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A REPEATED TURNING



One will hear the joke told, eventually, though it hardly ever sounds like one. It's almost always delivered casually, thrown out like an off-hand rhetorical question, as a matter of incontestable fact. "You know why it's always foggy in Daly City, right? Because all the Filipinos turn on their rice cookers at the same time." This particular teller of the joke (Wally, a newspaper photographer) and I (a student of anthropology) are sitting in scuffed plastic chairs in the living room of his cramped apartment in the Pinoy capital of the United States. We are both among the 33,000 Filipino residents of Daly City, California, where one out of three people are of Filipino descent.

It is a freezing afternoon in late August, and we are looking through the damp glass of the window that faces out onto the quiet suburban street. Outside the fog swirls, tugged by the wind into gentle twists of cotton, spilling over the roofs and parallel-parked Hondas. But inside, it is warm, as it does not take much time to heat up the small room cluttered with boxes of bulk food purchased from Costco, cassette tapes, photography books, and an open *balikbayan* box addressed to Wally's parents in Quezon City. Wally, with a half-consumed bottle of beer in one hand, leans back in his chair after delivering the punch line, and waits for my reaction. I grin widely, because it is hard not to. I've always found it really funny.

Wally is not the first person to tell me the joke. Almost every single one of my interviewees inevitably asks me the question about fog and Daly City. There is very little variation in the way the joke is told, whether in

English or Tagalog, whether there is a pause between the question mark and the answer. There is nothing here for linguists to savor or puzzle over. In this instance, for the anthropologist, perhaps what counts most is the teller, not the tale; it is in the teller that the kind of cultural difference worth studying lies. The tale is something we all already share.

And yet, despite its silliness, despite its meteorological absurdity, the joke begins to acquire a sense of both political and semi-religious gravity: it invites us to envision the peculiarly affecting image of thousands of Filipinos depressing the rice cooker switch simultaneously, about half an hour before dinner is served, in a daily culinary ritual that comes almost as naturally as breathing. And the steam collectively rises up and out, the fog becomes a unanimous, quiet declaration of ethnic presence.

In this city, you may not always see the Pinoys. They may be hard at work at their jobs, they may be huddled in privacy behind their drawn curtains, they may be inside the warmth of their kitchens. But they are there. The fog proves it.

By anthropological standards, Daly City may not seem particularly exciting—not the street violence of Naples, or the humid rainforests of the Amazon, or the urban grit of Spanish Harlem, or the harrowing war zones of Angola—but sometimes what seems deeply ordinary to the reader can yield the most ethnographically fascinating data. The relative placidity on the surface of Daly City is matched by the pleasant orderliness of rows, by the way the candy-colored homes wriggle along the brown spines of the Colma hills. But unlike cinematic suburbia—where the trimmed hedges are mere facades for repressed anger and American adultery (and perhaps a murder or two)—Daly City has an alternate, more fixed identity: it is known, both in the Philippines and in America, as “the Pinoy capital of the United States.” Filipinos live and work among Filipino restaurants, television shows, video stores, newspapers, and concerns that allow them to imagine a life in many ways indistinguishable from life “back home.”

As the largest and fastest-growing ethnic minority in a city where the majority of the residents are Asian and over half are foreign-born, Filipinos constitute almost 32 percent of the population. In this suburb of San Francisco, with a total population of 103,621, about 32,720 Filipinos make their home. These population statistics reflect demographic patterns in the country as a whole: since 1965, after the removal of national origin quotas, Filipinos have made up the highest number of Asian immigrants admitted annually into the United States. By 1990, 1.4 million Filipinos were in the United States

(in 2000, 1.9 million), of whom 64 percent were born overseas (Querol-Moreno, 1994).

Early in 2002 a survey research group released some rather surprising findings: 19 percent of all Filipinos, or almost one out of five, saw the Philippine situation as “hopeless” and would, given the chance, live or work abroad (cited in Pazzibugan and Batino 2002). As expected, the report provoked a flurry of responses in newspapers, some of them critical of the survey’s methods (only 1,200 people were interviewed), but most of them portraying the results as a “wake-up call” regarding the dissatisfaction of the citizenry. The president, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, not very helpfully responded that the emphasis should have been on the 81 percent who did not want to migrate. (Twenty percent were undecided, so the number should actually have been about 60, not 81, percent.) Her finance secretary, Jose Isidro Camacho, grumbled, “It is so frustrating to work in government and to sometimes see our efforts being unappreciated” (quoted in Pazzibugan and Batino 2002, 1). This was because many Filipinos had already shown their disapproval with their feet. Whether those 19 percent, or about 8.2 million, would indeed join their (at the time) 7.4 million compatriots living and working overseas was another matter. Nonetheless, their inclination to leave indicates the crisis in which the Philippines found itself—the continuation of a long discontent that impelled people to seek their fortunes elsewhere.

Many of the people who left—specifically, those who left for the United States—have a complicated, ambivalent relationship with the country and the people they left behind. They are accused of betrayal, are tugged in different directions by familial and national obligations, experience nostalgia and guilt, and repeatedly turn between the homeland and their adopted country. Pinoys in the United States live their lives as migrants caught up, willingly and unwillingly, in a network of sometimes competing definitions of identities, connections, and loyalties.

The post-1965 generation of immigrants in Daly City and in the United States in general—again, a mostly foreign-born population, of varying citizenship statuses—raises questions about the inflexibility of citizenship and national belonging, and about what it means to be a Filipino in the United States. Daly City represents a certain class ideal that is both a product and a component of Filipino middle-class imagining. And it represents an odd, disconnected form of Filipino national belonging as well. But this ideal is fraught with the potential loss of the very markers that indicate belonging to this particular class and nation.

The Filipino community in Daly City also exemplifies the ambiguities produced by the intensification of connections between Filipinos in the United States and in the Philippines. I contend that these intensified links—and the act of migration itself—are not necessarily a direct result of colonialism, as many scholars of Filipino American studies have argued. Moreover, these transnational links, which supposedly characterize a new form of migration, do not necessarily lead to a redefined, more fluid conception of Filipino (and American) identity and belonging.

Much of the discourse about identity revolves around the concept of obligation, whether to one's relatives, one's country, one's homeland, or one's people. For the immigrant, this sense of obligation and responsibility—produced in discourse by entities both abstract and concrete, such as the state, tradition, kinship, ethnic solidarity, nationalism, and so on—may coincide with or compete against narratives of ethnicity and loyalty.

Khachig Tololyan touches on this sense of obligation in his discussion of the word *diaspora*:

It makes more sense to think of diasporan or diasporic existence as not necessarily involving a physical return but rather a re-turn, a repeated turning to the concept and/or the reality of the homeland and other diasporan kin through memory, written and visual texts, travel, gifts and assistance. (1996, 14–15)

It is this “repeated turning” that I find in Daly City's Pinoy population. Whether manifested as political activism, assertions of ethnic pride, nostalgia, consumerism, or just vague remembering, the repeated turning is obliquely opposed to the narrative of assimilation. The tension between this remembrance and the demands of citizenship in the new homeland, the obligations in different directions, constitute a predicament for the Filipino immigrant; I examine how they negotiate—or indeed, fail to find—a balance between the two.

This book also performs a repeated turning of its own. The chapters move back and forth not just in terms of location (either in the United States or in the Philippines), but also in terms of time period. This is not necessarily a stylistic maneuver, but a reflection of the way historical events, and more importantly, competing obligations in different sites, affect Daly City residents in the temporal present. In the following pages I outline the arguments on this constantly shifting, reorienting terrain.

Outline of Chapters

For the first substantive chapter, I will use official census reports, interviews with residents, and ethnographic data to provide an overview of the history, politics, and cultural and economic demographics of Daly City. I will present an ethnographic portrait of the city's Filipino immigrant population and, on a more figurative level, the city's identity itself, utilizing the personal narratives of some of its Pinoy residents. I will argue in this and the following chapters that the rapid circulation of commodities, ideas, and images—which can be attributed to phenomena described in transnational theory—has encouraged the reproduction of a more orderly version of Philippine life set in Daly City.

The next few chapters—on the media, on nostalgia, and on obligations—will employ a kind of circularity: the phenomena of homesickness and nostalgia, I argue, are strongly associated with “nationality.” These chapters will also be loosely structured around two seemingly conflicting discourses of obligation—towards the adopted country (in terms of civic responsibility), and towards the homeland (in terms of nationalism and guilt)—and their intersections with class, ethnicity, and nationality. Looking back, both temporally and spatially, involves identification with the nation; the Philippine state, in turn, employs similar idioms in interpellating its former citizens. But the process of fashioning an identity as an immigrant in a new land, I will explain, “ideally” involves a “progression” from nationality to ethnicity to “Americanization,” as the parameters of belonging change. In turn, the incorporation of the immigrant into the new nation-state effects other changes, mostly perceived in terms of class status and, again, nationality.

The Philippine state tries to turn the familial obligations of Filipinos overseas into a form of service to the Filipino nation. Pinoys who live in, and may be citizens of, the United States, are enjoined to remember their homeland, not just by sending money, but by remaining loyal to that homeland as well. In real life, however, such an obligation has to be balanced with their new lives and responsibilities in America. Filipino Americans, then, bear the discursive brunt of being seen as “less Filipino” or as having “betrayed” the Philippines; this is because they are far more likely to settle permanently than are Filipino migrants to Saudi Arabia or Singapore. Although the portrayal of overseas immigrants as less culturally “whole” or “authentic” is nothing new, it is revealing to contrast this claim with their own assertions of ethnic identity (contradicting, therefore, the logic of assimilation)—as well as with the Philippine government's largely successful attempts to portray overseas contract workers as national heroes.

I explore, therefore, the contradictions between the different parameters set both by nation and by state with regard to Filipino identity. This particular debate also has to do, crucially, with class; the middle-class Filipinos who come to live in the United States are already economically set apart from those who work as domestic helpers in Hong Kong, for instance. At the same time, this identity, this longing to “remain” Filipino, is at odds with the demands and responsibilities of American citizenship, and this disjunction may affect civic participation and incorporation into the American body politic *and* involvement in civic life in the Philippines.

Chapter Three, “Looking Forward: Narratives of Obligation,” examines Pinoy immigrants’ attitudes toward living in America: how and why they immigrated, their perceptions of differences between the United States and the Philippines, their experiences with work, and the relevance of ethnic solidarity, among others. Rather than illustrating the flexibility and fluidity associated with transnational theory, the interviewees’ narratives confirm the material hurdles and restrictions on immigration and conceptions of self. My research shows that narrowly conceived notions of Filipino immigration to the United States—whether clumsily attributed wholly to former colonial relations or to the crass allure of materialism—miss the point. What impels immigration is in fact a complicated and ambiguous combination of factors stemming from family obligations, colonial history, economic conditions, images fostered by the media, and an overall quest for prosperity.

One focus of this chapter, however, is a particular facet of the immigrant predicament that reflects the tension between competing obligations. The perceived responsibilities of citizenship (for instance, political participation) in the adopted country sometimes clash with notions of loyalty and responsibility to the homeland. Often attitudes toward national and ethnic belonging spill over into the political sphere and reveal cleavages within the Filipino community that are products of immigrant conditions—for instance, in a historic city council election, where the primary candidates were, for the first time, both of Filipino background. Community leaders have long noted the lack of electoral participation among Filipinos in Daly City; I argue that these elections in turn illustrate a perhaps fundamental cultural split within the community itself—one between the native-born and the naturalized foreign-born. This example illuminates the political and cultural dynamics of the Filipino community and, most important, raises questions about the meanings of American citizenship and civic responsibility.

How are these twin senses of belonging expressed? The situation not only invites questions about belonging, or even loyalty, to both countries, but also produces a general imagining of both places from the perspective of the other. How is this act of imagination articulated in public and private discourse—in

both the mass media and in migrants' narratives about themselves? How is the Filipino nation reproduced in daily life away from the "homeland?"

These conflicting obligations—and their precisely international nature—are a result of how the immigrant identity is produced and circulated. Imagination, stimulated by the flow of commodities and the mass media, takes on a social role. The images produced by movies, television, and newspapers are also important because of their wide-ranging circulation. For instance, politicians and members of the public alike have invested much energy in the control of representation of Filipinos in both Philippine and American media. This is an indication of the importance of public discourse to everyday Filipino life. The immigrant's sense of belonging is embodied both in the repetitive, automatic acts of the ordinary, and in the categories and narratives people tell and employ.

Chapter Four, "Spreading the News: Newspapers and Transnational Belonging," is centered on an ethnographic analysis of the *Philippine News*, the most prominent of all Filipino newspapers in the United States. I discuss how the media in general, and the *Philippine News* in particular, define identification and loyalties towards a particular national form—in this case, a fictive, ideal, transnational one. In short, I focus on how the newspaper, as a product of this desire for transnationality, reflects the relationship between a Filipino identity and a Filipino American one.

The *Philippine News* primarily sees itself as responsible for shaping its community of readers and generally urging them toward political empowerment in the United States. But this orientation is accompanied by a similarly dedicated orientation toward Philippine affairs—a perfect example of transnationality, in all its ambiguity, at work. A parallel dynamic, between assimilation and the carving out of a separate ethnic identity, also operates within the newspaper. Conceptions of belonging, of generational differences, and of being a Pinoy in America are discussed and contested publicly in the articles and the letters to the editor. It is the relationship between the media and the political and cultural process that concerns me, and I contrast it with my informants' narratives.

The tension between adopted home and homeland—or, as I argue in the conclusion, the apparent lack of it—produces different and sometimes competing responsibilities. In Chapter Five, "Looking Back: Indifference, Responsibility, and the Anti-Marcos Movement in the United States," to illustrate the immigrant orientation toward the homeland, I will focus on the discourse of responsibility utilized by some members of the Filipino community in the United States during the Marcos dictatorship. This is admittedly a particularly aberrant time, but it starkly demonstrates how Pinoy political activists in the United States employed metaphors of loyalty and

responsibility in an attempt to mobilize what they saw as an increasingly forgetful Filipino community that had “abandoned” its homeland and its people. The chapter also examines the competing ideologies within the opposition to Marcos in the United States, and the ways in which class complicates political positions. It also illustrates the similarities between Filipino immigrants and earlier immigrant groups in terms of overseas political organizing oriented towards the homeland.

Obligation links up, on a more encompassing level, to social class and the figure of the *balikbayan*, or the Filipino overseas returnee. The Filipino immigrant experience necessarily entails the concept of money, and not necessarily the colonial link. This particular “bind” is conceived as being in opposition to the concept of the nation. In Chapter Six, “Betrayal and Belonging,” I have brought together various instances, drawing from both the United States and the Philippines, that illuminate the variety of ways in which class intersects with definitions of Filipino national belonging. These notions of Filipino identity and belonging are evoked to regulate the class and national inclusion/exclusion of middle-class individuals outside the country. I explore the perception that Pinoys in the United States have “lost” a certain cultural authenticity in exchange for what is perceived as a higher class status.

Nostalgia and homesickness take various social forms, and the boundaries of the nation-state are expanded and manifested through differing venues (community cultural events, the media). In Chapter Seven, “Citizenship and Nostalgia,” I address the manifestations of homesickness in a place like Daly City, where the trappings of Filipinoness are already almost commonplace. Whether nostalgia is seen as uncontrollable remembrance or as a rosy fabrication of a narrative of the past—a concept analogous to nationalism’s smoothing of historical bumps in the road—such narratives are manifest in the everyday, and are an intrinsic part of the experience of Filipino immigrants. This act of “turning back” contrasts with the act of naturalization, which is seen as constituting a radical change in identity, and therefore forestalling any possibility of “return” to the homeland.

The Pinoy immigrant community, like other communities, does not manifest a kind of belonging—not a new variant, but one elaborated from previous historical forms—that has merely intensified because of the faster “transnational” connections between the two countries. Rather, this is a citizenship in which migrants harbor feelings of ambivalent commitment to nation-states (and not just governments). While there migrants have similar sentiments of ambivalence about the postcolonial relationship between the United States and the Philippines, a closer examination of the issues involved reveals more practical and material reasons for immigration.

In the concluding chapter, I take a more ambiguous and ambivalent position—in considering nationalism, belonging, ethnic solidarity, and political involvement—that more aptly characterizes Filipino immigrant identity. The reality, however, as I wrote at the beginning of this chapter, is that they have already left. This is why a genuine transnationality has yet to exist; a state of existence in which one can belong to two places at once is merely a kind of transcendent hope on the part of the immigrant. Pinoy in America, who are, in interesting ways, similar to the immigrants who came before them, may still see the Philippines as home, but not as a place in which to live.

A Tentative Status

Filipino migration to the United States is of course rooted in the American colonization of the Philippines,¹ though its early history is rarely discussed as part of current immigrant experience.² Such a disconnection is mirrored in the history of contradictory attitudes towards the United States: resistance to U.S. occupation on one hand, embrace of American ideals on the other. Actively recruited by the American sugar industry, the first few thousand Filipinos arrived in Hawaii between 1906 and 1910 to work as laborers on sugar plantations (initially to replace Japanese and Chinese laborers who were on strike). This direct recruitment, plus agrarian unrest and the depressed economy in the Philippines, resulted in a massive influx of Filipinos, mostly from the Ilocos region, to the mainland in the succeeding years. Vividly and bleakly depicted in Carlos Bulosan's famous book *America Is in the Heart*, the Filipino immigrant population—the majority of whom were migrant farm laborers who suffered extremely harsh working conditions—would number over 30,000 by 1930.

Filipinos occupied a tentative status: they were classified as U.S. nationals since the Philippines came under the control of the American colonial regime in 1899. But “national” was an oddly liminal category, reflective of the

¹ Marina Espina's pioneering research has uncovered the presence of “Manilamen” in Louisiana as early as 1763 (Cordova 1983, 1–7). Scholars affiliated with the Filipino American National Historical Society have pushed the date as far back as 1587 (in Morro Bay, California), but the location and the date have been questioned (Santos 1997). Moving the historical goalposts is familiar to students of nationalism, and is understandable, given Filipinos' minority status in the United States. But such remembrances had little, if any, impact on Spaniards, Americans, or Filipinos—the latter quite unlikely to have conceived of themselves as such. In any case, I begin my discussion with the American colonial period in the Philippines.

² As the former candidate for the Philippine Assembly Eva Estrada Kalaw shamelessly put it, “the better Filipinos” are migrating to the United States nowadays, as opposed to “the lower-class vegetable pickers” (quoted in Denton and Villena-Denton 1986, 125).

Philippines' ambiguous status in the eyes of the colonizers. Filipinos in the United States were neither aliens nor citizens, and were therefore ineligible for naturalization like other Asians.

Hostility to Filipino migrant workers began to increase; they were becoming more militant in their labor organizing, and their growing aggressiveness, coupled with the availability of even cheaper Mexican labor, made Pinoys less and less popular. An effective way of dealing with the antagonism (and one in keeping with trends in American immigration policy) was to bar Filipinos, like other prospective immigrants from Asia, from entering the United States.³ And the easiest way to bar Filipinos from migrating to the United States was to grant independence to the Philippines. After the U.S. Congress established the Philippines as a Commonwealth in 1934 via the Tydings-McDuffie Act, the Filipinos who were already in the United States were suddenly reclassified as aliens. Despite the fact that they became ineligible for government assistance, Filipinos continued to stay even after the passage of the Repatriation Act the same year. The U.S. government had calculated that, for \$87, it would be cheaper to transport Filipinos out of the country than to support them on welfare. Despite estimates that 15,000 to 20,000 would leave (Catapusan 1936), only 2,190 availed themselves of the opportunity; the rest stayed on (Takaki 1989). Despite their travails, Filipino farm laborers preferred to stay in the United States.

After 1936 immigration slowed to a trickle, particularly during the war years (only 252 Filipinos immigrated from 1941 to 1945). But the long-delayed granting of naturalization rights, first to Filipinos in the U.S. Army in 1943, and finally to all immigrants from the Philippines in 1946, paved the way for the larger migration to come.⁴ Some women arrived under the War Brides

³ Much of this exclusion of Asian immigrants had already been accomplished with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, the Gentlemen's Agreement (in which Japan was pressured to deny visas to prospective migrant laborers) in 1907, and the creation of a "barred zone" in 1917.

⁴ Similar shifts in naturalization rights occurred for other Asian Americans: first for the Chinese, and much later, for the Japanese.

Perhaps the clearest pathway to American naturalization for Filipinos during this period was opened under colonial auspices. The 1947 R.P.-U.S. Military Bases Agreement established the presence of U.S. army bases in the Philippines to protect American interests in Asia. One of its provisions was the continued recruitment of Filipino nationals—and later, *citizens of a sovereign state*—as members of the U.S. Navy. The twist here—which was also a blatant act of employment discrimination—was that Filipinos were restricted only to steward and mess attendant positions; their reward was the opportunity to avail of American citizenship after a period of service.

The controversy still rages over the rights of World War II veterans from the Philippines. Drafted into service in 1941 as part of the United States Armed Forces in the Far East (USAFFE), Filipino soldiers were promised that they would be considered "active service" U.S. veterans. This promise was revoked in 1946 with the Rescission Act. The 1990 Immigration and Naturalization Act allowed the naturalization of about 25,000 veterans because of U.S. military service; however,

Act, but on the whole the numbers were minimal. In 1965 the new Immigration and Naturalization Act was passed, and the racial/national origin quotas of the 1924 act were abolished. Geared primarily to family unification and the admission of professional and skilled workers (in direct contrast to previous patterns), the act radically changed the composition of the Filipino immigrant population. Mostly composed, initially, of health-related professionals (specifically, nurses and medical technicians directly recruited from the Philippines), engineers, accountants, and their families, who were dissatisfied with economic and political conditions in the Philippines, the new wave of immigration increased the Filipino immigrant population fivefold, to 85,000, within the next five years (Pido 1985). From then on—each year from 1965 to the present—Filipinos made up the highest total of Asian immigrants admitted.

Initially, immigrants arrived under the third preference (professionals of “exceptional ability”) and the sixth preference (“workers, skilled and unskilled, in occupations with short labor supply in the United States”); in 1975 Filipinos constituted 18.5 percent of all third-preference immigrants. But the family-reunification preference immigrants soon outpaced the professionals. From 1966 to 1975, the proportions of the two kinds of preference immigrants were about equal. A decade later (1976 to 1988), however, the occupational-preference immigrants accounted for only 20 percent of the total, whereas family-reunification preference immigrants rose to an overwhelming 80 percent (Espiritu 1995, 21).⁵

As is the case with almost every other Asian immigrant group, the numbers kept growing: during the Aquino administration in the Philippines, between 1986 and 1990, more than a quarter of a million Filipinos arrived in the United States. In 2000, the number of Pinoys in the United States was

they were denied medical benefits and were ineligible to be patients in Veterans Administration hospitals. (The obvious question of “patriotism” is largely unexamined here, particularly by Filipino American activists, as the only logical scenario would have the veterans fighting for the defense of “their country”—the United States.)

⁵ This change can be partly explained by later policies that restricted the entry of professionals. The 1965 Immigration Act was revised in 1976: third- and sixth-preference immigrants, i.e., those who entered through occupational preference, had to have actual job offers before they could receive their visas. The Eilberg Act of 1977 further required that employers show proof of recruitment within the U.S. labor pool before hiring non-citizens (Chan 1991, 147–148). Currently 36 percent of employed Filipinos and Filipino Americans in the United States are categorized as employed in “technical, sales and administrative work,” 26.6 percent in “managerial and professional work,” and 16.8 percent in “the service industry.” This change in the category of immigration applications resulted in a corresponding shift in the economic and educational background of the Filipino American community.

The gender ratio has also changed radically from that of the bachelor society of the '20s and '30s: in 2000 women outnumbered men by about 100,000.

officially estimated at 1.9 million; including undocumented immigrants, the number is probably closer to 2 million.⁶ The 1990 population (1.4 million) was divided almost evenly among naturalized citizens (53.8 percent) and non-citizens (46.2 percent). Only 35 percent of this population was born in the United States, underscoring the relative recentness of the Filipino community (Querol-Moreno 1994). About half (51 percent) of the foreign-born Filipino population arrived before 1980, and the rest came to the United States in the following decade. This proportion of Philippine-born Filipinos in the overall population is reflected in the composition of the Pinoy community in Daly City.

The bulk of my ethnographic research was done in the mid- to late '90s, when the largest wave of immigrants after the People Power Revolution of 1986 had more or less settled into a comfortable stasis. The political upheavals of the '70s and '80s in the Philippines—reflected in a quieter (but not gentler) fashion in Filipino community politics in the United States—had given way to a sleepy peace, a calm before the chaos of post-9/11 America, recession in Asia and the United States, disastrous military interventions, and punitive immigration policies in the name of homeland security.⁷ Hot-button issues like affirmative action (especially in California), voting registration campaigns, the struggle for veterans' equity, increased militarization in the Philippines, or even the continued demolition of Filipino enclaves via "gentrification" like that of San Francisco's South of Market (SoMa) area, had failed to ignite a movement outside activist realms, as can be seen in succeeding chapters. Anecdotal accounts from many of my interviewees suggest that some former Daly City residents were enjoying a measure of prosperity, cashing in on the wild Bay Area housing market, selling their Daly City homes, and moving to larger residences in the East Bay and further down the Peninsula.

It was during this particular context of contentment, if not complacency, that my research was conducted. It may seem contradictory, especially to scholars of cultural change, to study a community that, in hindsight, was going through a generally stable period in its history. But it was also an opportunity to observe, at *Philippine News*, the production of good news and bad news when there was relatively little of either, or the chance to watch ordi-

⁶ According to Concepcion Montoya, the Philippines is the third biggest "provider of visa overstayers" in the United States, after Mexico and Haiti, with an average of 14,800 overstayers per year from 1985 to 1988 (1997, 115).

⁷ See in particular the Critical Filipina and Filipino Studies Collective's report, "Resisting Homeland Security: Organizing against Unjust Removals of U.S. Filipinos" (2004), which asserts that almost 85,000 Filipino immigrants—most for mere visa violations—are targeted for arrest, detention, and removal as a direct consequence of the PATRIOT Act.

nary citizens go about their sometimes perfectly ordinary lives. One could imagine, given this scenario, a deepening of roots, a cultivation of formerly fallow land, a building of community and political coalitions without intramural distractions. Still this was a community that, after putting itself on the map of the United States by electing its first Filipino mayor, continued to dream of places back home.

Filipino/Filipino American /Pinoy

The reader will have noticed the odd absence of the phrase *Filipino American* in the history recounted above. Perhaps indicative of both the paradoxical rigidity *and* the slipperiness of the symbolic boundaries between “Filipinos” and “Filipino Americans” are the terms themselves. In this section I shall discuss some categories and use them as a starting point for addressing issues in widening spheres: from identity and national belonging to the borders between academic fields to colonialism and postcolonialism. The importance of these symbolic boundaries can be seen even on a semantic level, but government policy and ethnic identification are also at stake.

I use the term *Filipino American* with hesitation, even though it is the technically correct term; individual understandings clearly differ from state-imposed ones. *Filipino American* can refer to any of several possibilities, or a combination thereof, depending on the speaker: (1) a person of Filipino descent residing in the United States, (2) a person of Filipino descent born in the United States, (3) a person of Filipino descent who is a naturalized citizen of the United States, and (4) a person of mixed race.

Most of my Philippine-born interviewees—some are naturalized citizens, some are permanent residents, some are neither—disavowed the term as applying to themselves. Many of the people I spoke to pointedly refused to identify themselves as Filipino American, explaining that the term was more appropriate for Filipinos who were born in the United States.⁸ (American-born college students embraced the term, as referring to themselves, almost without question.) For one interviewee, the term referred only to people of mixed race, such as half-Filipino, half-white. Simon Roldan, an interviewee who was born in the United States but who had lived in the Philippines until he was 21, readily identified himself as Filipino American solely because of his American citizenship. After further questioning, some interviewees were

⁸ As Rick Bonus similarly writes, “My respondents only occasionally referred to themselves as ‘Filipino Americans.’ More often they used ‘Filipino’ . . . to distinguish themselves from those . . . born in the United States. My reason for stressing that they are ‘Filipino American’ speaks to my contention that they are engaged in processes that have implications for being Filipino and American at the same time” (2000, 5–6).

clearly puzzled by my insistence on categories; some, like my informant Michael Santos, simply said that they were “wala, Pilipinong nasa Amerika” (oh, nothing, a Filipino in America).

The latter categorization reflects a very particular status—one of displacement. It is the category of a person whose identity is ostensibly “intact” but who is located in a different place. For some this entails a rejection of the adjective *American*—in effect, treating the United States as merely the issuer of one’s passport. Being a “Filipino in America,” as opposed to being Filipino American, is a state that seems to highlight the lack of a sense of belonging: this may, in turn, signify and intensify a longing for connections to the homeland.

What accounts, then, for this reluctance to be categorized? One explanation is the relative recentness of the term *Filipino American*, born from the Asian American movement of the late ’60s and used primarily (at least in the beginning) by academics and politicians.⁹ Related to this odd reluctance is the term’s progression (or decline) from a declaration of ethnic Americanness to a mere census category. For instance, one interviewee said that he uses the term *Filipino American* only when filling out forms—it is the box he checks off when asked about his ethnicity.¹⁰

Indeed, for many non-Filipinos, *Filipino* and *Filipino American* are interchangeable, the former being shorthand for the latter.¹¹ This usage is simply a matter of semantics, of course, but I believe it may also reveal an unconscious and unremarked slipperiness between the two categories. Not only does it reflect the increasingly immigrant component of the Asian American communities themselves, but it can also be read as manifesting the tentative nature of the ethnic identification itself. But, as my ethnographic interviews

⁹ Indeed, the term of choice among second-generation Bay Area activists (particularly those influenced by ’60s rhetoric) is “Pilipino American,” following arguments that the letter “F” did not exist in the precolonial alphabet.

¹⁰ Such identification is perhaps analogous to the clumsy “Asian Pacific Islander” (API) and “Asian Pacific American” (APA) categories, which clearly have their origins in government bureaucratism. Nonetheless, government agencies have been partly successful in forcing identification with these categories, if only for census data or funding requirements. Espiritu argues that the acceptance of the “Asian American” category is not just a result of pressure from above (which she traces to a homogenized view of Asians by white society in general), but a calculated, pan-ethnic strategy as well. Nevertheless, “the pan-Asian concept is now so well institutionalized,” she writes, “that new Asian immigrants and refugees often encounter . . . pressure to consider themselves Asian Americans, regardless of whether or not they see themselves in such terms” (1992, 16). This process is arguably similar to how “Filipino American” is becoming begrudgingly accepted as the default political category.

¹¹ Colloquially, of course, it is simply easier to drop the *American* part of the phrase for *any* term of ethnic identification in the United States, but this is not the case here; some interviewees took pains to distinguish themselves from “Filipino Americans.”

show, the boundaries between the otherwise transposable terms can be suddenly, rigidly drawn, depending on the context.

I will use the generic term *Filipino* to refer to Filipinos both in the Philippines and the United States, using *Filipino American* only to denote people who identified themselves thus (like those at the *Philippine News*) or who belong to the second generation. I choose this terminology not only for the sake of accuracy but to highlight the tensions regarding national belonging. I prefer to keep the two terms—*Filipino* and *Filipino American*—separate, but I am aware that these categories and their putative subjects/members may not necessarily coincide.¹²

And finally, a word or two about *Pinoy*. A slang term for Filipinos (*Pinay* is the feminine counterpart), *Pinoy* began to be used by Filipino labor migrants in the United States, ostensibly to differentiate themselves from Filipinos who lived in the Philippines. (I have found no concrete evidence to support this latter clause, especially if there was little to no reason to claim a specifically Filipino American identity this early in their migration history.) It is clear, however, from oral narratives, that the term was used by Filipinos to refer to themselves, as Carlos Bulosan (1973) does, in a passing reference in *America Is in The Heart* (see also Vallangca 1977). The term also began to be seen in print in the 1920s and '30s in the Philippines¹³, and it gained widespread demotic currency in the 1970s, aided by a couple of hugely popular nationalist folk songs (“Tayo’y Mga Pinoy” [We Are Pinoys] by Heber Bartolome and “Ako’y Isang Pinoy” [I Am a Pinoy] by Florante). Since then it has been used by Filipinos more or less everywhere.

Whatever its origins,¹⁴ I employ the term fairly interchangeably with *Filipino* in the text—not out of caprice or a utopian wish to elide differences, nor

¹² Others have discussed the term as well, notably Oscar Campomanes (1995, 147), who argues that “Filipino American” is “oxymoronic,” and uses “U.S. Filipino” in its place. Lisa Lowe (1996) similarly explores the political and legal contradictions inherent in the category “Asian American,” one that Dylan Rodriguez pushes to its logical limit, describing the “unnamable violence that deeply troubles the very formation of the field [of Filipino American studies] itself” (Rodriguez 2006, 146).

¹³ See Carson Taylor’s *History of Philippine Press* (1928), which mentions a 1926 journal called *Pinoy* from Capiz. From <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/acr6448.0001.001> (last accessed January 18, 2008).

¹⁴ Spuriously fanciful etymologies of the term have been bandied about—that it is a contraction of “P.I. [Philippine Islands], Noy” (the supposed answer of a Bicolano laborer, when asked where he came from), or that it is short for *Pilipino boy* (and therefore emphasizing a Filipino servility to American bosses), or, most dubious of all, that it is from *Pilipino* and *unggoy*, or “monkey” (the latter supposedly proving that *Pinoy* began as an ethnic slur). Monkeys and Filipinos were certainly connected in the American racial imagination as early as the turn of the twentieth century, but I have found no concrete evidence for any of the above folk etymologies, and there is no reason to believe that *Pinoy*—used liberally, after all, by Filipinos in the United States and in the

as a willful semantic gesture to avoid the contradictions and implications of *American*, but to highlight a genuinely transnational nickname for a people, and it is with those connotations of familiarity, endearment, and affection that I use it in this book.

Interviews and Narratives

My interest in studying notions of belonging is a reaction to previous studies of migration that have underscored the flow of capital and the economic and political systems that regulate the movement of people. In contrast, I focus more on the emotional dimensions of belonging as a way of foregrounding the more “irrational,” human element of immigration. In keeping with my concern to represent immigrant belonging as an emotional, subjective state, reflected in people’s perspectives rather than in an abstract, more material structure, I focus on discourse about the United States and the Philippines. The words and categories that interviewees use to delineate nationality and ethnicity, or to describe themselves as belonging or not belonging to particular classifications, are important.

While formal interviews comprise an important basis for my research, my book is still, primarily, an ethnographic work, the result of regular hours of participant observation and informal interviewing in different venues: shopping malls, social service offices, cafeterias, festivals, coffee shops, parks, restaurants, parking lots, and people’s living rooms in and around Daly City. As part of my research, I also participated in and observed the *Philippine News* staff’s daily activities, from editorial meetings to telemarketing campaigns. I also conducted interviews with staff members regarding the selection of news articles for publication, advertising, the newspaper’s relationship with the Filipino community, journalistic responsibility, and the like.

From a cross-section of Pinoy immigrants from Daly City I collected almost 50 narratives about their lives in the United States. Central to these narratives are such themes as their motivations for leaving the Philippines, patterns of arrival, varying expectations of life in the United States, and searches for employment. Most of my interviewees (like the majority of Filipino immigrants) arrived as professionals, were petitioned for as members of the first-preference category (as unmarried children of American citi-

Philippines themselves—was ever employed derogatorily. The suffix *-oy*, in any case, should be familiar to any Tagalog speaker as used in nicknames after one drops the final letter (Nonoy, Doy, Totoy, Caloy)—diminutive, perhaps, but most certainly meant with affection. (The slang term *Flip* could have been derogatory in its origins, but it is clearly a contraction of *Filipino* and surely predates its erroneous folk etymology, i.e., that it is an acronym for “Fucking Little Island People.”)

zens), or were petitioned for by their parents' siblings. I discuss my informants' stories at length, focusing on about half a dozen in particular, not just to put names and stories to what would otherwise be immigration statistics, but also to highlight the complexity of each individual's family, class background, and so on. Most of the narrative, if not direct quotations from the informants themselves, is paraphrased or directly translated from the interviews.¹⁵

Many of the conversations, whether prompted by me or not, revolved around identifiable themes: the informants' departures, differences between the Philippines and the United States (and, by extension, contrasts between Filipino immigrants and American-born Filipinos), work, the possibility of return, homesickness, and, in general, being Filipino in America. Generally, the themes arose from a chronological narrative: I would begin by asking how they came to immigrate to the United States, and their retellings would proceed from there. Though I prepared some questions in advance, the conversation would usually proceed of its own accord, depending on the interviewee, toward topics such as race, colonial history, sexuality, and politics. Certain questions, however, remained foremost in my mind: How were career or lifestyle decisions balanced with decisions concerning family reunification or in conflict with them? To what extent, if any, is Pinoy immigration to the United States already structured or conditioned by a colonial legacy?

I made clear at the beginning of each interview that names and other relevant identifying details would be changed in the final manuscript. I also stressed that the interview had nothing to do with my work as a reporter, and that no details of the interview would be appearing in any of my newspaper articles. I asked permission to tape the interviews, which almost all gave.

Except for people whom I worked with at the newspaper or met at various Daly City venues and events, I generally located my interviewees through snowball sampling: subjects recommended someone else who would be willing to be interviewed, and so on. They were fully informed of the nature of my research and, at the beginning, my identity as a graduate student in anthropology. Such an identity was not always feasible; monkeys and bones were understandably the first things to come to my interviewees' minds. My

¹⁵ Almost all my interviews were conducted in Tagalog, but since I am a native Tagalog speaker, it is quite possible that my Tagalog blinders were on and I had simply taken for granted the possibility that all my interviewees could understand me completely. For some interviewees, particularly those who had arrived earlier, it was clear that they were uncomfortable speaking in Tagalog, preferring to answer my questions in English instead. But for the most part, the post-1965 generation of immigrants spoke some form of Taglish (a speech form composed of Tagalog and English mixed in varying quantities), and our conversations "naturally" fell into it.

reluctant adoption of the label “sociologist” did not work either, and so, a few weeks into fieldwork, my more accurate introduction of myself as a “student” sufficed.

But my position as a Filipino student asking to be taught about the Filipino immigrant community generated its own set of interesting problems. My interviewees, though not cognizant of the anthropological debates about emic and etic knowledge, were skeptical of what made them so intrinsically interesting in the first place, especially to someone who seemed like “one of them.” In the first few weeks, my blundering initial question—along the lines of “When and how did you come to the U.S.?”—was mostly answered with stony silence, especially by people I was meeting for the first time. Because I was also a Filipino immigrant myself, there were times when our conversations would seem like exercises in a kind of feigning of ignorance. Repeatedly, an interviewee would begin to describe something, then stop herself and say, “But you know what I mean! You’re from the Philippines too!”

It was these frustrating interruptions in the discourse, however, that provided the most interesting entry points into the discussion. What *was* I supposed to know because I was from the Philippines too? These glossed-over topics referred to cultural experiences that Filipino immigrants presumably shared—traits, phenomena, views of how the world worked, that had passed into the sometimes unarticulated realm of Filipino common sense, the specifically discursive stuff that bound together an imagined community of Filipino immigrants. And it was at these points, which happened often, that I would respond, “I think I know what you mean—but could you elaborate further?”

Questioning the Transnational

My interviews were situated in a period marked by what some scholars have heralded as a new empirical object: transnationalism. An exploratory article by Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton (1992c) formulated perhaps the first conceptual framework for analyzing “the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement” (1). I use the term *transnational theory* to refer to the body of academic writing on the subject. “Researchers,” the authors note, “had found in their own field work evidence of a new pattern of migration” (1). The scholarly consensus seemed to be that previous conceptualizations of migration were inadequate for describing the emerging phenomena. Migrants, assisted by the very visible hand of global capitalism, were creating networks that crossed state borders instead of producing dislocated experiences, and the borders of nations did not coincide anymore with their physical, state-determined territories.

What scholars call transnationalism, however, can be seen simply as a continuation of quite *old* processes; it is in that respect only a response to changing theory. In many ways, Filipinos in Daly City seem to live their lives very much according to the classic patterns of migration, according to earlier configurations of migration and settlement in the late 1800s and early 1900s. These earlier patterns are, arguably, “transnational” as well, but even then, some aspects of the theoretical model of transnationalism are simply not supported by my findings about Daly City.¹⁶

Many scholars of the supposedly emergent phenomenon of transnationalism have focused on immigrants primarily as rational economic and political actors.¹⁷ This simplistic approach does not adequately describe an experience that also encompasses complicated transformations in symbolic conceptions of identity and belonging. Is it possible to conceive of multiple homelands, of different, multiple narratives of the self? In this sense of belonging, the transnational is perhaps better understood as a kind of “transnationality”—as a state, as an experience, with all its accompanying, sometimes contradictory sentiments, located among and within individuals, rather than as an organized economic system. Such a state of being is expressed, not only through migrants’ practices and activities, but through their words as well, embodying a wide range of sentiment and imagination.

I take seriously Arjun Appadurai’s suggestion of the relevance of studying imagination as “an organized field of social practices.” Because of the mass media, he writes, “more persons in more parts of the world consider a wider set of ‘possible’ lives than they ever did before” (1990, 5; 1991, 197). The topic of imagination is not as odd as it seems: if the nation can be imagined (from within and without), then one can also imagine oneself “outside” it. Daly City may loom large as a potential destination within a Filipino’s sphere of possibilities. The pervasiveness of emigration from the Philippines and the ubiquity of mass media have long made it possible for Filipinos to imagine alternate life stories, different possible trajectories.

¹⁶ There are, of course, some crucial but related differences: the impact of rapid communication and transportation, the greater role of the media, and the wider and faster distribution of commodities. This is particularly important in relation to the circulation and stimulation of discourse and a more intense reconstitution of connections between the so-called homeland and Daly City, but it does not necessarily lead to a different sense of belonging.

¹⁷ Indeed, much research still needs to be done. Is transnationalism, for instance, as Glick-Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton ask, transmissible between generations (1992a, xiv)? Is the second generation—for which the idea of home may necessarily be different—included in transnationalism’s theoretical embrace? How do gender, class, and sexuality fit within the framework? How are the ramifications of transnationalism changed when intention is considered, when people plan to stay or plan not to?

This imagining may be done in different directions—that is, both about the Philippines and about the United States, from any location—and in different tones of voice. Recent studies of migration and “the transnational” have generally overlooked emotional components—notions of home, loss, belonging, patriotism, ambivalence, nostalgia, and homesickness—and these affective elements, particularly important in understanding the emotional lives of immigrants, are articulated in social practices that reinforce or subvert national conceptions and processes. “Transnationality,” however, may not necessarily be an embodied state, but primarily the (failed) object of immigrant yearning.

The possibility of migration—or, if one is in Daly City, of a “transnational” mode of existence—becomes most potent on the discursive, symbolic level. Though anchored in the everyday reality of letters, phone calls and the absence of relatives, the imagining of a different life elsewhere, or a life left behind, is also mediated through constructions of mass media. In turn, the boundaries that delimit migrants’ lives, that circumscribe the cultural definitions of *here* and *there*, of *Filipino* and *non-Filipino* (or *less Filipino*), are located and established in people’s memories and narratives. The language used by these moving subjects is crucial in tracing the categories that Filipinos use in the formation of a Filipino identity in the United States.

In this respect I am cautious about studying the Filipino community in Daly City as a “transnational” one. Examining the emotive aspects of immigration, particularly by listening to the narratives of Daly City residents, makes it clear that the oversimplified push-pull migration model must be abandoned. Furthermore, the familial, political, cultural, and financial connections between Daly City Pinoys and their relatives in the Philippines highlight the structural links between the two places. The features described by scholars—the supposed reconfiguration of nation and state boundaries, the growing role of high-speed media in the social imagination, and its impact on anthropology¹⁸—even if their theorization has been found wanting, have been instrumental in my conception of Daly City as an immigrant community.

¹⁸ Other anthropologists have used a transnational framework effectively, examining both the material and subjective aspects of transmigrant life: they have looked at Hong Kong entrepreneurs in California and their strategies in accumulating cultural capital (Ong 1992), and at non-resident Indian immigrants investing in the “homeland” and their difficulties in communicating a certain “Indian-ness” to relatives and business partners in India (Lessinger 1992). Naficy (1991), in his study of Iranians in Los Angeles, examines nostalgia and its articulation in souvenirs and music videos, using psychoanalytic methods.

On Two Fields

The apparent multiple belongings of Daly City's Filipinos point to an important bridging of Asian studies with Asian American studies. Though resistance comes from both fronts, Asian studies and Asian American studies are growing closer to each other, at least in their subjects and the geography of their respective realms. Regrettably, the guarding of academic turf, together with the unpredictable politics of funding, has made it difficult to find common ground between those two obviously limited spheres of area studies. The highly politicized nature of the history of Asian American studies in particular has necessitated, unsurprisingly, a defensive inflexibility on the part of Asian American academics. This has also, unfortunately, resulted in a failure to change along with a rapidly shifting population, or to account for historical connections with Asia since the beginning of Asian immigration to the United States.

Surely the large influx of Asian immigrants into the United States after 1965 alone demands the inclusion in Asian American curricula of histories claimed by well over half of those who may now call themselves Asian Americans. In turn, scholars of and in the Philippines would do well to understand the political and cultural dynamics of the communities their former compatriots have formed. As the Philippines shapes the forms of homesickness and nostalgia for Pinoy immigrants in the United States, so does the United States occupy the social imaginary of the Filipino people. One should recognize the necessity of Filipino American studies in Philippine studies and vice versa, and the ways in which the boundaries of both fields acutely affect analytical perspectives. My ethnography is located at the much-contested junction between both fields.

The connection between the Philippines and the United States is clear, particularly in historical, economic and political structures. Some contemporary scholars have seen this link in psychic formations as well, though it is debatable. The relevance of these postcolonial links, however, may become clearer if the connections between two fields of study—Asian studies and Asian American studies—are defined further. It is perhaps understandable, then, that given the circumstances, bridging the two academic fields of Philippine studies and Filipino American studies should be met with deep suspicion. At academic conferences, warnings are raised, from time to time, that even the study of the transnational itself threatens the borders of Asian American studies.

Such worries are not entirely unfounded. Deeply embroiled in politics, funding for ethnic studies seems to be more dependent on the vagaries of university administrations than that of other more "traditional" departments

and fields. Area/ethnic studies as a whole—but especially ethnic studies—are forced to justify their existence continually or be subsumed under the more “legitimate” discipline-based departments. Some of the bad blood stems from the fact that Asian American studies and ethnic studies in general, and certainly at their inception, were construed as alternative spaces for educational curricula “said to be irrelevant to the experiences of people of color” (Wei 1993, 17). Born from the Third World Strike at San Francisco State College (now University) and at the University of California at Berkeley in 1968, Asian American Studies was a direct challenge to what was seen as an educational system that promoted Eurocentric ideology. This consciously oppositional stance was directed at the academic “Establishment,” as it were, and what it stood for—including, one may argue, the field of Asian studies, whose beginnings were linked with matrices of colonial knowledge and particular strains of Orientalism (Said 1978; Rafael 1994). Asian American scholars of the ’60s, in particular, sought consciously to separate themselves from Asia, finding little in common (including language) with those who lived there.¹⁹

My work bridges the two spheres of study—not just in my investigation of identity as forged from the intersections of two places and cultures, but also in my emphasis on people whose senses of belonging are rooted in different locations. The population demographics alone—not to mention the links and networks forged between people of different countries—demand that studies of Pinoys in the United States, particularly in places like Daly City, not be automatically confined to Asian American studies and the mechanical “Americanness” the field implies, but be considered as extensions of Philippine studies as well. For the latter, the sheer number of Filipinos overseas has required a rethinking of government policies and cultural norms and an overall reconfiguration of the Philippines’ identity as a nation and as a state. One must also understand how Filipinos in the Philippines view themselves and the country in relation to the unprecedented, massive absence of their friends, relatives, and neighbors. An estimated six million Filipinos were working abroad in 1994—roughly 10 percent of the total population and 22 percent of the 27-million-strong labor force (Beltran, Samonte, and Walker 1996, 19). By 2006 eight million were working abroad. Such possibilities for overseas employment, in turn, expand the horizon of options for those left behind.

¹⁹ Asian American Studies is also the product of students and activists of the second (and third) generations, and could be seen as a reaction against their parents’ immigrant generation. One can argue that, in many ways, the keystone works of Asian American studies and literature can be read as repudiating the parents’ immigrant culture—either for its seeming backwardness or for its concession to assimilation.