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Pakikipagkapwa in the Basque Country: Gendered Homemaking and Postcolonial Belonging among Filipino Domestic and Care Workers

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Abstract

This article examines how ten Filipino domestic and care workers (DCWs) in Greater Bilbao, Basque Country, employ indigenous cultural frameworks and postcolonial religious legacies as strategies of communal homemaking and integration. Drawing on semi-structured interviews and participant observation conducted in 2024, the study finds that *pakikipagkapwa*, the Filipino ethic of relating to others as *kapwa* (the shared self) theorized by Enriquez (1986), operates as a lived form of postcolonial resistance, enabling Filipino DCWs to negotiate hybrid identities and reconstruct home through communal food practices, organized sports, and the postcolonial reclamation of Spanish colonial Catholicism enacted through Filipino Masses and Filipino-led religious communities. Gender is central to this process: Filipino women disproportionately carry the burden of cultural preservation and community leadership, a positioning that is at once a triple burden and a source of hard-won public authority, and that challenges narratives reducing migrant women's agency to labor precarity alone. Applying Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo's (2023) homemaking framework alongside Bhabha's (1994) concepts of hybridity and mimicry, the article argues that Filipino indigenous social frameworks offer a productive non-Eurocentric corrective to prevailing integration models, which privilege individual assimilation over communal belonging. The article contributes original empirical and theoretical insights to debates on non-EU labor migration in Europe, postcolonial approaches to integration, and the gendered dimensions of diasporic homemaking in the Spanish-Basque context.

Introduction

On 16 June 2024, the streets of Getxo came alive with the sights and sounds of the Philippines. Overseas Filipinos from across the Basque Country (Euskadi) gathered for the annual *Fiesta Filipina en Getxo* (*Jai Filipinarra Getxon* in Euskera) to commemorate the 126th anniversary of Philippine independence from Spain. Dressed in traditional attire, participants performed dances representing the country's diverse ethnolinguistic groups. Philippine flags adorned the venue alongside the Basque flag, visually affirming both national heritage and local belonging. A longtime Filipina resident emceed the program in Spanish, while a co-host interpreted the performances for the diverse audience gathered at the Plaza de los Enanos in Las Arenas. The programme also featured invited performances by other migrant communities from across Greater Bilbao, underscoring the festival's intercultural character. The celebration concluded with home-cooked Filipino dishes and *kakanin* (traditional Filipino rice-based sweets), karaoke, and laughter spilling into nearby parks and café-bars, creating a scene that felt familiar to Filipino participants yet unfolded against the distinctive backdrop of the Basque landscape and its grey Atlantic coast.

This scene encapsulates a paradox central to the Filipino diasporic experience in Europe: a community profoundly shaped by Spanish colonial legacies, evident in Catholicism, Hispanized surnames, and Spanish loanwords woven into everyday speech, celebrating independence from Spain on Spanish soil through cultural practices that are unmistakably, defiantly Filipino. Rather than a story of migrant assimilation, this encounter represents the return of the descendants of the colonized to the former

colonial metropole, enacting a culture that has absorbed, adapted, and transformed colonial inheritances.

The Philippines is one of the world's largest labor-sending nations. In 2024, the number of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) was estimated at 2.19 million, with women comprising the majority at 57.2 percent (PSA, 2025). Within this system, domestic and care workers (DCWs) occupy a structurally vulnerable position, laboring in the private homes of others across intersecting inequalities of class, gender, race, and documentation status (ILO, 2021; PSA, 2025). Filipino migrants remain underexamined in Europe, and particularly in Spain, despite numbering in the tens of thousands; their experiences of integration, especially in the distinctive context of the Basque Country, have received scant scholarly attention (Instituto Nacional de Estadística [INE], 2022).

Existing scholarship on Filipino migration concentrates overwhelmingly on North America, the Gulf, and East and Southeast Asia (McKay, 2016; Parreñas, 2015). The Iberian Peninsula, and the Basque Country specifically, remains largely absent from the Filipino diaspora literature, despite the depth of Philippine-Spanish entanglement. The Basque context is a generative site: a society with its own cultural distinctiveness and minority identity politics, into which a Filipino community arrives carrying the enduring legacies of Spanish colonial rule. That community's most active agents are women, whose care labor draws them to the region and whose cultural labor sustains its diasporic life, making gender not simply one dimension of analysis but constitutive of the homemaking practices this article examines.

This article makes two arguments. First, *pakikipagkapwa*—the Filipino ethic of relating to others as *kapwa* (the shared personhood)—as theorized by Enriquez (1986) functions in the Basque diaspora not merely as a survival strategy but as a form of communal belonging that constitutes postcolonial resistance: a collective assertion of Filipino selfhood against the individualizing pressures of a European host society. Second, the reclamation of Spanish colonial Catholicism, through Bhabha's (1994) concept of mimicry, enables Filipino migrants to exercise cultural agency by repurposing colonial subjugation as a resource for belonging. In a Getxo parish where Mass is celebrated in Tagalog alongside hymns and songs in English, Cebuano, and Spanish, this reclamation draws not only Filipino churchgoers but also their Basque kin into a Filipino mode of devotion. Both arguments are gendered throughout: it is predominantly Filipino women who build the institutions, lead the congregations, and bear the custodial labor through which this belonging is achieved.

In advancing these arguments, the article makes three contributions: it documents a Filipino diasporic community largely absent from the migration literature, extending the geography of Filipino migration studies to the Basque Country; it brings the homemaking approach into dialogue with kapwa and with feminist theorizations of women as reproducers of national and ethnic collectivities; and it models a decolonial approach by treating participants' conceptual vocabulary not merely as data but as theory.

The remainder of the article develops the theoretical framework and methodology, presents the ethnographic findings, and concludes by discussing their implications for theories of integration, homemaking, and postcolonial belonging.

Filipino Migration, Homemaking, and the Diaspora in Spain

This section brings into dialogue three bodies of scholarship: research on Filipino labor migration and care work, the emerging homemaking approach to migrant integration, and the limited literature on the Filipino diaspora in Spain, particularly the Basque Country. Together, they reveal a conceptual gap in explaining how migrants cultivate collective belonging, a gap this article addresses through an ethnographic analysis informed by pakikipagkapwa.

Filipino Labor Migration and Care Work

Filipino labor migration is not simply economic but deeply institutionalized and culturally normalized. Asis (2006) characterizes it as a "culture of migration": a set of social expectations in which working abroad becomes a route to upward mobility and family obligation. Rodriguez (2010) theorizes the Philippines as a "labor brokerage state" that systematically exports workers, particularly women, to meet global demand for reproductive and care labor. This framing is particularly relevant to the Filipino DCWs examined here. Their migration cannot be understood solely as an individual choice but as a trajectory shaped by interlocking national policies, global labor markets, and familial expectations (Asis, 2006; Rodriguez, 2010).

Domestic and care workers are a feminized, often invisible subset of this system. Parreñas (2015) situates their labor within an "international division of reproductive labor," and Hochschild (2000) names the resulting "global care chain" a defining feature of globalization. For Filipino women, entry into this care economy is shaped not only by labor demand but by colonial gender ideologies: the enduring influence of the Spanish colonial María Clara ideal and the American colonial construction of the "educated, English-speaking Filipina" has contributed to positioning Filipino women as desirable care workers in global labor markets (Espiritu, 2003). The Philippine state reinforces this through the *bagong bayani* (new hero) discourse, which valorizes and disciplines their mobility at once (Rodriguez, 2010).

That framework, however, casts care workers as objects of extraction, obscuring the agency through which they remake their lives abroad. McKay (2016) insists instead on care as a relational resource migrants mobilize rather than a commodity taken from them. Reading care work through kapwa, rather than exclusively through the global care chain framework, repositions these workers as agents who extend, rather than merely expend, their relational capacities. Scholarship on Filipino care workers in Southern Europe remains thin, though work on Italy and Spain establishes that DCWs reconstruct dense associational and religious lives abroad (Parreñas, 2015; Santos, 2023). This article asks how pakikipagkapwa structures that reconstruction in a Basque context that remains largely absent from the literature. This scholarship explains migration and labor but leaves open the question of how migrants make themselves at home.

Homemaking, Integration, and the Non-Eurocentric Turn

The concept of homemaking, elaborated by Boccagni (2017) and developed for integration research by Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2023), reframes integration away from the assimilation/transnationalism binary toward the everyday material, emotional, and relational practices through which migrants negotiate a sense of home. For them, integration is not a linear progression toward cultural convergence but an ongoing negotiation shaped by structural inequalities—class, race, gender, and documentation status—that condition the possibilities for homemaking. This framework is particularly apt for studying Filipino DCWs because their paid work is itself a form of homemaking for others, introducing a distinctive power dynamic into the concept under analysis. The approach converges with a wider turn toward the analytics of home and belonging (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2011). Together, these perspectives shift attention from questions of adaptation to questions of presence, recognition, and belonging in a society that often renders migrant care workers invisible.

Developed primarily through research in Western host societies, the framework risks reproducing the Eurocentrism it seeks to challenge if applied without attention to migrants' own conceptual worlds. A growing literature calls for decolonizing migration research, criticizing its methodological nationalism and unexamined liberal premises (Bhambra, 2017; de Sousa Santos, 2018). Schinkel (2018) argues that "immigrant integration" is itself a mode of social-scientific monitoring presuming a homogeneous host society into which migrants are expected to integrate, while Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2016) insist integration is a two-way process of mutual accommodation.

These critiques point toward the need for conceptual frameworks grounded in migrants' own epistemologies. Building on Santos' (2023) finding that pakikipagkapwa functions as a culturally specific "emotional geography" among Filipino women migrants in Spain, this article responds to that call by examining how pakikipagkapwa structures homemaking and postcolonial belonging in the Basque Country.

The Filipino Diaspora in Spain and the Basque Country

Spain and the Philippines are bound by more than three centuries of colonial history, from the Manila-Acapulco galleon trade to the Catholic evangelization that reshaped Philippine society. Yet contemporary Filipino migration to Spain has attracted little scholarly attention relative to the Filipino presence in North America, the Gulf, and East and Southeast Asia. In 2022, Spain recorded 37,419 residents of Filipino nationality, only 622 of whom lived in the Basque Country, including 458 in Bizkaia (INE, 2022). Because the INE counts nationality rather than Philippine origin, these figures exclude naturalized Spaniards, understating the Filipino-origin population. The undercount is telling: statistical near-invisibility mirrors the limited scholarly attention devoted to this community. Despite this limited visibility in official statistics and scholarship, Filipino DCWs have established a durable, multigenerational community in Greater Bilbao and the wider Basque Country.

The legal and policy context shapes migrants' opportunities for homemaking in concrete ways. Non-EU migrants in Spain may regularize their status through *arraigo* pathways (social, *sociolaboral*,

socioformativo, family, and second-opportunity routes), each with specific residence, documentation, and, in some cases, employment requirements (Ministerio de la Presidencia, Justicia y Relaciones con las Cortes, 2024). These are difficult to satisfy in a sector marked by informality and dependence on individual employers (Parreñas, 2015). Rather than existing apart from homemaking, legal precarity conditions its very possibility by shaping access to housing, healthcare, employment, and public space (Boccagni, 2017). The Basque Country possesses an integration framework that differs markedly from other Spanish regions due to its sub-national institutions and distinct linguistic identity (Jeram, 2014). Furthermore, its institutional and civil-society landscape continues to be shaped by a deeply embedded Catholic cultural heritage (Itçaina, 2018). Within this context, the concentration of Filipino migrants in affluent municipalities such as Getxo reflects the spatial organization of care work itself, as many workers live close to the households in which they are employed.

Existing studies illuminate the structural conditions of Filipino migration to Spain but reveal little about how Filipino domestic and care workers cultivate belonging within the distinctive social, linguistic, and postcolonial context of the Basque Country, or the indigenous cultural resources they draw upon in doing so.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis draws on three interlocking bodies of theory: the homemaking approach, read through an intersectional and postcolonial lens; Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and mimicry; and Enriquez's psychology of kapwa. Bringing these perspectives into dialogue provides the theoretical foundation for the article's two arguments.

Homemaking, Postcoloniality, and Intersectionality

Homemaking is not confined to private dwellings but unfolds across public parks, community centers, places of worship, and shared sensory experiences. This broader understanding is especially productive for the present study, where communal practices blur conventional distinctions between private and public space. The article extends the homemaking framework in two directions. First, it incorporates a postcolonial perspective through Bhabha's (1994) concepts of hybridity and mimicry. For Bhabha, hybridity does not denote simple cultural mixture but the ambivalent production of new meanings through colonial encounters. Mimicry refers to the colonized subject's partial, never-complete adoption of the colonizer's forms, a resemblance that always contains the possibility of subversion. Together, these concepts illuminate how Filipino DCWs appropriate colonial inheritances as resources for homemaking, transforming rather than merely reproducing them.

Second, the framework incorporates intersectionality to examine how gender, class, race, and documentation status shape unequal opportunities for homemaking within the Filipino diaspora (Boccagni & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2023). Gender is especially salient because domestic labor is feminized,

community leadership often requires negotiating gendered expectations, and the custodial work of sustaining community life remains disproportionately women's responsibility. Feminist scholarship on gender and nation argues that women are positioned as both symbolic and practical reproducers of ethnic and national collectivities (Yuval-Davis, 2011). This article shows how those dynamics shape the micro-politics of homemaking and belonging within the Filipino diaspora.

Kapwa and Pakikipagkapwa

Central to this article is Enriquez's (1986) concept of kapwa, commonly translated as "the shared self," which forms the philosophical core of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino psychology). Whereas Western liberal thought posits the individual as the foundational unit of social life, kapwa begins from the premise of radical intersubjectivity: the self is constituted through, rather than prior to, its relations with others. De Guia (2005) further conceptualizes kapwa as a relational ontology that dissolves the sharp boundary Western thought draws between self and other. Pakikipagkapwa denotes the ethical practice through which this philosophy is enacted, emphasizing fellowship, solidarity, and mutual recognition.

Enriquez (1986) and Santiago and Enriquez (1976) identify a graded series of relational modes, from *pakikitungo* (transactional civility) through *pakikisama* (getting along), *pakikilahok* (participation), and *pakikipagpalagayang-loob* (mutual trust and rapport), to *pakikiisa* (shared identity or oneness). Rather than fixed categories, these describe progressively deeper forms of relational engagement that migrants enact in new social contexts. Sikolohiyang Pilipino was itself a decolonial intellectual project, insisting that the Filipino psyche be theorized from within Filipino experience rather than through imported Western categories (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). Building on this tradition, the article argues that pakikipagkapwa functions in the Basque diaspora both as a practice of homemaking and collective belonging and as a form of decolonial praxis, affirming a Filipino relational ethic—alongside and at times against—the normative individualism that continues to shape dominant European integration discourse. In the analysis that follows, pakikipagkapwa is treated not merely as an empirical finding but as an analytical concept through which migrants' practices of homemaking, belonging, and postcolonial agency are interpreted.

Methodology

This article draws on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Greater Bilbao between March and July 2024. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews with ten Filipino domestic and care workers (DCWs) and participant observation at five community events: the SIKAP Sportsfest (April 2024), Palm Sunday Mass at Parroquia de San José in Romo, Getxo (March 2024), the *Santacruzan* (May 2024), the annual Fiesta Filipina en Getxo (June 2024), and the 2024 Kalayaan (Independence Day) Gala Night (July 2024). A key informant interview was also conducted with a former leader of a Filipino community organization. Much of the fieldwork was conducted in Getxo, an affluent coastal municipality where demand for domestic and care labor is concentrated. Many Filipino DCWs reside close to the households in which they are employed, making Getxo a focal point of Filipino community life.

Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling within the Filipino community in Greater Bilbao. All ten participants had current or previous experience in domestic or care work, with lengths of residence in Spain ranging from fewer than three years to more than forty years. Seven participants identified as women and three as men. Pseudonyms are used throughout. Interviews were conducted in Tagalog, Cebuano, English, Spanish, or a combination thereof, and were translated into English by the researcher, who is proficient in all four languages. For readability, interview excerpts are presented in English. Original-language expressions are retained only where lexical, cultural, or analytical nuances would otherwise be lost; these appear in italics, followed by an English translation in square brackets. Table 1 summarizes the participants.

The study adopted a reflexive and modestly decolonial methodological orientation. Drawing on Sikolohiyang Pilipino, participants were approached not as objects of extraction but as kapwa—persons with whom knowledge is co-constructed (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). The researcher's position as a Filipino scholar residing in Bilbao facilitated access and rapport, while remaining a source of reflexive insight rather than unmediated insider knowledge (Carling et al., 2014). Ethical approval was obtained from the consortium of degree-granting European universities before fieldwork commenced, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Data were analyzed thematically using ATLAS.ti, with codes organized around the homemaking framework's material, emotional, relational, and cultural dimensions. The analysis presented here focuses primarily on the relational and cultural dimensions of homemaking.

Table 1
Characteristics of the ten Filipino domestic and care workers interviewed in Greater Bilbao

Pseudonym	Gender	Years in Euskadi	Nature of Work
Mutya	Woman	10	Domestic worker, carer (live-out)
Florante*	Man	8	Domestic worker (live-out); restaurant
Laura*	Woman	5	Domestic worker (live-out)
Amihan	Woman	7	Domestic worker (live-in), carer
Mayumi	Woman	3	Domestic worker (live-out), carer
Maria Ligaya	Woman	17	Domestic worker (live-out)
Evangelia	Woman	40	Carer (live-out)
Gregorio	Man	23	Residential carer, driver; domestic work
Marcelo	Man	16	Residential carer; tours
Gabriela	Woman	20	Formerly domestic worker (live-in); family café-bar

*Note: All names are pseudonyms. * Florante and Laura, a married couple, were interviewed together.*

Pakikipagkapwa as Communal Homemaking

For Filipino domestic and care workers in Greater Bilbao, belonging is not primarily an individual achievement but a collective one. This section examines how pakikipagkapwa structures three dimensions of communal homemaking: the associational networks that provide the social infrastructure of belonging, the sensory and culinary practices through which public spaces are rendered familiar, and the embodied practices of communal sport. Across these dimensions, the Filipino ethic of pakikipagkapwa performs integrative work that conventional measures of migrant integration seldom recognize.

Social Networks and the Architecture of Belonging

The social networks that undergird Filipino DCWs' sense of home—including SIKAP Filipinas, the El Shaddai Bilbao Chapter, and the Shekinah women's fellowship—are not supplementary to homemaking but constitutive of it. As Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2023) argue, migrants negotiate the meanings and possibilities of integration through their participation in community institutions. For the participants in this study, those negotiations take place largely in Filipino and are shaped by relational norms grounded in pakikipagkapwa. Belonging is therefore cultivated not primarily through the acquisition of host-society competencies but through dense networks of reciprocity, mutual care, and shared obligation.

Mutya's involvement in SIKAP Filipinas illustrates the progression through Enriquez's (1986) relational modes. What began as pakikitungo developed through sustained pakikilahok into pakikipagpalagayang-loob, as she formed close relationships with the association's former and current presidents. For Mayumi and Maria Ligaya, faith-based groups likewise provided more than spiritual support; they created spaces where pakikisama could be practiced and deepened through regular interaction. These organizations did not merely support an existing community; they actively constituted one by fostering relationships through which Filipino migrants came to recognize one another as kapwa.

Maria Ligaya described her El Shaddai chapter in the language of kinship rather than institutional support: "They treat me as family. Sometimes, when I have problems, I can open up to them" (Maria Ligaya, 2024). As an active member of the worship team, she explained that singing had become an expression not only of faith but also of belonging: "Singing is also a form of prayer" (Maria Ligaya, 2024). "singing is also a form of prayer." Her account illustrates how religious participation became a practice of communal homemaking, simultaneously nurturing spiritual commitment, social intimacy, and belonging (Fig. 1).

Mayumi recalled how her initial hesitation gradually gave way to a sense of belonging: "At first, you feel intimidated. But after a while, you become very close to them" (Mayumi, 2024). She explained that the Shekinah fellowship became especially important during her first months in Euskadi: "Especially when you first arrive and do not know anyone yet, you feel homesick. Then, someone says, *"Uy, ali diri*" [Hey, come join us], and eventually that feeling goes away" (Mayumi, 2024). What goes away is homesickness;

what arrives in its place is a sense of kapwa through which strangers become companions and Euskadi begins to feel like home.

This associational density performs a political function. Because care workers are structurally dispersed across private households, often residing in their employers' homes, the very existence of a visible collective quietly challenges the isolating logic of the labor regime. Yuval-Davis (2011) notes that belonging becomes politicized when threatened; for Filipino DCWs, marginal in Basque public life, the community organization is the vehicle through which belonging is collectively claimed. Pakikipagkapwa provides the ethical foundation for that collective claim by understanding personhood as fundamentally relational, in contrast to a labor market that treats workers as isolated units of reproductive labor.

It would flatten the record to present pakikipagkapwa only as consolation. Marcelo explained that the Filipino community became a source of perseverance:

"Whenever I think about returning home, I look to the other Filipinos here as my point of reference. *Sila gani nag-antos diri sa kwan. Ako pa kaya, di ko mag-antos?* [They endured hardship here. So why shouldn't I endure too?] Seeing what they had gone through made me reflect. *Mga babae gani, naka-agwanta sila. Dapat mag-sacrifice pud ko. Kaya gani nila, ako pa kaha?* [Even the women have endured. I should sacrifice too. If they can do it, why can't I?]" (Marcelo, 2024)

His reasoning reveals the ambivalence at the heart of communal belonging: the shared self that sustains him also obliges him. Kapwa thus performs both integrative and disciplinary work, a double movement explored more fully in the final findings section.

Evangelia, who has lived in Euskadi for more than four decades and acquired Spanish citizenship through marriage, exemplifies pakikipagkapwa as a form of cultural bridgework. She emceed the independence celebration with which this article opened, mediating between Filipino and Spanish worlds within a region shaped by its own minority-language politics. Active in both Filipino and Basque organizations, and featured in a Basque NGO's cultural-diversity exhibition, she embodies the two-way accommodation envisioned by Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2016). Asked how she is treated, Evangelia answered in Spanish:

¡Te tratan muy bien! No te tratan como cualquiera… Te tratan igual. Aunque eres una criada, aunque trabajas en una casa porque la razón que tienen ellos, eres una buena persona, tú trabajas para vivir. No estás robando, estás trabajando. Entonces eso no es malo. [They treat you very well! They do not treat you as just anyone… They treat you as equal. Even though you are a maid, even though you work in a house, because their reasoning is: you are a good person, you work in order to live. You are not stealing, you are working. So that is not bad.] (Evangelia, 2024).

Her testimony performs what it reports: equal treatment narrated in Spanish, the language of the former colonizer. Yet the recognition remains asymmetrical: "Spanish language proficiency is necessary. We may understand Spanish, but they cannot understand Filipino" (Evangelia, 2024). The work of translation

remains one-directional, and pakikipagkapwa provides an ethical means of inhabiting those asymmetries rather than erasing them.

Food, the Senses, and the Domestication of Public Space

One of the most consistent patterns across the ethnographic data is the centrality of food as a homemaking practice. Law's (2001) "geographies of the senses" illuminates what participants describe: the smell of *adobo* in a Getxo apartment, the taste of *biko* [Filipino sweet rice cake] shared in a park in Erandio, the sound of karaoke drifting across a Basque neighborhood. These sensory experiences recreate the Philippines, however temporarily, through embodied and shared experience.

Maria Ligaya emphasized that hospitality persists despite scarcity: "Despite the financial challenges of raising two children, my door is always open. We may not have much, but there is always something I can offer." This hospitality is rooted in kapwa, which blurs the distinction between private generosity and public hospitality, and in bayanihan, or communal solidarity (NEDA, 2021).

Mayumi described how food transforms public spaces into places of belonging: "Sometimes I make *biko*. Then, we bring wine and Coke, eat together, talk, and sing karaoke. That's our bonding here" (Mayumi, 2024). Her account captures what Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2023) describe as the co-production of informal spaces where leisure, mutual support, and sociability converge. What matters is not simply the food itself but the act of eating together, through which pakikipagkapwa is enacted and belonging becomes materially and sensorially embodied. These gatherings domesticate public space by rendering it temporarily Filipino without requiring ownership or formal claims to it. For workers whose legal claim to remain in the Basque Country is often conditional, parks become among the few places where a Filipino world can be assembled without producing papers. As Law (2001) argues, eating Filipino food in diaspora is a performative act of cultural assertion that also mitigates the social isolation identified as a significant risk factor for migrant domestic workers (Martinez et al., 2022) (Fig. 2).

Beyond shared meals, communal sport similarly transforms public space into a site of homemaking. The annual SIKAP Sportsfest brought together Filipino domestic and care workers representing different municipalities in Greater Bilbao and diverse ethnolinguistic regions of the Philippines through traditional games such as *luksong lubid* (jumping rope), *bunong braso* (arm wrestling), *sipâ/takyan*, and tug of war. Rather than dividing participants through competition, the event cultivated collective belonging through embodied play. The participation of a Basque team member extended the gathering beyond an exclusively Filipino community, illustrating that pakikipagkapwa is not confined to co-ethnics but can encompass members of the host society. This exemplifies Bhabha's (1994) Third Space as a site where cultural difference is negotiated through shared participation rather than erased.

Like the communal meal, the Sportsfest also revealed the gendered organization of homemaking. Women, including Evangelia and Mutya, led the planning and coordination of the event, while men participated primarily in the athletic competitions. The former president of SIKAP similarly observed that men's involvement was concentrated in sport, whereas women assumed much of the organizational and

relational labor through which community life was sustained. These were not Filipino traditions simply preserved abroad but practices reinterpreted in Euskadi, acquiring new meanings through migration. In Boccagni's (2017) terms, both the *kamayan* feast and the Sportsfest transformed ordinary public spaces into temporary Filipino places, demonstrating that homemaking extends beyond domestic interiors into the shared spaces where diasporic life is collectively enacted.

The Limits of Fellowship: Racialization and the Assertion of Kapwa

Communal homemaking does not unfold on neutral ground. Alongside the conviviality documented above, participants described experiences of racialization that placed their belonging within a hierarchy of social worth. Gregorio recalled his first employer telling him, "You came here because you are poor in the Philippines." He responded, "*Señora*, we came here to better our lives. We have food in the Philippines!" (Gregorio, 2024). His reply contests not the reality of economic migration but the moral hierarchy through which it is understood. Marcelo encountered the same logic in public space. He recalled being confronted by a passerby who shouted, "*¿Qué haces aquí? ¡Vete a tu país!* [What are you doing here? Go back to your country!]" Marcelo replied, "*Somos iguales. Tú vas a morir y yo también. Somos humanos.* [We are all equal. You will die, and so will I. We are all human beings.]" (Marcelo, 2024).

Marcelo's response illustrates pakikipagkapwa articulated beyond the Filipino community and under conditions of hostility. Rather than appealing to legal rights, residence, or economic contribution—the conventional vocabularies through which migrants justify their presence—he invokes a shared humanity grounded in shared mortality: *somos humanos*. Here, the ethic is mobilized outward as a counter-claim at the very moment his belonging is denied. Where Enriquez (1986) theorizes kapwa within Filipino social relations, Marcelo extends it to someone who refuses to recognize him as kapwa. Yet he harbors no illusion that this assertion dissolves structural inequality. Reflecting on discrimination, he remarked, "*...will happen anytime, anywhere. Por eso, hay que tragar.* [That is why you have to swallow it.]" (Marcelo, 2024). The verb *tragar* (to swallow, to endure without protest) captures the emotional labor demanded of migrants whose belonging remains conditional, revealing that the work of integration often includes the management of humiliation as well as the cultivation of belonging.

That burden, however, is unevenly distributed. Gregorio and Marcelo encountered exclusion in workplaces and public spaces, where they could respond directly. For many women in this study, the labor of endurance accumulated instead within the private households where they lived and worked, often without witnesses or opportunities for reply. Racialization and gender therefore do more than intersect; they organize different forms of vulnerability and different possibilities for resistance. The more audible refusal is not necessarily the more costly one.

Redeeming the Colonizer's Religion: Filipino Catholicism as Postcolonial Homemaking

If pakikipagkapwa provides the social grammar of Filipino communal homemaking, Catholicism supplies its most theoretically charged idiom. This section argues that Filipino domestic and care workers reclaim

Catholicism through practices of homemaking that exemplify Bhabha's (1994) concepts of mimicry and hybridity. Rather than simply reproducing the religion introduced through Spanish colonization, they appropriate it as a vehicle for Filipino cultural assertion on the former colonial metropole's own soil. As the cases below demonstrate, this work of religious homemaking is carried predominantly by women.

Mimicry and Adaptation: The Palm Sunday Problem

More than three centuries of Spanish colonial rule established Catholicism as one of the Philippines' most enduring colonial legacies. Introduced as an instrument of colonial domination and cultural transformation, it was progressively appropriated, adapted, and indigenized by Filipinos into something recognizably their own (Arogo, 2021). This complexity is thrown into relief when Filipino Catholics practice their faith in Spain, on the soil of the colonial encounter. Religious institutions have long served as infrastructures of belonging, offering social networks, material assistance, and spaces for cultural reproduction. For Filipino Catholics, however, these institutions acquire a distinctly postcolonial charge, since the faith anchoring their belonging abroad is itself the sedimented product of colonial imposition, later indigenized into something unmistakably Filipino.

On Palm Sunday 2024, Filipinos arrived at the Parroquia de San José in Romo, Getxo, carrying bundles of laurel twigs. Although participants commonly referred to the service as the "Filipino Mass," its liturgy drew on a multilingual repertoire, with hymns and songs performed in English, Tagalog, Spanish, and Cebuano. In the Philippines, the tradition centers on *palaspas* (woven palm fronds) blessed by the priest and placed on household doorjambs; in the Basque Country, where palm fronds are scarce, laurel has been substituted. This seemingly practical substitution is analytically significant. The adaptation exemplifies Bhabha's (1994) notion of mimicry: the postcolonial subject's partial repetition of colonial forms, an imitation that is "almost the same but not quite." The ritual's symbolic logic remains intact—the blessing, the procession, and the placement of the branches at the household threshold—while its material form is translated into the ecological conditions of the Basque Country. The laurel twig is the *palaspas*, and is not. It embodies Bhabha's (1994) "almost the same but not quite": faithful enough to sustain ritual continuity, yet sufficiently transformed to reflect the conditions of diasporic life (Fig. 3).

Santacruzan in Getxo: A Postcolonial Contact Zone

If Palm Sunday represents mimicry at the level of ritual objects, the Santacruzan represents it at the level of ritual performance. Introduced to the Philippines by Spanish missionaries as a commemoration of the finding of the Holy Cross, the Santacruzan combined Catholic devotion with the symbolic authority of Spanish colonial rule (Afinidad-Bernardo, 2024). In Getxo in May 2024, Filipino women and girls processed as *sagalas* inside a decorated church, watched by Filipino and Basque congregants, many of the latter relatives and friends of a Basque-Filipino family active in the parish. Maria Ligaya's son walked as Constantino, escort to Reyna Elena. The casting is analytically striking. Reyna Elena represents Saint Helena, traditionally credited with discovering the True Cross, while Constantino represents her son Constantine, the emperor who legalized Christianity. A Filipino boy in Getxo thus embodied one of the

foundational figures of the Christian tradition brought to the Philippines through Spanish colonization, performing that role within the same parish community his Filipino mother now calls home.

Read through Bhabha (1994), the Santacruzan unsettles both assimilationist and transnationalist interpretations: having passed through colonization, indigenization, migration, and recontextualization, it belongs fully to none of the societies it has traversed. As Pratt (1992) argues, colonial encounters are best understood as contact zones in which cultures meet and reshape one another. That many Basque spectators attended through family and parish relationships underscores this point: the encounter unfolded through kinship, worship, and everyday social ties rather than across a fixed colonial divide. Once a colonial instrument of evangelization, the Santacruzan has become Filipino cultural heritage, carried back to Europe as a practice of communal homemaking that reshapes the symbolic landscape of the former colonial metropole. What was once imposed through empire now returns as a diasporic claim to belonging.

Gabriela's Altar: Reclaiming the Colonizer's God

Gabriela came to Euskadi as a domestic worker and now works in the Getxo café-bar owned by the Basque man she met there and later married, acquiring Spanish citizenship through that marriage. At home, she has established a prayer altar, reintegrating Catholic devotional practice into family life. As she explained, "I still feel the same—I'm still Filipino. Even though I'm Spanish now after marrying my Basque husband, the culture is still there. In fact, he and his parents have adopted our culture" (Gabriela, 2024). The statement reverses the expected direction of integration: Filipino culture reshapes the domestic life of a Basque household. Her three children participate as angels in the Santacruzan, perform Filipino dances at community celebrations, and speak Binisayâ with their mother. Marriage, religion, and motherhood become intertwined practices of homemaking through which Filipino identity is reproduced across generations, the Catholicism once introduced through colonization now serving purposes the colonial project never anticipated (Aguja, 2013; Rodriguez, 1990).

This dynamic also illuminates the gendered character of postcolonial homemaking. Spanish colonialism displaced the *babaylan*—the precolonial Filipina spiritual leader—and promoted ideals of feminine piety centered on the Virgin Mary (Aguja, 2013; Rodriguez, 1990). Yet the women who organize *Flores de Mayo* in Getxo, coordinate the Santacruzan, sustain the Filipino Mass, and cultivate devotional life within their homes exercise forms of religious authority that exceed the ideals of passive femininity historically promoted by colonial Catholicism. Their authority is not a return to the babaylan, in any literal sense, but a postcolonial reconfiguration of women's spiritual leadership through the very religious tradition once used to constrain it. In Pratt's (1992) terms, the parish becomes a postcolonial contact zone where colonial inheritances are not merely reproduced but actively reworked through everyday practices of migrant homemaking. Religious practice thus functions not merely as a marker of continuity but as a gendered practice through which Filipino women negotiate belonging and reshape relationships with the receiving society. In this sense, the Catholicism once introduced through colonial conquest is no longer simply inherited but actively inhabited through Filipino practices of care, kinship, and communal belonging.

Filipino Women as Custodians of Cultural Continuity

The gendered dimension of cultural preservation, threaded through the preceding sections, warrants direct attention. In Greater Bilbao, the Filipino Catholic community, SIKAP Filipinas, and the *Asociación Pagkakaisa* (Unity Organization) are all led by women. The *Kalayaan* (Independence) Gala Night, an annual celebration featuring Filipiniana and Barong Tagalog attire, was organized and attended almost entirely by women and their children. Luzviminda, a key informant, noted that "men are seen participating mainly in sports events, especially basketball, and rarely beyond" (Luzviminda, 2024). The same pattern marked the liturgy: at the Filipino Mass in Getxo, the choir, lectors, altar servers, and parish staff were predominantly adult women, extending their custodial role from community organizing into the liturgical life of the very institution that once confined women to ideals of silent devotion. These patterns map onto feminist theorizations of women as symbolic and material reproducers of ethnic and national collectivities (Yuval-Davis, 2011).

There is an instructive tension. On one reading, the concentration of cultural labor in women's hands reproduces a conservative gendering of community life, adding unpaid cultural labor to paid care and family responsibility: a triple burden. On another, that same concentration is the basis of hard-won public authority: women represent the community to host institutions, command its organizational resources, and shape what Filipino identity will mean for the next generation. Both readings hold. An intersectional lens (Yuval-Davis, 2011) reveals burden and authority as mutually constitutive rather than forcing a choice between victimhood and empowerment. Far from simply preserving tradition, Filipino women shoulder the labor of institutional reproduction in a community where patriarchal expectations channel many men toward more circumscribed participation, particularly sports. They build institutions, train the next generation, and represent the community while managing full-time care work.

That the double burden is real and costly is most evident in Gabriela's account, whose deteriorating health eventually required emergency medical attention. She described the multiple roles she was expected to perform simultaneously:

Last year, Laura witnessed how much pressure I was under to manage everything perfectly—I have three kids now, right? *Mother ka, profesora ka, asawa ka, camarera ka, limpiadora ka* [You are a mother, a teacher, a wife, a waitress, a cleaner]. Thank God, I have friends who provided all kinds of support!" (Gabriela, 2024).

Gabriela enumerates her roles across three languages; the grammatical subject never changes, only the demands placed upon it multiply. Her multilingual self-description reflects layered expectations of family, paid care work, and the diasporic community. Yet her closing remark returns to kapwa: what sustained her was not institutional support but friends. Wife, waitress, and cleaner are enacted within a single household economy: the café-bar belongs to her husband, and the marriage that employs her is also the one through which she acquired Spanish citizenship. Household and workplace converge, a convergence whose costs the Discussion takes up below.

Maria Ligaya crystallizes this duality. Weeks after her son walked as Constantino, she was crowned Mrs. Kalayaan 2024, representing her hometown and the Bisayâ-speaking Filipinos in the Basque Country. The pageant carries a parallel colonial genealogy: where the Santacruzan emerged from Spanish evangelization, the beauty pageant entered the Philippines under American rule (Clutario, 2023) and was indigenized and carried into the diaspora as a vehicle for community-building (Babis, 2022; Farrales, 2019). The two colonial legacies converge on a Basque stage, both repurposed, both led by women, a hybrid selfhood one Miss Kalayaan contestant made explicit: *"Soy vasca y soy filipina"* [I am Basque and I am Filipina]. Custodianship and authority emerge as mutually constitutive, complicating scholarship that casts migrant women primarily as precarious workers rather than as the principal architects and public representatives of diasporic community life.

The Double Edge of the Shared Self: Pakikipagkapwa and the Limits of Relational Belonging

The preceding sections risk an overly redemptive reading, as though pakikipagkapwa simply converts subordination into belonging. The data resist this. The same ethic that extends the shared self across the employment line can also become the mechanism through which exploitation is absorbed. This is not a qualification of the argument but its completion. Whether pakikipagkapwa enables belonging or sustains subordination depends less on the ethic itself than on the structural conditions under which it is enacted. The domestic-work literature notes that the familial idiom obscures the employment relation, recasting contractual obligations as affective ones and dampening claims-making (Lan, 2006; Parreñas, 2015). Among these participants the risk is legible. Laura keeps a four-hour post over better-paid offers because these employers treat her as *señorita* rather than *chica*, a choice for dignity over income, framed through scarcity: it is rare, she notes, to find an employer who does not see her as merely a helper. Recognition becomes a scarce resource for which workers effectively pay through forgone earnings.

Mutya's account shows how far endurance can run. When her employer's wife, resentful that the children had grown closer to Mutya than to their mother, withheld food to force her resignation, Mutya recalled:

"So, I endured (*tiniis*) it even though she wasn't feeding me. My friends would bring me food. I felt like an overseas worker in Saudi Arabia—they would bring me food just so I could eat. I really endured it. Why did I endure (*tiniis*) it? Because I kept thinking about the money she still owed me. It would have been such a waste. That money would help my family back in the Philippines." (Mutya, 2024)

Here, *tiis* (patient endurance), a disposition closely allied with pakikipagkapwa's prioritization of relational continuity, enables the endurance of a materially abusive situation. Yet the quotation also reveals the limits of cultural explanation alone. Mutya endures not only because of a relational ethic but because leaving would mean forfeiting money that could support her family in the Philippines. Her friends' support embodies kapwa, but what ultimately structures her decision is economic precarity.

Gabriela's case locates the cost in the body. Enumerating her roles as a mother, teacher, wife, waitress, and cleaner culminated in hospitalization for anxiety after prolonged overwork. Unable to rest because

her husband-employer feared losing customers, the boundary between work and care was enforced only when her body imposed it. Her belonging in Euskadi is genuine, but it is secured partly through forms of self-subordination made difficult to resist by the convergence of marriage, family, and employment. Nor is belonging negotiated only within the household. Outside it, racialization continues to delimit migrants' acceptance. Gabriela recalled bar patrons asking, *"Hay luz en Filipinas?"* [Is there electricity in the Philippines?], their condescension intensifying after learning that she was married to the owner's son.

Taken together, these cases suggest that the consequences of pakikipagkapwa depend on what may be called the *structural floor*: the institutional protections that allow migrants to sustain relationships without surrendering their capacity to make claims. Where such a floor exists—labor protections, severance rights, universal healthcare, mechanisms for reporting abuse—the shared self becomes a resource for belonging. Where that floor is absent, as in the Gulf states invoked by several participants, pakikipagkapwa risks becoming the cultural grammar through which exploitation is endured rather than contested. This double movement—where the same relational ethic simultaneously enables belonging and normalizes subordination—suggests that pakikipagkapwa is best understood not as an inherently emancipatory cultural value but as a relational ethic whose emancipatory potential depends upon the structural conditions within which it is enacted.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article has argued that Filipino domestic and care workers in Greater Bilbao cultivate belonging through pakikipagkapwa and indigenized Catholicism, demonstrating that homemaking is simultaneously a communal, postcolonial, and gendered process.

Four findings emerge. First, pakikipagkapwa functions as a form of decolonial praxis: Filipino DCWs do not merely adapt to the host society but introduce into it a coherent model of social life, one that integration research has overlooked, one whose reach extends beyond the community yet whose shared self obliges as it sustains. Second, the reclamation of Catholicism repurposes a legacy of subjugation into a resource for belonging, extending Bhabha's (1994) account of mimicry. Third, the gendered dimension of cultural preservation complicates narratives that reduce migrant women to labor precarity: they are institution-builders and community custodians, roles that coexist with care work and are exacted from the same body. Fourth, this ethic is double-edged: the shared self can license self-subordination, separated from belonging not by the ethic itself but by the structural floor beneath it.

Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo's (2023) homemaking framework is enriched in dialogue with non-Western frameworks such as kapwa. Migrants do not arrive as cultural blank slates but as bearers of social theories and moral frameworks with their own integrative logic. This is the two-way, mutual-accommodation model Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2016) advocate, answering Schinkel's (2018) critique by relocating agency and conceptual authority with the migrants. The Filipino case sharpens the argument for decolonizing migration research (Bhambra, 2017; de Sousa Santos, 2018): the culture Filipino DCWs carry to Euskadi is already profoundly hybrid, shaped by three centuries of Spanish rule

and half a century of American colonization. They are not simply non-Western migrants encountering a Western host society but postcolonial subjects returning a transformed colonial inheritance to its origin. When treated as social theory rather than folk belief, indigenous concepts transform the analytic frame: kapwa proposes an alternative relational ontology beneath dominant integration models. Taking the migrant's theory seriously is not cultural respect appended to the analysis but a substantive revision of it.

This study's ethnographic approach offers depth but limited generalizability. The sample of ten does not represent the diversity of Filipino DCWs in Greater Bilbao, particularly in gender balance and the absence of LGBTQIA+ participants. The article focuses on communal and cultural homemaking, leaving material dimensions beyond its scope. Future research on Filipino-Basque children's hybrid identity formation and the digital networks sustaining DCW ties would extend the analysis, as would comparative work with Filipino communities elsewhere in Spain.

This article has shown that the indigenous Filipino ethic of the shared self, transplanted and reworked on Basque soil, is not a residue of the homeland to be shed in the course of integration but the very medium through which integration, on the migrants' own terms, is achieved. Maria Ligaya expressed this more simply when describing the friends and fellow El Shaddai members who sustain her: "I'm so thankful that there are people who care for me—people who love me. They're not my relatives, but I really feel that they are my family." Its analytical force lies in the apparent paradox. The people she names are not Basques but fellow Filipinos encountered through a diasporic congregation. Yet this does not make her belonging less real. Rather, it reveals a blind spot in dominant integration research, which has long privileged migrants' ties to the host society over the social worlds they build among themselves. Belonging may first be constituted among one's own before extending outward, and a self shared with those connected by neither blood nor birthplace is already an achievement of integration. Pakikipagkapwa does not require sameness; it enables belonging without erasing difference, a relational achievement that prevailing integration indices remain ill-equipped to recognize. The Filipino festival in Getxo with which this article began is therefore more than a celebration of national independence. It is the public enactment of a relational ethic through which migrants transform a former colonial landscape into a place they call home (Fig. 4).

Declarations

Author Contribution

G.P.R.P. conceived the study, designed the research, conducted the fieldwork, analyzed and interpreted the data, prepared the figures and tables, and wrote, reviewed, and approved the final manuscript.

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Footnotes

1. María Clara is the central female character in José Rizal's 1887 novel *Noli Me Tángere*. Long represented as the idealized, modest, and devout Filipina under Spanish colonialism, she has become a powerful cultural symbol, lending her name to the traditional Maria Clara dress and shaping enduring ideals of Filipina femininity (Aguja, 2013; Rodriguez, 1990).

2. SIKAP (*Samahan sa Ikauunlad, Kapatiran, at Pag-asa*) is a Filipino community organization in the Basque Country that supports Filipino migrants through cultural, social, and community activities while promoting Philippine heritage in the region (Asociación SIKAP Filipinas, n.d.).

Figures



Figure 1

Candlelit worship during the twenty-ninth anniversary celebration of El Shaddai Bilbao Chapter



Figure 2

Kamayan feast (Filipino boodle fight) in a public park in Greater Bilbao, illustrating homemaking through shared food and pakikipagkapwa



Figure 3

Filipino Catholics waiting for laurel branches to be blessed during Palm Sunday at the Parroquia de San José in Romo, Getxo, illustrating the adaptation of the palaspas tradition in the Basque Country



Figure 4

Procession during Fiesta Filipina en Getxo, led by the Basque and Philippine flags, illustrating the public enactment of pakikipagkapwa and Filipino diasporic belonging.