	"Friendship is a mutual agreement... a two-way interaction... you get to help the other person then this person would help you also."
Friendship as Support System	"Friendship is... a mutual agreement... if I'm vulnerable to you and I get to share a lot of my issues with you, meaning we really have deeper connections."
Learning from Diversity	"The most notable thing I learned from my friends... is the concept of respecting personal spaces."
Technology: Connection vs. Superficiality	"It makes the friendship even deeper... because of technology, we were able to somehow keep in touch until now."

Code for RQ1	Supporting Quote
Transformation: Personal Growth	"I'm a changed person... the way that Hungary shaped me... It's really different now."
Transformation: Widened Perspective	"It changed me in the way that I see the world like... I get to break my stereotypes when it comes to other cultures."
Advice: Be Prepared (Mentally & Financially)	"Prepare mentally and emotionally. If you're planning to stay long term... you'd have to prepare yourself and find coping mechanisms."
Advice: Embrace the Leap	"Step out of your comfort zone. Fly, book that ticket and fly."
Code for RQ2	Supporting Quote
1.1 Dream of Studying Abroad	"Actually studying abroad was always been my plan since high school."
1.2 Practical Motivation (Career)	"One thing also is for the carrier to get promoted... that if you have better academic background that you will have better positions."
1.3 Europe as a Preferred Destination	"In my mind of I was like thinking like, OK, I'm gonna go to Europe because I think for me, the US... it was too much for me."
1.4 Influence of Social Media/Ads	"I was just watching YouTube and an ad came to me like, do you want to study in [Hungary]?"
1.5 Influence of Personal Network	"I found out about it with my friend who who also applied in the scholarship."
1.6 Convenience and Accessibility	"For me. It was just for convenience, actually."
1.7 Scholarship as a Key Enabler	"Because of the scholarship that was offered to students... it immediately became one of my goals to acquire the scholarship."
1.8 Romanticising Leaving the Philippines	"As a Filipino, I didn't really search for that, but as a Filipino we kind of romanticised leaving the Philippines."
1.9 Desire for Personal Growth	"you know, studying abroad made me independent as I am today."

Code for RQ1	Supporting Quote
1.10 Strategic Course/University Choice	"I chose the Britain because when I was looking up searching about this programme, there were a lot of international students."
1.11 Lack of Pre-Departure Awareness of Migration Policies	"Not at all."
1.12 Pre-Departure Orientation (Informal)	"I think I organised my own free departure organisation so I contacted all of the students Filipino students here... and then I hosted a video chat."
1.13 Financial Struggles (Stipend Not Enough)	"the stipend is not enough."
1.14 Taking Part-Time Work	"I work every summer."
1.15 Family Financial Support	"I asked to help from my my siblings and my brother and my sisters and even from my parents."
1.16 Initial Language Barrier Shock	"I expected that they would be more open when it regard with regards to the international students and also they could speak English... it didn't happen."
1.17 Experiencing Racism/Discrimination	"There was one time that me and Carmina were from Budapest... two people are kissing on the back, and they're gonna eat each other's face."
1.18 Cultural Differences (Directness, Sarcasm)	"Hungarian sarcasm is that it's pure form and they like stab it into your heart like."
1.19 Culture Shock (Public Display of Affection)	"the public display of affection it was shocking"
1.20 Culture Shock (Silence on Public Transport)	"They are quiet in the bus. They don't talk in the bus."
1.21 Culture Shock (Store Hours)	"the the stores here close so early at night."
1.22 Sense of Independence & Freedom	"Excited... independent lifestyle and everything. You know, I will be living alone in Hungary like woo."
1.23 Feeling of 'Otherness' / Being Stared At	"if you look different to them, they would look at you."

Code for RQ1	Supporting Quote
1.24 Initial Disappointment (City vs. Expectations)	"the city itself felt like a ghost town."
1.25 Ease of Making Filipino Friends	"I think you know Filipinos, we're speaking for Davidson... it was a tightly knit community."
1.26 First Contact with Filipinos (Pre-Departure)	"we have known each other because during the application process we met."
1.27 Filipinos as a Support System (Emotional/Practical)	"I really don't know how will I survive without the Filipino community here."
1.28 Shared Culture, Language, and Food	"we share the same culture and language... we also share the same food."
1.29 Difficulty Making Hungarian Friends	"It's a bit hard to make friends with them especially if you have no mutual connection."
1.30 Hungarians as "Hard on the Outside, Soft on the Inside"	"I would say that they're really like, you know, hard on the outside but soft on the inside."
1.31 Pre-existing Friendships from the Philippines	"some of my friends from the Philippines are in other parts of Europe."
1.32 Forming Friendships through University/Classes	"My classmates, my international classmates, they're now... lifelong friends."
1.33 Preference for Asian/SE Asian Friends	"Most of my friends here in the prisoner Southeast Asian."
1.34 Strong Bonds with Fellow Filipinos	"we have a core group which I call them and that's the first... they were the first ones... if there's still the ones with me right now."
1.35 Community Built Around Food	"We usually eat... I think this is the activity that we mostly are like, majorly missed in the Philippines are food."
1.36 Formalisation of the Community (AFSHU)	"we were formally established like two years ago with the with the Association of Filipino students in Hungary."
1.37 Internal Conflicts (Crab Mentality, Gossip)	"there's this characteristic of Filipinos that are... negative, like crab mentality when someone is getting promoted."

Code for RQ1	Supporting Quote
1.38 Fragmentation due to Different Life Stages	"my responsibility as a PhD student doesn't, you know, doesn't give me the same time as I had last two years ago to organise these parties."
1.39 Social Class Differences as a Source of Friction	"I think also when it comes to social class difference too. I think that's where the conflict is really."
1.40 Political Divisions among Filipinos	"the Filipinos are like, they're also, like, divided with political beliefs... it can get it super like... very hard to navigate."
1.41 Falling Out with Friends	"I was also surprised that what's this that we had very different public opinion or political inclination."
1.42 Preference for Fewer, Deeper Friendships	"It's better to have like a one... A. A few friends... Then having a lot."
1.43 Reconciliation after Conflicts	"I think we've already reconciled actually, but I think it will never be the same again."
1.44 Personal Growth from Conflict	"That was actually made me so mad, but I tried to be civil because I'm also the first one who tried to understand him."
1.45 'Settling' in the International Community, Not Hungarian	"I feel actually a lot more settled [with the international community]."
1.46 Feeling at Home within the Filipino Community	"Yes, I feel at home, actually I didn't get any home sickness."

APPENDIX C:

APPENDIX D: