

Three

"Out There":

The Topography of Race and

Desire in the

Global

City

The city, the contemporary metropolis, is for many the chosen metaphor for the existence of the modern world. In its everyday details, its mixed histories, languages and cultures, its elaborate evidence of global tendencies, and local distinctions, the figure of the city, as both a real and an imaginary place, apparently provides a ready map for reading, interpretation and comprehension. Yet the very idea of a map, with its implicit dependence upon the survey of a stable terrain, fixed referents and measurement, seems to contradict the palpable flux and fluidity of metropolitan life and cosmopolitan movement. . . . Beyond the edges of the map we enter the localities of the vibrant everyday world and the disturbance of complexity. Here we find ourselves in the gendered city, the city of ethnicities, the territories of different groups, shifting centers and peripheries—that city that is a fixed object of design (architecture, commerce, urban planning, state administration) and yet simultaneously plastic and mutable: the site of transitory events, movements, memories.

— IAIN CHAMBERS, *Migration, Culture, Identity*

New York permits homosexuals an unparalleled chance to assemble a mix-and-match life. — EDMUND WHITE, *States of Desire*

Kakanan na ba ako ng 'New York, New York'? Parang nasa sentro ako ng mundo. Noong lumalaki ako sa Maynila, ang Amerika para sa akin ay Manhattan, Empire State, Statue of Liberty. O 'di va? Ang baduy ko 'no para akong turistang fresh off the boat.

[Shall I sing "New York, New York"? I feel like I am in the center of the world. When I was growing up in Manila, America for me was Manhattan, the Empire State Building, and the Statue of Liberty. Isn't that tacky of me as if I were a tourist fresh off the boat? — ARTURO

Homo Xtra or *HX*, a weekly gay guide to New York City, includes a section called "Out There." In contrast to the other parts of the guide, which enumerate the gay offerings of various Manhattan neighborhoods or districts (e.g., the Upper East Side, Chelsea, and the West Village), this section lumps together all the various gay bars and events outside Manhattan. The "Out There" section exemplifies a typical and popular topographical rendition of New York City with Manhattan as the cosmopolitan center and the surrounding areas as the less sophisticated peripheries. Most of Manhattan below Harlem is popularly seen as the modern gay "white" metropolis with Chelsea, the East Village, and more recently Hell's Kitchen as the prime gay neighborhoods. In contrast, the other boroughs are more often than not seen as peripheral, decrepit immigrant enclaves as well as premodern and anachronous queer sites. These two spaces are separated not only by bridges and tunnels but more importantly by racial, class, and ethnic cleavages. The "B and T" or "bridge and tunnel," which is a disparaging term used for the general population living outside Manhattan, is also deployed for queers of color from the "outer" boroughs who are seen to frequent the venues in and inhabit the spaces of the "out there."

To further illustrate the ways this imagined geography operates in daily life in the city consider this particular vignette. I was walking with my friend Ernesto down Christopher Street one cold winter day in 1995 when a gay white man coming out of a bar wobbled toward us. Visibly drunk, he accosted us with the question, "Are you two Orientals?"

We were too shocked to answer immediately. He proceeded to declare, "Well, I have never seen two Oriental homos before." My friend

Ernesto, who was in fact Chicano, had a sharp tongue. Facing the drunken man, he blurted, "Excuse me, but we prefer the word *ornamental*." Ernesto and I looked at each other and started laughing, and we left the man speechless.

This vignette and the "Out There" section demonstrate the fissures around race and other forms of differences that shape the contours of gay spaces in New York City. Both point to the kinds of "grids of difference" (Pratt 1998) that crisscross the urban terrain. To understand these grids, it is necessary to think of them not as serendipitous but rather as products of the structural processes of a global city. Saskia Sassen (1994, 2001) was among the first proponents of the global city as a "contested terrain" (1996: 151) and as a highly differentiated space. Mollenkopf and Castells (1991) suggested and critically analyzed a useful model of the global city as an uneven landscape on the one hand and a structured duality on the other. This structured duality is made up of a superstructure consisting of modern technological and financial industries that are buttressed by a service sector made up mostly of immigrants, people of color, and women. In other words, the gleaming modernity of New York City's financial, commercial, and cultural centers with highly educated, mostly white personnel is supported by a gendered, ethnicized, and racialized substratum. This model is useful in enabling us to understand the myth of a monolithic gay community but also to see the divergent racialized spaces as overlapping realities (Parker 1999: 54; Chauncey 1994: 2-4) that progress and/or intersect with each other. Therefore, despite its reputation as a gay mecca and the persistence of queer subcultures, new communities have formed in New York City that are only partially recognizable as gay (Parker 1999: 224).

This chapter takes a traditional component of ethnographic texts called "the setting" and recasts it into a shifting narrative of places, peoples, and events that implies not a static geographic area but one that is made and remade by specific kinds of observers and participants. In this case, I take myself and my informants as roving eyes and itinerant feet walking the gay city—somewhat like and unlike the figure of the *flâneur*. The French poet Charles Baudelaire (1964) first posited the figure of the *flâneur*, whose adventuresome character sets out to map the twists and turns of modern urban life. Walter Benjamin (1983) further elucidated the *flâneur* as one who, untrammelled by convention, casts a knowing eye and, unwittingly, a lustful heart to a

city waiting to be possessed by his omniscient knowledge. Critical studies of the *flâneur* have argued that the figure is a white upper-class heterosexual male who is able to gain access to and possess the various scenes and personages of the city. Accordingly, feminist and queer scholars have explored the possibilities of other marginal people walking the modern city and laying claim to its spaces. For example, cultural theorist Sally Munt (1995) offered a critical reflection on the lesbian "*flâneur*," or *flâneuse*, while the gay fiction writer Edmund White (2001) presented a more biographical rendition of the gay *flâneur* in his own traversing of Parisian gay spaces. This chapter goes beyond these formulations by attempting to answer how queers of color strive to map out the gay city as they stake out their own spaces. What follows is less of a systematic cartographic exercise and more of a series of loosely interconnected stories and events that produce a partial and highly specific topography. Therefore, the mapping of gay New York City is not only about the physical layout of the queer landscape but is also about hierarchical and uneven spatialized imaginings where particular queers are socially and symbolically located.

Gay New York: Beyond/In Black and White

For immigrants and other mobile people, the city represents the coming together of "worlds" and "nations" into one geographic area (Hannerz 1996). For many queers, urban space is the site for constituting selves and communities (Bech 1997; D'Emilio 1983).¹ Many people, my informants included, perceive these interlocking worlds of New York City as a unique milieu in which to create a gay sense of self.

Filipino gay men marveled at the infinite variety of activities, events, and places marked as gay or queer in the city. One informant said that this variety is emblematic of everything "American," in which everything is always seen as bigger, more plentiful, and wider ranging. Many of my informants described this variety in terms of products to be bought and consumed.² As one informant put it, "Gay life in New York was like a big vending machine." Indeed, by the late twentieth century, New York City gay life had mushroomed into a plethora of groups and events that catered to almost every possible political, cultural, economic, physical, and social need. The pages of gay travel and entertainment guides, directories, and other gay-oriented publications show how gay men in the city are able to join and access groups that

have a variety of agendas, including those that focus on the political (e.g., Gay Republicans), ethnicity (e.g., Irish Lesbian and Gay Association), religion (e.g., Dignity or "Gay Catholics"), occupations (e.g., Firefighters Lesbian and Gay of New York, Inc.), self-help (e.g., Gay Alcoholics Anonymous), support (e.g., Gay Circles), and law (e.g., Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund).

This enumeration of places, groups, and people is necessary to provide the backdrop for how Filipino gay men talk about gay life in the city to their friends back in the Philippines. At the same time, many of my informants would talk about race, as would most people in America, in terms of black and white. However, this bifurcation more often coincided with Filipino gay men's stereotypical views of race and of gay spaces. I would ask various informants to sketch verbally the locations of an array of gay venues in the city. Most of them would talk of places in terms of the racial composition of the bars and neighborhoods.

The mappings of racialized queer spaces come in many guises. Notable among these are two ethnographic studies that highlight the stark racial and cultural boundaries between black and white gay men in New York City. The ethnographies of two Manhattan-based groups of gay men by Martin Levine (1990, 1992, 1998) and William Hawkeswood (1996) represent critical forays into the divergent reactions to the emergence of a gay culture. These two geographically bounded groups are not only culturally distinct but are also racially differentiated. Therefore, to modify my earlier statements about Manhattan, this borough-island is not in itself a monolithic gay enclave. In fact, these studies show that people living in Harlem or upper Manhattan have created a gay niche that is quite different and separate from the world renowned gay neighborhoods located downtown.

Levine's (1990) ethnographic study of the gay macho "clone" examined a loose group of predominantly Caucasian men who dominated and set the tone for the post-Stonewall New York City gay scene in the 1970s and early 1980s. Levine studied the culture, social organization, and behavior of a cohort of men that was among the first to be affected by the AIDS pandemic; it was, in fact, the generation to be devastated and, in a way, decimated by the disease.

Gay clones rejected the effeminate stereotypes prevalent during the pre-Stonewall era and went to the opposite extreme. This generation of men presented a hypermasculine series of images in their manner of

dressing, in the sites where they gathered, and in the symbols they utilized. For example, the clone usually donned working-class outfits, particularly those worn by lumberjacks, construction workers, the military, and police. These outfits also provided other coded messages to other clones. The colors of handkerchiefs and their placement in either the left or the right back pocket sent a message about the wearer's favored sexual act and the position (top or bottom) that he assumed in that act. Other coded clothing styles included key chains, leather chokers, and ropes. Most men sported mustaches and had muscular, buffed bodies.

The organization of clone social life centered on the "clique" (Levine 1990: 80-90). The clique included men whose lives were dominated primarily by the fast life of parties, dances, drugs, and easy sex. These men participated in a routinized and ritualized series of events, parties, and other seasonal gatherings called the "circuit" (ibid.: 92). The circuit events were highlights in the gay clone's social calendar and were important cultural events.

Clones also maintained clear boundaries in their representation of family and other "straight" institutions. Most of these clones were from other states and had migrated to New York for economic as well as sexual opportunities. Levine noted that gay clones generally anticipated reproach and chastisement from heterosexual kin, friends, and colleagues and attempted to escape this by living in gay enclaves and substituting the clique for these other social relationships as their main social network (ibid.: 98). Levine suggested that the clone socially isolated himself and created a social world mostly populated by others like him (ibid.: 80). This was made possible because of the relative privilege enjoyed by these mostly Caucasian men and, more importantly, by a rhetoric of individualism that pervades mainstream gay identity politics, which I discussed in the previous chapter.

In contrast, Hawkeswood (1996) focused on a specific group of African American gay men who lived and socialized in Harlem, and preferred other African American men for sexual partners during the late 1980s. This group of men had little significant contact with the mainstream gay enclave in downtown Manhattan. Within this relatively self-contained group of gay men, cultural practices, codes, and folklore differed from most of what is largely considered to be the New York City gay lifestyle.

These men did not live separately from their non-gay African Amer-

ican neighbors. Rather, they participated fully in Harlem community life and were accepted as full members. Religion and family were important components of their lives unlike most of the men from the clone culture, which veered toward secular issues. Religion, particularly in largely black congregations and denominations, is an arena for gay socializing and the formation of what is called the "church girl" network (*ibid.*: 111).

While the gay clone projected the ultra-masculine look, Hawkeswood's informants continued to present themselves as ordinary men without special clothing styles in everyday life. Drag, however, was very popular as an annual drag ball was an important event in the social calendar for this group of men. In fact, voguing or house culture, a particular drag/cross-dressing cultural practice among African American and Latino gay men, is an integral part of many of these men's lives (*ibid.*: 85–87, 188–89). The voguing ball, which I describe in detail below, is not only a statement about a different engagement with images of gender, homosexuality, and gay identity, but is actually a performance of class and the racial components of the class hierarchy. In these balls, black and Latino men and women dress up as Wall Street executives and as gangsters, or banjee (street) men, as private school coeds and as runway models, as street prostitutes and welfare queens.

Caucasian gay clones have an ambivalent relationship with discourses on class. The fetishization of working-class clothes comes together with images of opulence. Mainstream gay events are almost always imbued with glamour and images of what is seen as upper-class taste (which may vary according to each person). Many of the gay men I have met from various ethnic and racial groups would admit that they have "good taste." Gay men, according to popular, stereotypical lore, are bearers of "good taste," but the specifics of what constitutes "good taste" and who are its arbiters vary widely despite its heavy class underpinnings. Good taste, therefore, despite its material manifestations from furniture and art to houses and clothes, is naturalized in many ways as an intrinsic part of being gay. I would suggest that class is always sublimated in most gay discourses and subsumed not only under the cloak of good taste but also under a rhetoric of same-sex desire and the image of the valorized (white) gym-buffed body. Moreover, as the discussion in chapter 4 will show, Filipino informants report that Americans in general seem to be totally ill at ease with the question of class.

Most importantly, the irony behind white gay clones' dis-ease with class is the fact that mainstream gay cultural events and lifestyles are suffused with class demarcations, which, in turn, hide racial boundaries. Consider the following entry from *Circuit Noize*, which was a bible/guide for gay men who wanted to become part of the circuit in the 1990s.

The circuit is a series of queer parties that are held around the world. A circuit party gives us the chance to escape the pressures of our day-to-day existence and to enter the altered world where man-to-man sex is not only accepted, but is celebrated. . . . From gay ski weekends to an escape to South Beach [Florida] in the middle of winter. From a party at the Olympic Stadium in Montreal to a spring celebration in the middle of the desert. (Circuit Boyz Productions 1996: 6)

Major American, Australian, and European cities become the venues for this series of parties. The circuit party, among other queer events, has caused the notion of homogenizing queer culture. But what is left unsaid is that many men are excluded from such events despite a desire to be part of the scene; many are unable to travel either because of money problems or lack of documents. The circuit, more than anything, showcases the tension of class and mainstream (white) gay identity. With class comes the concomitant racial question in the face of the economic and culturally marginalized positions of gay men of color. Who among gay men of color may be viable members of the circuit even if they were welcomed into it? Certainly not Hawkeswood's informants from Harlem nor many Filipino gay immigrants.

Most importantly, while gay clones largely decentered racial or ethnic identity in relation to gay identity, the African American men Hawkeswood studied were concerned about black identity and black expressive styles. These men's preference for residence and social life within a black environment "further serves to explain the perception they hold of themselves as being primarily black men" (124).

The tension between urban queer spaces and race is more vividly explored in sites where various racial and ethnic groups meet. A recent work on the racialized and sexualized spaces of Times Square by the celebrated gay writer Samuel Delaney (1999) examined a section of the city that is known as a racial and ethnic crossroad and goes beyond the racially circumscribed sexual spaces of the city. In *Times Square Red*,

Times Square Blue, Delaney described in both biographical and ethnographic terms the various sexual emporia, theaters, street corners, bars, and other places in the midtown Manhattan district where queer men met for sexual and social purposes. He chronicled the changes in which hustlers and clients of various racial, class, and ethnic backgrounds converged in the area while seeking sexual pleasures and entertainment. He lamented the intrusion of giant corporations and stores and the eventual "cleaning up" of the district under the auspices of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. While he unflinchingly exposed the gritty side of the pre-Giuliani years, including the harsh realities of queer public sex, he is equally unflinching with the horrors and violence of gentrification and normalization of Forty-second Street and its environs.

"Where's the Gay Bar?": Shifting Sites and Selves

Having mapped out the broader range of gay spaces in the city, I shift attention to what is considered to be the quintessential gay space — the gay bar. It is the most prominent space for socialization and, for many, authentic belonging to the community. Going clubbing or bar hopping is one of the typical preoccupations of many gay men. In fact, one way to differentiate oneself from the rest of the gay population is to declare that one is not into the bar scene. The New York City gay bar is epitomized in works of fiction, cinema, poetry, and other cultural forms. However, this section is an exploration of the more mercurial if not elusive aspects of queers of color spaces that defy the usual and popular renditions of the gay bar.

There are particular types of gay bars. According to my informants' informal taxonomy of gay bars, there is a diversity of bars that cater to particular sexual tastes and more often are demarcated by ethnicity and race. There are leather bars for people who like leather and slapping (*mahlig sa balat* at *sampal*). Then there are Western/cowboy bars, which focus on country music and cowboy attire. Then there are sports bars, which possess a more casual atmosphere with a lot of athletic decor and without a rigid dress code. This type of bar was described by one informant as "totally pa-min" [ultra-masculine or masculine appearing]. Then, there are piano bars, which many of my informants would describe as places where gay men can participate in sing-alongs. There are TV bars, which cater to cross-dressers, trans-

vestites, transsexuals, and other transgendered individuals and their admirers. Here, many of my cross-dressing informants found a veritable home especially since these are places where they can, as one informant quipped, "go all the way with *kabakalaan*" [being *bakla*]. Finally, there are the racially delineated bars, such as Latino or *cha-cha* bars, black or *dinge* or *madim* (dark) bars, and Asian or rice bars (which are discussed further below).

Gay bars are assumed to be unambiguous spaces in terms of marking its target clientele and sensibility. More specifically, New York City gay bars are seen to be stable sites in terms of maintaining the sensibility of a "gay space" at least over a particular period of time. Gay travel guides feature maps where gay bars are indicated as points within various grids. However, this kind of mapping is too simplistic and does not take into account the various ways in which public spaces, particularly those "out there" can be inflected by other identities. Two bars in the Queens immigrant neighborhoods of Woodside and Jackson Heights reveal the prevalence of ambiguity and malleability of queers of color spaces.

In one bar, located in the Latino neighborhood of Jackson Heights and a block away from the elevated tracks of the no. 7 train, the clientele, staff, and music are primarily straight until 7 P.M., after which everything changes; from the people drinking to the ones serving the drinks to the music being played, it becomes a gay bar. When I visited the place with two other Filipino gay men, I was skeptical about what I had been told about the bar. Before 7 P.M., the bar, which was a one-room affair, had fifteen clients. Several male and female couples sat around drinking to a tear-jerking ballad in Spanish. Sure enough, it was indeed like clockwork. The bartender started counting his money. The couples and other single people in the bar started putting on their coats. And at 7:01 P.M., the new bartender stepped in, placed a tape in the stereo system, and started playing a dance song by Madonna. Soon, several men arrived; some, at least to us three Filipino observers, seemed gay or as one of my companions said, "queeny."

Dodi, one of my companions, said that he had gone to several gay bars in the area, and he complained that he needed to have a visa in order to enjoy being in these places. He admitted that the people in the bars, including the bartender, were very friendly, but Dodi was frustrated at his lack of Spanish language skills. In fact, he said that being in these bars reminded him of his much dreaded Spanish classes when

he was in college in the Philippines. Dodi regretted not having been serious with his language studies. As he lamented, "Who knew that those irritating Spanish classes were going to be useful in my later life? At least, I can still remember basic things like 'Me llamo Dodi' and 'Voulez vous coucher avec moi.'" When I reminded him that his second phrase was in fact French, he exclaimed, "See, it is so hard to socialize in this neighborhood, especially if you are not Latino."

At the New Manila (a fictitious name), which was a Filipino restaurant in Woodside, there was a big Friday night event every week. Woodside is a large immigrant enclave with a significant number of Filipino residents and Filipino-owned business establishments. The pageant was organized by Miss Saudi, one of my informants who once worked in the Middle East. He said that Miss Java, one of my other informants and a famous figure among Filipino gay men, was judging the contest. I arrived at 7:30 P.M., and I was expecting to be confronted by a nightclub or pub-like atmosphere. Instead, I was surprised to see a family-style restaurant with big round tables and various families seated and eating Filipino food. Except for one or two Caucasians, most of the people in the place were Filipinos. In the middle of the din of people talking, eating, and walking around, I heard someone singing at one end of the stage. A middle-aged man was crooning quite convincingly to the karaoke machine's rendition of Frank Sinatra's ballad, "My Way." I thought I had come on the wrong night when Miss Saudi called my name. He rushed to me saying, "The pageant is a bit delayed. Tonight is karaoke night, also." I asked if the pageant would be held after the non-queer-looking clientele had left. He said that the pageant was part of the night's entertainment. "It is like the Philippines. Somebody lip-synching and then you have a drag beauty contest. Somewhat like the karnabal [carnival]." There's more on pageantry and Miss Saudi in chapter 5.

It is clear from both sites that queers of color spaces are no more essentially queer than any other space. These sites display and invoke intersections of temporalities and places. They are not intrinsically separate from their own mainstream immigrant communities, but are somewhat integrated into the geographic layout of diasporic life. Gay bars "out there" are no more gay bars in the stereotypical sense than they are places in which immigrants participate in claiming their own location in the city.

The Drama/Cultures of the Racialized Queer Body

An informant told me that to be gay in New York was to be confronted and in fact visually and "pleasurably assaulted" by images of the male body. One informant, after witnessing his first gay pride parade, said, "Ganito pala ang pagiging gay, parang karnabal, puro karne." [So this is what it means to be gay, like a carnival, full of meat.] Another informant quipped, "Karawan, karawan, at karawan pa rin . . . Hindi ka makascape sa drama ng karawan." [Bodies, bodies, and more bodies . . . you cannot escape the drama of the body.] Many informants shared this opinion. Indeed, one need only read any gay-oriented magazine or attend any gay function to know that being gay is to live what one informant termed the "drama of the body." This drama involves diverse cultural practices that construct the body according to various groups. For example, a group of gay men (mostly Caucasians) are called bears because they are mostly husky, hirsute, and bearded. However, despite this diversity, Filipino gay men acknowledge that the most valorized corporeal image among gays is almost always a young muscular Caucasian body.

In gay-oriented magazines, most of which are based in New York City (e.g., *Homo Xtra*, *Next*), the cover images are usually naked or half-naked white men. Advertisements directed to a gay audience include pictures of naked men. In fact, ads for services such as dermatology, podiatry, chiropractic medicine, and other auxiliary medical services primarily serving gay men often feature the image of the valorized somatic type.

Gay videos and magazines are a veritable smorgasbord of racialized bodies. While the buffed male body is still the central focus of most of these magazines, there have also been specialized magazines catering to people who desire other corporeal types. Still other magazines focus on different ethnic and racial types such as Latinos, Asians, and African Americans. However, most of these magazines and videos that depart from the norm of the gym-buffed white body are "ghettoized." The merchandise on magazine racks and in porn video shops is often organized according to a racial and corporeal typology. For example, in one Greenwich Village video porn shop located on the main gay thoroughfare, Christopher Street, the main shelves feature videos with a mostly Caucasian cast, while videos with an obviously Latino (e.g.,

Rican Meat, Latino Hunks), African American (e.g., *Black Stallion*), or Asian (e.g., *Oriental Boy*) cast are displayed and grouped separately. Another illustrative set of porn taxonomy included "Heterosexual," "Gay," "s&m," and "Oriental," which points to the combined racialization and sexualization of Asians (both male and female).

The gym, alongside the bars and discos, has become a quintessential gay space. There are several gyms, particularly in the Chelsea and Greenwich Village neighborhoods in Manhattan, that are overtly directed at gay male clients. A significant number of gay men that I have met often talk about the gym as an intrinsic part of their everyday routines. For many gay men, the gym is as important as three square meals a day. One Caucasian gay man told me, "There isn't enough time in the day to really squeeze in a good workout. It needs careful planning of your life and strict discipline." In addition to transforming bodies, the gym facilitates social contacts. "Oh yes, he goes to my gym," was a frequent statement made by gay men about others to assert some kind of mutual links. According to several informants, the gym parallels the church in mainstream society as a social institution for the creation of affinity and comradeship. As Exotica wisely put it, "Dito iba ang Iglesia ng mga bading—sunsamba sila sa katawan." [Here the gays have a different church—they worship the body.] This statement is less an informative one and more that of an outsider looking into a distant culture. While several of my informants do go to the gym, bodybuilding practices nevertheless provided another node of difference between themselves and the mainstream. This is not to say that Filipino gay men are hypocritical but that they have a vexed relationship to this and other mainstream institutions of gay sociality.

Apart from the gym, there are other social organizations and institutions that cater to the communal obsession with the body. If one were to peruse the monthly events calendar of the Lesbian and Gay Community Center, one could glean examples of such organizations as the New York Physique Team, Knights Wrestling Club, and other sports-oriented clubs. *Homo Xtra* and *Next*, two of the leading weekly guides to events in the New York City gay scene, include not only personal ads but also ads for groups that focus on tactile experiences (not limited to massage), meditation, and alternative health philosophies (e.g., Reiki).

The baths and sex clubs are important if not ubiquitous institutions in the mainstream gay community. The late 1990s have seen the re-

surge of these institutions after several years of dormancy owing to the AIDS epidemic. During the late 1980s concerns expressed by some AIDS activists and city health officials focused on how these institutions promote unsafe sex and the transmission of HIV. Other activists argue that these places celebrate gay liberation, particularly from the dominant codes of conduct. Despite these conflicts, these institutions and the "culture" of anonymous sexual encounters still persist. In all of these places, one pays an admission, or "cover charge." Most if not all are dimly lit, and encounters are conducted either in small cubicles/booths or in public "orgy" rooms. One informant said, "There is a proper way to behave in these places. One can touch, but not too aggressively. The slightest disinterest should make one aware and act accordingly." The blatant public display of bodies leads to anxiety for some of my informants. One of them said, "There [the baths and sex clubs] there is no way one can hide the fact that one has *bibit* [love handles]; the minimal lighting helps, pero [but] once the *pombre* [man] touches you—bingo—*luz valdez ka* [you lose!]"

Like the gay clones of the 1970s, the new clones of the 1990s—the Chelsea clones—believe that wearing proper attire is a good way of asserting one's identity. Clothes, for many gay men, are not meant to cover the body but to accentuate it or call attention to it. According to my informants, the ultra-masculine style favored by mainstream Caucasian gay men has specific sets of rules for presenting their dressed selves. Like the 1970s clone attire, there is an emphasis on working-class wardrobes of tight-fitting white (plain) T-shirts, work boots, and jeans for the new clone. Tattoos, earrings, and/or pierced nipples are additional accoutrements. However, most of my informants were wary of the uniforms and clothing styles of the clones. According to Rommel, clothing cannot totally remake the person, there is still a body—a racialized one that is "carrying the clothes." Exotica, one of my wise main informants, commented on one of the fashion trends of the early 1990s—the "grunge" style where the look was disheveled and unkempt. He said, "You know that is fine for the white folks, but if one of us [Filipinos] started wearing that style we would not look stylish—just dirty and poor!" Thus, to walk the streets of the city in these styles of the moment does not guarantee membership in the community; rather, as many of my informants confided, these styles of dressing actually heighten the differences between themselves and other gays.

The Tale of Two Parties

To exemplify further the different kinds of drama and cultures of the gay body and to propose starkly the divergent constructions of gay identity and culture, I juxtapose two events. One is an annual circuit dance that is a mainstream Caucasian production and the other is a sporadically scheduled affair that is attended mostly by Latinos and African Americans. The descriptions that follow, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, are based on my observations and on the experiences of Filipino gay men. My purpose in providing descriptions of these two cultural events is to locate gay Asians not in terms of an abstract gay community, but in terms of one that is fraught with racial and class cleavages.

THE BLACK PARTY

In the mainstream gay circuit there are annual events that are seen as cultural high points. Apart from the Gay Pride Parade, which usually takes place on the last Sunday in June to commemorate Stonewall, there are major parties that punctuate the year in the city's gay life. One of these is the Black Party. Despite the name, the party is not for African American gay men only. As a matter of fact, only a handful of African American men attend this event. The party's revelers are mostly gay white men who come not only from the New York City area but also from different parts of the country and the world, including Europe, Canada, and Australia. The party's name tackles the color black and its concomitant symbols as its theme. There are other counterparts such as the White, Red, and Black and Blue parties, which are sometimes held in other new gay meccas outside New York such as Atlanta, South Beach/Miami, and Philadelphia. The Black Party is one of the more expensive gay affairs with tickets running from forty dollars before the event to sixty dollars at the door. Posters advertising the event can be seen in many of the gay-oriented magazines, shops, restaurants, and bars in Manhattan.

The 1995 celebration was held at a cavernous ballroom in midtown Manhattan. I was told that the "right" time to get to the party was around 2 a.m. As my informant told me, "One cannot be caught dead standing there when the gates open. We don't want to appear too over-eager." The party continued nonstop until late the next evening.

The proper attire was black leather—leather biker jacket, chaps,

thongs, arm bands, wristbands, caps, and boots. An occasional black or white T-shirt and denim could be spotted, but the apparel de rigueur was either black leather or exposed flesh.

For the few Filipinos in attendance, the milieu suggested something forbidding and dangerous yet at the same time pleasurable and alluring. The black leather motif and the overall sinister masculine aura of the event lead one of the Filipino gay men in my group to exclaim gleefully, "O hindi va, parang nasa impiyerno tayo?" [Don't you think it is like being in hell?]

My informants and I arrived around 2:30 a.m. and went down to the coat-check booth. Many attendees were stripping out of their coats, jogging pants, and jackets to reveal bare chests, leather shorts, and other vestments that were totally unseasonable given the wintry weather outside. Some people changed while they were in line. Others went to the men's room to accomplish the task. On the main floor where the dancing took place, there was a huge throng of people gyrating to the music.

Informants who attended the event reported a very strong sexual tension in the whole place. Many participants would casually touch and/or fondle other people's bodies, even people they did not know. On the dance floor, several men sidled up to other men they did not know and gyrated to the music. Others removed articles of clothing while dancing. There were several instances when some people danced fully naked. An informant and I observed a group of people huddled around a couple of men, one of whom was whipping the other. My informant looked at me and said, "Kakaiba talaga ang mundong ito. Palaging nakalantad ang katawan at saka kung anung type mong gawin—anything goes!" [This world is really different. The body is always on display and whatever you want to do—anything goes.]

I left around 9:30 in the morning. The place was still packed and jumping. Another Filipino informant who was present said, "Kailangan talaga, ilantad mo ang katawan—para bang nilalako mo. Look ka na nang look at baka maka-buy kang bigla." [One really needs to display one's body—like you were selling it. You may look and look, and maybe you might buy.] The main purpose of the party was not to find a love mate, but rather to see and be seen. As one Caucasian gay man told me, "The Black Party is what most of gay entertainment is all about—flesh and voyeurism." The party, therefore, is really a public celebration of the gay body, a carnival devoted to corporeal images and pleasures.

THE VOGUEING BALL

Culture or voguing houses are groups consisting predominantly of Latino and African American gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. Most of these houses are named after famous fashion designers or cosmetic brands (e.g., Revlon, Fields, Miyake-Mugler). The organization of a house is patterned after the familial structure, with a mother, father, and children. These roles do not follow any generational or gender hierarchy. Therefore, one housemother may be male and the father female. The social life of the houses revolves around the preparation, management, and competition in balls. The balls are the central activity of houses and essentially are fashion runway competitions. Usually one house holds a ball and different houses from around the city as well as from other cities in the Northeast come to compete. They are usually held in big halls in different parts of Manhattan.

I attended four balls sponsored by different houses. My first experience with balls was in 1991. For my initial foray into this world, I went to a huge hall off Union Square at 6 P.M. I paid twenty dollars and was frisked for hidden weapons. According to the program, the competition was supposed to start at exactly 6 P.M. I waited for a while because the activities did not start until 8:30 P.M. I later found out that this was a usual occurrence. In most balls, regulars come in with food and drinks since most of the venues do not have any refreshments for sale. I was advised by regulars that another way to survive the ball's erratic schedule was to arrive at least two to three hours late.

The typical ball starts with the "grand march" where the members of the organizing house are presented. Each member walks down the runway to the cheers and chants of the crowd. Usually the nimble, spectacularly acrobatic, or physically beautiful are the ones given the most applause. Then the competition begins.

The competitions I attended were divided into two main categories, which were themselves sharply divided into two main parts, "femme queen" and "butch queen." Femme queens were those who presented a more feminine image while butch queens were those who presented a masculine image. However, these categories were frequently crossed and transgressed with butch queens coming out in female clothing. For example, in one particular ball I attended the specific categories under butch queen included BQ Body (muscular bodies), Burch Queen in Drag, and Burch Queen Transformation (where participants were re-

quired to model Wall Street executive clothes and then change or transform into the sexy secretary).

More than anything, while some of the categories focus on the body or the face ("Face" is an actual category where the winner is oftentimes subjected to a tactile screening by judges to test for skin roughness and beard growth), many of the categories are about the social aspirations of the mostly working or lower middle-class Latino and black participants. For example, in one ball program, the Femme Schoolgirl category is described in this way: "You just got kicked out of boarding school for lack of payments. Now what do you do in your school uniform to get back in?" Then there are categories such as Wall Street Executive and Socialite Queen. Labels, Labels, Labels subjects competitors to a close inspection by judges to see whether their clothes are authentic couture outfits.

The essence of the ball's symbolic structure is glamour as exemplified by high or couture fashion, the trappings of wealth, and media conceptions of beauty. The tension between the material realities of the participants and the excessive glamour and opulence of the categories and the whole ball itself creates an arena where a mostly gay-identified group of Latinos and blacks attempts to present their dreams and aspirations visually. Moreover, these balls are in fact encapsulations of the ironies and displacements these men and women (women and transsexuals also attend these balls) experience in the outside world and are often about race and class more than sexuality and gender.

Apart from the obvious difference in the racial makeup of "personnel" or performers in these two events, I believe these two events exemplify different twists and turns in the drama of the body. The Black Party and other mainstream events deflect class and race while the voguing ball celebrates it. The white buffed body clad in leather may in fact have some physical similarities with the Burch Queen Transformation competitor but this is also where the similarities end. The Burch Queen competitor may suddenly appear in an Armani suit to simulate a social type he may never become because of his racial and class background. While voguing balls do celebrate the body, I suggest that they are really less about a gay body than a Latino or black body in its various social transformations on stage. Many of my informants talked about the affinity they felt with voguing culture, particularly cross-dressing, but more important to them were the ways in

which Latino and African American queers' notions of transformation and gender performance resonated with their own cultural ideas. In chapter 5, I discuss this issue further in relation to public cross-dressing performances.

Desire in the Street, Danger under the Sheets

Walking the streets of New York City is an undertaking full of perils and possibilities. Many of my informants told me that cruising in the streets can be quite fascinating because one is never really sure of what will happen. The busy, noisy, and dirty streets of New York City are sources of nostalgic moments for some of my informants. One of them said that if one were to take out the people and the stores, the chaos of New York street life roughly approximates that of Manila's. While some other informants may disagree, this attitude uncovers the deep contradictory mix of anxiety and excitement regarding the possibilities of desire in public spaces.

Vaseline Alley is not a real alley. It is a regular street located a block away from Roosevelt Avenue in the Jackson Heights section of Queens. This is an immigrant neighborhood filled with Koreans, South Asians, and Latinos. The "alley" is actually a stretch of several blocks right around a string of gay bars on Roosevelt Avenue and is known to be a major area for queer cruising and public sex.

A couple of my informants admitted going to this area on a regular basis in the 1980s and early 1990s. One of them said, "Mahirap makipag-do ditro sa kalyeng 'to, hindi mo makabisa ang tao." [It is hard to have sex here in this street; you can never be sure about other people.] When queried further, he mentioned the fact that most of his encounters were with either Latino or South Asian men who mostly spoke little or no English. He later admitted that speaking while having public sex is not important, but he was nevertheless bothered by his inability to speak to his sex partners. At the same time, Filipino gay men who frequent this area have reported violent incidents involving bashings and robbery, but as many of them admitted, the danger comes with the allure.

With these violent incidents comes fear of the police. One of my informants was arrested once, and he spent two nights in jail. He said he was a victim of entrapment; the policeman who arrested him kept talking about the INS and deportation rather than jail. My informant

was terrified because he was here on a working visa and could easily be sent back to the Philippines.

Vaseline Alley, according to many of my informants, differs from the queer cruising places in Manhattan, such as the piers near Christopher Street. Most of these areas are located in gentrifying sections of the city and are now mostly inhabited by white yuppies. For many of them, Vaseline Alley, while not any safer, is in fact an area where they can blend in instead of standing out.

Many of my informants compared the public cruising areas in the city with what they knew in Manila. Rommel said that he used to frequent the area called "Chocolare Hills," which was a field near the old Congress building in Manila. He said, "When you look for sex in the dark, it does not matter where you are." Other informants disagreed with him. For many of them, the major difference was the variety of bodies available in New York and the fact that the public areas at least seemed somehow to be a democratic space. As one of them said, "Sa dilim, akala mo kahit ano puwede pero kapag diyutay good bye!" [In the dark, you might think that anything goes, but if you are not amply endowed — goodbye.] More often than not, the public cruising areas are met with some kind of hesitation; this was particularly true around the time the New York City police conducted a series of arrests in Vaseline Alley and the Manhattan piers. For many of my informants, being a person of color added to the danger of being arrested.

A queer of color cannot walk with impunity in any area of the city. Even in immigrant neighborhoods, the idea of public cruising as a democratic practice is unraveled in the face of racist sexual practices. In fact, the dangers for immigrant queers of color multiplied as intense policing of the areas occurred with great regularity in the 1990s. As much as the Stonewall slogan was in part about the claiming of public space, immigrant queers of color such as Filipino gay men view the streets with trepidation and anxiety.

Rice Bars and the Space of Gay Asian Americans

The two disparate parties discussed above are in fact illustrations of racialized and class-laden cultural expressions in New York City gay life. However, far from being a white-black issue, New York City gay life also includes practices, histories, and places for Latinos and Asians.

To delineate the spaces as well as the kind of visibility Asian gay men, specifically Filipinos, confront in New York City, I consider several texts and discourses as well as observations that provide both the background and elaboration of such spaces. In this consideration, we inevitably meet with racializing discourses of Orientalism. Orientalism, as I use the term in this book, extends both the theoretical and geographic context suggested by Said (1978) to the realm of American gay spaces. How are Asian gay men raced/racialized? How are Asian gay men classed??

Rice bars are among the most overtly Asian and Orientalized gay spaces in New York. In 1996, there were two located in the Upper East Side section of Manhattan. While Asian gay men frequent other bars, rice bars, as the derisive term suggests, are gay spaces where a sizable number or a clear majority of the patrons would likely be Asian. Rice bars, according to gay lore, were popularly or stereotypically seen to be unsophisticated institutions with outdated music that catered to a clientele made up of older homely (mostly white) men and naive immigrant Asian men. In the past, efforts have been made to transform these bars into iterations of the mainstream ones. In addition to providing new sleek interiors, these bars have also made efforts to change their image from an Asian/rice one to a more international and sophisticated reputation.

Exotica, my guide, brought me to my first rice bar in the mid-1980s. It was located on the Upper East Side. The decor was rather nondescript, but the music took me back in terms of time and space. The song "Rock the Boat" was playing and a few people were dancing on a small raised platform. Here was music that was at least a decade old and which for many of the Asian men in the bar brought to mind a time when they were still in their homelands. In addition to the dated music, most of the clientele did not mirror the younger crowd of men in the downtown bars. Exotica again explained, "Mahirap talaga dito sa rice bowl, hindi mo maininidhan, kakaba kasi Asiatka ang customer." [It is really hard here in the rice bowl (bar), you cannot really understand it. It is different because Asians are the customers.] Many Filipino gay men perceive the rice bar as intrinsically different and atypical because it is an Asian queer space. Despite the camaraderie, fun, and pleasure that can be found in these spaces, many informants also intimated to me that these same spaces were sites of alienation and exclusion.

Informants told me that in one of the two existing rice bars in the

1980s, one of the Caucasian owners would survey the crowd and would single out people—mostly Asians—who did not have a drink in hand and scold and shame them into buying one. Exotica told me that he and his friend would make a point of picking up some stray bottle to make it seem as though they were drinking something. As Tito, one of Exotica's friends, would say, "Too bad, they are trying to sell liquor to the Asiatkas (Asians) but they will not succeed." Believing in the stereotype that Asians do not drink, Tito was also trying to make a point that the rice bar did not seem to be a good and welcoming space for Asian gay men despite the fact that this was one place where they were in the majority.

Informants told me that until the early 1980s, the presence of other Asian men in most bars and at other gay activities was very rare. They further noted that interesting configurations form in bars that cater to predominantly Caucasian clientele. For example, in one trendy Greenwich Village gay bar in the 1980s, gay men of color occupied a section of the bar off to the right of the entrance, which many informants called the "Third World" section, while the white majority occupied all the different levels and sections.

Informants noted a shift in the visibility of Asian men from the 1970s to the 1980s. An informant said: "Noong mga 1970s at early 1980s, kung pupunta ka sa isang affair ng kababinghan noon, tiyak, ikaw lang ang natatanging Miss Asia. Wala kang kakumpetisyon. Ngayon, ang daming mga contenders." [During the 1970s and early 1980s if you went to any gay affair, you would be the only Miss Asia. You did not have any competition. Now there are so many contenders.]

Like other gay personal ads in other magazines, the ads in magazines oriented toward Asian gay males (e.g., *Passport* and *Oriental Gentleman*) and those written by or for Asian gay men in other kinds of magazines (*Village Voice* and *Homo Xtra*) illustrate a myriad of textual strategies. The ads can be grouped into two: Caucasians (there have been very few nonwhites who advertise) looking for Asians and Asians looking for Caucasians. Caucasians' ads often are in these forms: "Gay Oriental Male (GOM)/Gay Asian Male (GAM) wanted: slim, boyish, small, cute, young or younger-looking, and hairless." Asians, in contrast, usually construct their ads in this way: "Gay White Male (GWM) wanted: daddy, older, hairy, husky, hunk, muscular, and masculine." Most Caucasians looking for Asians are usually older, in their forties or fifties, while the Asians are considerably younger.

GAM [Gay Asian Male], 25, 5'8", slim and professional looking for GWM [Gay White Male], hairy, muscular a plus.

Gay Filipino 30s' combines Eastern mysticism with Western pragmatism looking for G W/H/A male, professional and into relationships.

Not just another Asian, I am muscular, hairy, and aggressive, looking for same or white/Hispanic hunk.

GWM looking for boyish, young Asian. Slim and not into bars.

At first glance, a majority of these texts shows how Orientalized images that tread the lines of masculine-feminine and dominant-submissive are overtly displayed. The overt physical and generational disparities exemplified in these texts are part of what is seen as the "rice queen" syndrome. In gay lexicon, rice queens are Caucasians who are older, usually economically well-off men who are attracted to Asians. Moreover, such attraction is popularly seen to come with racist and patronizing attitudes and beliefs on the part of the Caucasian, who projects Orientalized images to his object of desire. In fact, the common belief is that the rice queen preys on young Asian boys.

In a 1993 presentation to the Gay Asian Pacific Islander Men of New York (GAPIMNY), a gay Asian group in New York, Gene Chang, a student at Columbia University, transported the rice queen phenomenon into the realm of the psychopathological (Ogasawara 1993: 11). He suggested that the rice queen's desire for Asian (young and young-looking) men is really a mask for pedophilic tendencies. He supported his contention by graphing the "incompatibility of physical attributes" (height, age, penis size, and so on) between Asians and Caucasians in personal ads. Chang further explored the exploitative and "imperialist" possibilities of encounters between an older Caucasian and a young Asian by examining mainstream gay porn films. He contended that the Asian gay man is relegated to passive sexual (as inserted) and social roles (i.e., masseur, houseboy, and so on). What is interesting in this presentation is Chang's leap from his "findings" of corporeal asymmetry mapped out in personal ads to the contention of a rice queen's real pedophile identity. Using statistical techniques and graphs, Chang charted the differences between Caucasian and Asian gay men in personal ads in terms of average height (two inches), weight (thirty to forty pounds), and age (fifteen to twenty years). He directly equated

such difference with actual power inequality in gay Caucasian-Asian sexual politics.

Chang's views, though faulty, are the prevalent views among the growing number of politicized Asian gay men. Although I do not deny the existence of exploitative and racist interactions between gay Asian and Caucasian men, such prevalent views as those held by Chang adhere to the same dichotomous stereotypes on which Orientalist images are constituted. Furthermore, these same "radical" views construct the Asian gay man as devoid of agency.

The other texts I consider are gay travelogues and travel guides. These texts not only provide glimpses of people and places for touristic delectation, they also raise deep insights about the authors and the social milieu in which such genres are produced. In fact, the narrative I will closely examine is a gay travel guide to the Philippines. The narrative in question is *Philippine Diary: A Gay Guide to the Philippines* by Joseph Iriel. This is not so much an actual diary but a catalogue of cruising places and people for men who like Asian men as sex partners. For these kinds of men, Iriel offers connoisseur's tips in establishing, maintaining, and controlling encounters or relationships with Filipino gay men. He offers interesting insights about Filipino gay men based on his "relationships" with several of them, which he chronicles hazardingly in the book. Among such gems is his observation that Filipino gay men have unstable personalities. "Filipinos may be very patient," he writes, "but if they are pushed far enough, they snap completely and are capable of extreme violence" (1989: 15). His other observations about Filipino gay male traits include a childish fascination with telephones, an inability to manage sums of money, noisiness, a penchant for gossip, intellectual shallowness, and a disdain for any intellectual conversations. Among his other interesting assertions is the claim that behind smiling Filipino faces "lurks a deep melancholy, an unresolved sorrow that is almost always associated with their family relationships" (ibid.: 23).

Despite being a guide for rice queens going to the Philippines, Iriel extends his analysis to include Filipino gay men everywhere, including those in the United States. He maintains that there are particular immutable traits of Filipino gay men that do not change regardless of place of birth and socialization. The transplanted Filipino gay man in the United States displays the same child-like qualities he observed among his "companions" in the Philippines. Although Iriel says that

the Filipino gay male may actually change some of his habits, he will only do so for survival and individual gain.

Iriel emphasizes that a Filipino gay man's family and class background do not matter. He asserts that whether a Filipino gay man is from the slums of Manila or has been educated at Harvard, he possesses specific immutable characteristics. Despite the global mobility of Filipinos, Iriel incarcerates the Filipino gay male into an essentialized and exoticized island of cultural primitiveness and pre-adult developmental limbo. Iriel's narrative connects itself to the dominant Orientalized stereotypes by asserting that any Filipino belongs and is rooted to that locale of imagined exotic alterities—the Orient.

It would be too easy to provide an ad hominem diatribe against this text. However, such is not the intention here. I take this text as a springboard for Filipino gay men's narratives about race in the succeeding chapters. Iriel's text may be an overt form of the rice queen syndrome, but the images constructed in the texts are the same ones that confront Filipino gay men when they enter the shores of the American gay community.

Iriel's text reconstructs the Orientalized notions of the Filipino and Asian male body. These Orientalized notions dichotomize East and West in female and male terms. The Oriental body is always and already female or feminized. This construction is then extended to the passive and active axes in sexual terms before turning to Asian corporeal characteristics that involve feminized, androgynous, and pedophilic dimensions. For example, popular Orientalized signifiers include hairlessness, boyish/feminine qualities, slinness, and a gentle mien. It is this fixed and static notion of the body that will be disputed by the narratives of Filipino gay men in the succeeding chapters.

Class, however, is particularly problematic in the case of Asian gay men. However, it is not so much the kinds of attitudes that Asian gay men have about the class hierarchy (from field experiences, they are more conscious and reverential of class differences) but the imputation of erroneous class assignments to Asian Americans in general. As the so-called model minority group, Asians in the United States are seen as upwardly mobile and occupy a tier just below Caucasians in economic resources and mobility.

As a mostly immigrant group, Asians in New York City face particular challenges. While they are generally portrayed as economically prosperous, their immigrant status is often interpreted as lacking or as being

deficient in cultural capital such as fluency in English. Informants often told me that Asians are regularly perceived to be naive and innocent of the trappings of gay and Western attitudes and guile. These images tie into the kind of pseudo-pedophilic view of the Asian body as both feminine and childlike. In addition to being perceived as "fresh off the boat," Asians are also seen as imbued with a natural grace and exotic poise. This mix of contradictory yet connected images and discourses about class, body, and race are what Asian gay men in general and Filipino gay men in particular confront in their daily lives. In the next chapters, I will demonstrate how these spaces, ideas, and images are manipulated by these men to create new forms of belonging and selfhood.

Whose Community? Whose City?

When a senior scholar of queer studies read an earlier version of this chapter, he was so incensed at what he considered to be my voyeuristic tour of the gay (white) mainstream community that he accused me of writing like a *New York Times* journalist out to expose the evils of the community. He ended his tirade by comparing me to gay conservatives such as Michelangelo Signorile and Andrew Sullivan and with great flourish declared, "The white gay community is my community. I love this community."

While I would admit to the rather terse mode of some of the descriptions in the earlier version, I was surprised at the virulence of his accusations. Was I indeed the prototypical voyeur with an eye for grand exposés and scandal? Why couldn't a critical examination of the gay community be done without being accused of voyeurism or backwardness? More importantly, what was wrong with my kind of voyeurism? In other words, why could I not lay claim to this community through my own gaze and my informants' gazes?

Unlike Benjamin's flaneur—the paradigmatic figure of modernity who walks through all avenues and alleyways of the city with impunity—my gaze and physical presence as well as those of the informants in certain queer spaces were being questioned. The very idea of a critical eye being cast upon mainstream gay places and events was interpreted as being a malevolent if not an unsuitable preoccupation for a queer scholar. As someone who has been situated "out there," I began to realize that in many ways, the senior scholar saw me as an upstart and troublemaker who did not know his proper place.

In a city marked by overlapping and contradictory sites, New York City queers of color spaces are oftentimes circumscribed by larger forces such as federal, city, and state laws. During my fieldwork from the early to late 1990s, the New York City police were accused of harassment and cruelty against people of color. At the same time, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani promulgated a “quality of life” campaign that virtually wiped out public queer spaces in many areas of the city. What is particularly instructive is that people of color were more afraid of the risk of being arrested and/or harassed in various areas of the city. In addition, the ambivalent and mercurial quality of several queers of color spaces point to the abject and marginal status of these sites in relation to the mainstream gay topography.

For diasporic queers, spaces in the city intersect with other spaces from other times and places. In particular, Filipino gay men’s memories are enmeshed with their experiences of the various queer spaces, which in turn shape their experiences of new sites. As participants in and observers of the various sites and places in the city, Filipino gay men are keenly aware of their location and acknowledge both the opportunities in and barriers to staking a claim to any of these places. From cruising the streets to entering the portals of the gay bar to trying to access gay cultural events, Filipino gay men are witnesses to and participants in the ongoing drama of racialized corporeal politics and hierarchical social arrangements. These men continually struggle to navigate their way through the contradictory landscape of the gay global city of New York.

Physical distance between queer spaces in the city may be connected by bridges and tunnels of modern urban public transportation, but social distance marked by race and class, for example, are gulfs oftentimes left open. In a gay global city marked by the “here” and the “out there,” queers of color, such as Filipino gay men, find themselves continually negotiating their proper place and laying claims to spaces from which they are often excluded.

Four

**The Biyuti
and Drama of
Everyday
Life**

The everyday tells us a story of modernity in which major historical cataclysms are superseded by ordinary chores, the arts of working and making things. In a way, the everyday is anticatastrophic, an antidote to the historical narrative of death, disaster and apocalypse. The everyday does not seem to have a beginning or an end. In everyday life we do not write novels but notes or diary entries that are always frustratingly or euphorically anticlimactic. In diaries, the dramas of our lives never end—as in the innumerable TV soap operas in which one denouement only leads to another narrative possibility and puts off the ending. Or diaries are full of incidents and lack accidents; they have narrative potential and few completed stories. The everyday is a kind of labyrinth of common places without monsters, without a hero, and without an artist-maker trapped in his own creation. — SVETLANA BOYVA, *Common Places*

I was sitting in a cramped apartment in Queens, New York in the spring of 1992. I had been talking for more than an hour with Roberto,

one of my informants, when he suddenly blurted, "Look around you, this is not the glamorous life that people back in Manila think I have. They all believe I live in a brownstone or a spacious house on Fifth Avenue—like the ones in the movies and TV. They don't know the daily drama I have to go through here just to make it. Although, if you ask me whether I would exchange the struggle here with a cushy life back in the Philippines, I would say never darling, never!"

The complicated twists and turns of Roberto's declaration reveal a particular dimension of gay life that is often missed if not ignored in queer scholarship—the daily life struggles and experiences of queer immigrant men of color. I am interested in the ways the seemingly mundane activities in daily life construct a vital arena in which to investigate various under-explored issues, specifically the connections between everyday life, intimacy, and diasporic queer identity formation. While there has been an emerging body of scholarship in recent years around the travails and travels of gay identity and peoples within a globalizing world, most of these works have concentrated on social movements that provide panoramic snapshots of people and "communities" on the verge of parallel queer comradeship. While heavily influenced by the body of lesbian and gay community research, my work departs from it by centering on the seemingly private and banal aspects of queer people's lives.

Most ideas about queer community and identity formations are based on organized public enactments of gayness and lesbianness. In contrast, the focus on the everyday not only exposes the inadequacy of conventional narratives where self and community progressively unfold, it also points to the complexities of various intersections and borderlands of race, gender, class, and sexuality in diasporic and immigrant groups. The everyday also troubles if not resists the conventional time-space binary by expressing the ways in which memory is spatialized and space is entangled with intimate habits, routines, personal histories, and chronologies. Influenced by the works of the social theorist Michel de Certeau (1984) and the feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith (1987), I take the everyday as a crucial "problematic" and as a site of tactical maneuvers for creating selves and forging relationships for marginalized groups, particularly diasporic queers everywhere. In other words, the focus on the quotidian life unveils the veneer of the ordinary and the commonplace to lay bare the intricate and difficult hybrid negotiations and struggles between hegemonic social forces and voices from below.

This chapter grounds the cultural, political, and historical specificities of Filipino diasporic gay men's experiences within the uneven yet hegemonic power of global capitalist expansion. These men's experiences are anchored to the Philippines' long enduring political, cultural, historical, and economic connections to the United States, including being part of the intensification of the movement of labor and capital in the late twentieth century. Yet this contextual anchoring is a backdrop to the creative tensions between these men's individual predicaments and larger social forces.

Everyday life is a site for critically viewing and reading modernity (Boym 1994: 20). Unlike traditional historiography, which depends on grand narratives of "famous men" and great events, the narratives of everyday life reveal the rich intricacies of the commonplace and how these stories intersect or come up against modern institutions such as the nation-state. Everyday life intersects and engages with the intimate, the private, and the search for home in modern life. While these three sites are not necessarily equivalent to each other, I would argue that they meet at critical junctures, especially in the displaced lives of queer immigrants.

Intimacy, according to Lauren Berlant (1998: 287), is a crucial yet ambivalent practice in modern life because of its connections to domesticated and normative forms of relationships and spaces such as home, family, and privacy. If home, privacy, and domesticity are vexed locations for queer subjects, particularly those in the diaspora (Eng 1997; Gopinath 1998), then it follows that queers' struggles toward finding, building, remembering, and settling into a home, as well as the displacements brought about by migration, create a sphere that has been called diasporic intimacy (Gilroy 1993: 16). Diasporic intimacy constitutes those struggles that showcase the different ways in which the state, public life, and the world outside intrude upon and permeate those seemingly bounded, private, and domestic spaces of home and how diasporic subjects confront them. The process of creating diasporic intimacy can be achieved either through counterpublic cultural productions or through more mundane routes such as "the habitual estrangements of everyday life abroad" (Boym 1998: 501). Therefore, I would argue that everyday life then is the space for examining the creation and rearticulation of queer selves in the diaspora.

My analysis of the everyday is shaped by my understanding of *biyuti* and drama, two concepts I have described in previous chapters.

This chapter analyzes how these notions are deployed as filters in confronting and understanding everyday life situations and how they may illuminate the predicament of Filipino gay immigrant men as diasporic subjects. In this chapter, I explore seemingly commonplace, ordinary, or banal situations in order to examine the exigencies of identity articulation and formation among Filipino gay men, particularly in their negotiations between bakla and gay traditions. By examining space, class, family, religion, and other aspects of everyday living, I expose the usually hidden and highly nuanced processes of being, becoming, and belonging. In other words, I examine the quotidian dimensions of cultural citizenship. Identity articulation among Filipino gay men, as I will show in the sections on family, lovers, and friends, is based on idioms of complementarity and opposition. Sexual desire, gender markings, and racial difference become the crucibles through which relationships are forged and contrasted with each other.

This chapter may be faulted for being unruly, for having crisscrossing narratives that never seem to finish. I would argue that such unruliness stems in part from the rhythms of everyday life. As the quote from Svetlana Boym above suggests, linear narratives — particularly those that depend on a kind of teleological trajectory — crumble in the face of the kinds of improvisations (Bourdieu 1977) and tactics (de Certeau 1984) that constitute Filipino gay men's struggle for survival in America.

Everyday life has a semblance of being ordered into easy, predictable schedules and normative actions. Routines may in fact deceive the casual observer into thinking such experiences are easily, if not unproblematically, funneled into neatly recognizable shapes. While this chapter attempts to codify or reel in many of the themes and ideas of these narratives, the nature of the drama and *biyuti* of the everyday for Filipino gay men is a certain elusiveness that defies perfunctory categorizations. I argue that these narratives provide glimpses of how selves and identities are remade and recast in different situations. I critique the notion of the naturalized and monolithic construction of a gay lifestyle as discussed in chapter 3 by focusing on the intricacies and complexities of the daily struggle for survival of these men. I use the idioms of *drama* and *biyuti* as a valuable means by which to understand the Filipino gay men's shifting notions of self and identity in specific moments and, conversely, the relative experience of stability, essence, and placement.

This chapter begins with two pivotal narratives. The first is a story of an apartment and how physical space becomes an arena for the articulation of identities as well as the iconic tableau of the life experiences of a gay immigrant. The second story deals with the daily and weekly routines of one Filipino gay man. Here, routines are subjected to critical analysis to suggest how such seemingly ordered blocks of time and rigidly enforced activities are also instances of simultaneous contestation and capitulation within the frame of living in an urban cosmopolitan area such as New York. In both narratives, family ties, race, class, and religion erupt in mundane activities to saturate the words and actions of the Filipino gay men involved. These two narratives provide a kind of fulcrum for propelling or setting into motion other narratives that focus more closely on themes and issues that are otherwise only hinted at or suggested.

The Story of an Apartment: Space and the Commonplace

The first vignette is about Alden, a middle-aged Filipino gay man, and focuses on his apartment in Greenwich Village. Unlike most cinematic and televisual unreal renderings of the spacious and sophisticated "New York City apartment," Alden's small studio apartment is much more typical, with nothing really to distinguish it or mark it as different from other apartments of this type in the city. The living, sleeping, and eating/cooking quarters are situated within a space of twenty by thirty feet.

The furniture exudes a slightly worn quality that Alden acknowledged to be emblematic of a kind of bohemian lifestyle of the "old" Village that is slowly being eroded by the influx of straight white yuppies into the expensive condos and townhouses. Having lived in the same apartment since the early 1970s, Alden is one of the lucky few in the city to be in a rent-stabilized apartment, paying a mere four hundred dollars a month to live there.

This apartment, as Alden contends, is not just a place but is also a story — the story of his life in America. Alden came to America in 1971, and he first lived with a female cousin in New Jersey. His parents thought that it would be important to have somebody to look after him and serve as a surrogate parent. However, when he arrived at his cousin's house, the cousin declared that she was not about to be responsible for Alden. She admonished Alden to become more self-reliant because that was what was needed to be able to succeed in America. He was

expected to carry his own weight and pay part of the rent. Alden was dismayed at first but after a while he admitted that it was "a different drama" that he had to learn.

He moved out after six months and stayed with a couple of Filipino men whom he knew from the private school he attended in Manila. After a few petty quarrels about rent, Alden moved out. He found his current apartment after a few weeks of searching. For Alden, finding something on his own was a turning point. It marked a distancing from his way of life in the Philippines, where he had lived in a big house with his parents, grandparents, unmarried sibling, and several maids. He had shared a room with his brothers until he was seventeen. Getting his own room allowed him to create a world for himself. Remembering that moment, he looked around his present studio and said:

When I got my room [at seventeen], I did a full interior decoration. I went crazy and I really made it fabulous. She [Alden's mother] told me to throw out the loud curtains and throw pillows. She said it look like a [cheesy] dance hall. Here [in my Greenwich Village apartment] I can put in whatever I want. Look at that Herb Ritts poster [of a naked man]. I would not even think of putting that up back home; my mother would upbraid me.

He compared his life in the Village with his life in the Philippines in terms of the rooms or spaces he had lived in. Alden felt his individuality was nurtured in this Village apartment so unlike the room of his childhood. He was emphatic when he said that although his apartment may not look like his family's residence in Manila, it was nevertheless very pleasant. Despite the many rooms in the family residence, with equally as many maids to clean them, he almost always felt cramped there, even after he was given his own room. He felt he could not create a world of his own without the disruption of other family members.

Alden's apartment studio is a study in contrasts. Right across from the wall with the poster of a naked man is a corner he dubbed alternately as the "guilt corner" or his "Filipino corner." This corner is in fact a wall filled with photographs, mainly of family members in the Philippines. Occupying the central part of this wall, right next to the television set and VCR, is an altar. There Alden has placed several religious images and statues his mother made him bring to America, mostly antiques that were owned by his great-grandmother. The religious figures include a crucifix, the Virgin Mary, and the Infant Jesus

of Prague. When I asked him why he called this his "guilt corner," he said that sometimes life in America can get so frenetic and stressful that he forgets to call his family back home. After an extremely busy week at work, he would sit on his sofa and stare at the pictures and statues and suddenly feel guilty. Then he would make his weekly overseas call to the Philippines. The power of the corner would also befall him after a series of sexual encounters, when he suddenly felt the impulse to pray and try to become, as he said facetiously, "virtuous" again.

Alden's apartment consists of two parts or sides, the American side with the poster and sofa and the Filipino side with the altar and family pictures. He said that by crossing the room, he traverses two boundaries of his two selves: "Ang parte ng apartment na ito, ay parang Pilipinas. O sashay lang ako ng kaunti to the other side, balik ako sa Amerika. Kasi, ganyan ang feeling ko palaging pabalikbalik kahit hindi toroong nag-babalikbayan." [This part of the apartment is like the Philippines. So I only need to sashay to the other side, and I am back in America. That is how I feel, going back and forth even if I have not gone home (*balikbayan*).]

The ambivalence of "being home" and "at home" was emphasized when Alden spoke about visiting his family in the Philippines. The nostalgia and homesickness he felt from time to time was tempered by the realities of being with his family:

Actually, actually matagal na akong di nakakauwi. Mahirap at masarap ang bumisita sa atin. Pero naku ha, okey lang ang gasos pero pagkatapos ng mga beso-beso, eto na ang mga tanong. Kelan ka ba ikakasali? Bakit daw alone ang biyuti ko sa New York? Nakakalukring 'di va? Masarap kung may party at kasama mo ang family mo—lalo na kung Christmas—pero para akong sinasakal kapag pinakkialaman ako. Para akong bata. Hindi ko lang masabi sa kanila na umalis ako para makaalpas sa kaguluhan ng pamilya doon. Don't get me wrong ha . . . kung may problema dito pag minsan, hinahanap ko ang support ng family ko, pero most of the time, I am grateful na magisa ako dito. Mahirap nga pero mas mabuti na yon kesa hindi ka makagalaw. Gusto nila akong umuwi pero marami ka ngang space sa bahay mo sa Manila pero hindi mo naman magawa ang gusto mo, para que pa?

[Actually, actually, I haven't gone home for a long time. It is both painful and marvelous to go home for a visit. But please, the travel

costs are fine, but after the initial buss on the cheek, the questions come pouring in. When are you getting married? Why is your biyuti alone in New York? It is maddening. It's great to be at a Christmas party and to be with your family, but I feel like a child (there) when they get into my business. I can't tell them that I left to escape the chaos of family life there. Don't get me wrong, when there is a problem here (in America), sometimes I look for my family's support, but most of the time I am grateful to be alone. It is hard, but it is better this way than being unable to move. They want me to go back [to the Philippines]. But even if you have a lot of space back home, you can't do what you want to do. Why would I want to do that?]

Here, Alden echoed many of the Filipino men I interviewed. Despite the difficulties of immigrating to America or migrating to New York and the subsequent sense of displacement, many expressed a sense of relief and contentment with the distancing effects that their movement and travel have generated.

Alden still lives in his apartment. He does not plan to move out because of the rather prohibitive prices of new places. He is perhaps unique among other Filipinos in that he pays a very low price for an apartment in a premium, or choice, area, and has lived there for more than fifteen years. When I last visited him in December 1995, a full year after our interview, he had replaced the Herb Ritts poster of a naked man with French impressionist prints. He reasoned that he was getting old and Herb Ritts was after all quite passé. The altar was still there on the opposite wall. It still had the same arrangement of religious figures, except for a small bud vase with a yellow rose. Alden reminded me that his aunt was ailing back in the Philippines and he was praying for her.

Chores and Routines: The Rhythm of Difference in Daily Life

Let us move both literally and figuratively from this first vignette of Alden's apartment to another vignette, and another dimension of the everyday. Our move is from the meanings of mundane spaces to the meanings of banal activities—chores or routines. The second vignette is about the daily routines of Roldan, a forty-year-old informant, who arrived in the United States during the early 1980s. I followed Roldan's daily activities for two straight weeks and off and on for several

months. I kept a diary where I recorded his daily, weekly, and monthly activities. The following are highlights of the two-week detailed record I made of his daily life. I knew him for five years before I asked him to allow me a voyeuristic view of his activities. Roldan said that he considered me as a visitor for two long weeks.

Every week, Roldan got up early and spent most of his weekdays at work and his weekends doing chores around his apartment in Queens. After breakfast on the first Wednesday, he put on his office garb, looked in the mirror, and said, "Nobody would guess who is under this suit and tie. They might think I am a Wall Street executive or a successful career girl [he giggles]—oh, I really need more coffee—I must still be dreaming. People will take one look at me and say—I must still be fresh off the boat." He then sashayed and twirled around the mirror. "You know, people in the office treat me a little differently." When I asked him what he meant by a different treatment he said, "It is difficult to say.—You know my biyuti is Asian [Asiatkal], so you never really know whether they think right away that I am effeminate or if they think I am gay because I am a thin, frail looking Asian. Who knows?"

When I pressed further about this issue, he said, "When I used to go to bars in the Village or Chelsea, I felt left out—you know I don't look good in a tight T-shirt. But then, when another Filipino gay friend told me about these cross-dressing bars—all of a sudden I found a different world where these gorgeous white men found me attractive." Roldan then revealed how he started to go regularly to cross-dressing bars in Manhattan every weekend. He said, "Akala ko punnunta ako ng America para maging gay pero ngayon alam ko na nagpunta ako sa America para maging tunay na bakla." [I used to think that I came to America to be gay, but then I realized that I came to America to be a real bakla.] In this statement Roldan is referring to the fact that he always perceived gayness and gay culture as rooted both in the United States and ultra-masculine images and practices. He was reflecting on the fact that he has become more of the bakla than the gay man he thought he was going to be in America because of his weekend leisure activities.

At the same time he was talking about this, Roldan also talked about the dangers of being a cross-dresser in public. He was afraid of getting caught and thrown in jail. He was not worried about the embarrassment such a situation may potentially cause but about how such an incident might jeopardize his stay in America. I had known for

a long time that Roldan was an illegal immigrant. His words when he confessed to me about his status were, "You know my *biyuti* is TNT." TNT is an acronym used in Filipino queer language or swardspak and literally means "always in hiding."

He was proud of the fact that no one in the office knew about his immigration status. In fact, he once worked in a personnel department, and one of his duties was to check on the paperwork regarding job candidates' eligibility to work in the United States. Despite this irony, Roldan talked about the difficulty of being in such a legal limbo. He once considered a green card marriage but backed out. When I asked him why he backed out, he answered, "Do you think my *biyuti* can pass INS scrutiny. I don't think so sister [manash]! One look at me and they will say—oh a big fag, a big bakla!" I countered that maybe the authorities would just see him as another slim Asian man. He said, "Oh, there is too much risk to do that drama, too much . . . I am too afraid." Then he paused for a second and said, "Well, you may be right, I know through the *bakla* grapevine that there is this . . . [he mentions a famous female impersonator in the Philippines] who was in a green card marriage. Darling, he is now a U.S. citizen. Oh well, he is used to the stage—I am not . . . or maybe I am not always on stage." Then he laughs, this time a little sadly.

He mentioned that he really could not risk being caught in this situation. He had a family in the Philippines that was dependent on his monthly financial remittances. One weeknight, during the two-week period, Roldan received an urgent phone call from his mother. The phone call was unusual because they always talked during weekends. After talking to her for thirty minutes, Roldan hung up the phone with an irritated facial expression and breathed a long sigh. I asked him if anything was wrong. He said that his mother had just informed him that his youngest sister, whom he was sending to one of the most exclusive private schools in Manila, wanted to get married. She was seventeen years old. Roldan's mother wanted him to talk to the sister to convince her to continue her studies. Roldan was fuming mad, not only at his sister, but also at his mother, who expected him to play surrogate father via an overseas phone call. Besides, he said, his father was still alive, but because of Roldan's vital role as provider, he was by default given authority over specific family issues.

He made it clear to me that his family was not poor but rather "middle class." The money and goods he regularly sent back enabled

his family to be more comfortable economically, especially during the troubled times in the Philippines. He said that he was looking forward to the day when his responsibility would end. After saying this, he shook his head and admitted that his previous statement was in fact wishful thinking. Then in a voice of surrender he said, "Ganyan talaga ang drama." [That is how the drama goes.]

Positions and Everyday Life: Some Themes

The two previous narratives portray and betray recurring themes that seem to permeate the inchoateness of everyday life, albeit in different forms. Family, class, and religion intersect with sexual desire, social conflicts, and corporeality. More importantly, these themes are really sites of difference, or categories, that position Filipino gay men in everyday life. In other words, family, class, and other categories place these men within existing hierarchies and continuous and discontinuous practices. The following narratives and descriptions attempt to flesh out these themes by bringing in other informants' stories and field observations.

FAMILIES WE CHOOSE?

The family is always seen as a social unit that exerts an enormous amount of power over the lives of immigrants or non-white groups. Discourses that purport to explain cultural differences between so-called mainstream or white communities and cultural and racial others usually focus uncritically on "close family ties" as a defining characteristic or trait. More often than not, there is a bifurcation between the somber image of an isolated nuclear family in mainstream society and the rather vibrant tones of the extended family of the ethnic/racial other. These discourses elide the diverse shades, degrees of ambivalence, and the incongruous meanings that beset familial relationships, especially among immigrants of color.

When informants talked about the early part of their lives, memories of their families permeated their stories. The invisible chain linking the present to the past was very evident in my informants' narratives centered on the family. More often than not they painted a sympathetic picture of family life. For those who were born in the Philippines and whose family members were still mostly in the Philippines, family and geography were enmeshed. Therefore, for those who migrated to America, family was also something bounded or rooted to a place.

Rico perhaps said it best when he observed, "Dito puro trabaho [sa Amerikal] . . . walang kang pami-pamilya. Dito puro trabaho o kaya kalandian . . . mahirap isingit ang pamilya." [It is all work here (in America) . . . you don't have time for the family. Here it is either work or whoring around . . . it is hard to make time for the family.] When I asked Rico about his memories of growing up in the Philippines, he said that when he was growing up he always was concerned with family and that if he had not immigrated to the United States he would still be living with his family even though he was in his thirties. He said his family was a great influence in his life: "Kaya sigurong drama ko ngayon ay masaya at walang kiyeme." [Which is why my drama is happy and with no kiyeme.] To some extent Rico considered his family to be an ideal one in which to grow up. He argued that while his family life may seem too sheltered to many of his friends in America, it was this kind of atmosphere that allowed him to succeed and survive here. In other words, it gave him a firm foundation when he was growing up.

For many Filipino immigrants, leaving the Philippines means leaving family members behind. This experience provides the most fundamental influence on the way Filipino gay men analyze, create, and reflect on ties with their biological families. Moving far away from the family is not socially expected in the Philippines. Alden, who was from a prominent family in the southern part of the Philippines, said that his mother kept asking why he would want to leave if he could get a job with his father and not bother about housework, food, or rent. He told her wanted to make it on his own.

On the other side of the coin were Mel and many other informants whose families thought that going to the United States was the most logical thing to do. According to several of my informants, the Philippines did not offer any promising future for them. Like many other Filipinos who saw a bright future in living abroad, Mel and many others had their families' blessings and hopes for a successful future overseas. Rene is a good example of how those who were born and raised in the Philippines were socialized into thinking about immigration. "Everything in the Philippines was oriented toward America," he said. "In the 1960s when I went to elementary and high school in Manila there was the 'English Only' rule. We were fined for speaking Tagalog. In my family, my parents encouraged us to speak English. The only time I had to speak Tagalog at home was to the maids."

Moving away involves ambivalent feelings, including both the heartwarming and the equally (at least to some informants) "suffocating closeness" of the extended family. The distance between the immigrant and his family promotes particular engagements and claims that complicate narratives about family relationships. The freedom that comes with distance from the family affords some Filipino gay men a chance to try new experiences and remake themselves. Much like Alden's poster of a naked muscular man, many Filipino gay men are able to do things that they would never have done under the surveillance of family living nearby. Tony, or Tonette as he was sometimes called, noted that being far away from his family enabled him to experiment with roles and personas:

Noong nasa Manila ako, kunyari pa akong pa-min ang drama ko although alam ng lahat na bading talaga ang truth. Pag-step ng aking satin shoes dito sa New York, o biglang nagiba ang pagrar-ampa ko. May I try ko ang pagmu-nu and also nag-gym ako. Ang sabi ng ibang Pinay na bading na parang lukresiya ako. Bakit daw ako nagpapamuscles and then nagmumunjer ako. Alam mo, pag wala ka sa pakikialam ng pamilya at kaibigan mo sa Pilipinas, kahit ano puwede.

[When I was still in Manila, I was still putting on the macho drama although I know that all the badings knew the truth. When my satin shoes hit New York, I suddenly changed the way I walk the ramp (*rampa*). I tried going in drag and going to the gym. Many Filipinos told me that I was crazy. Why, they ask, was I growing muscles and going in drag? You know, when you live far away from your parents and friends in the Philippines, anything is possible.]

The meaning of the family in all of the narratives contains notions of continuity and persistence and at the same time the translation and transformation of relationships. For example, Alden's cousin, who insisted that familial ties needed to be rearticulated in consonance with "individualistic" America, induced Alden to reevaluate his notion of family albeit with some misgivings. While Alden recognized his cousin's wise words, he nevertheless maintained a pragmatic view that this kind of "every man to himself" attitude was true only in America and that it did not apply to his relationship to his family back home. In contrast, Roldan's distance and regulated phone contact with his fam-

ily enabled him to step back a bit and reflect on the difficult issues surrounding his "surrogate breadwinner" and "head of household" status.

In both Alden's and Roldan's cases, there is an explicit placement of the traditional idea of family to the Philippines not only because that was where most members of their immediate families were based. Rather, as other informants whose immediate family members lived in America would attest, the distancing allows these men to confront the demanding life in New York. In other words, except for crucial moments like phone calls or visits, Filipino gay men attempt to locate family life at a distance to enable them to engage in an individualistic way of life. Moreover, it is the rooting of the traditional meanings of family and the ambivalent feelings that accompany them that create the anxiety and pleasure of nostalgia for both Alden and Roldan. Indeed, the meanings of family are negotiated through various situations and moments. This is especially true for informants whose experiences include cross-dressing (see chapter 5) and AIDS (see chapter 6).

In the two previous narratives about Alden's apartment and Roldan's daily routines, familial ties sporadically interrupted or disrupted the blissful flow of daily life. In Alden's case, his family's influence was spatially and temporally situated when the power of the "Philippine corner" with its religious relics and family photos produced feelings of guilt after sexual encounters or pangs of homesickness during holidays. In Roldan's life, the phone calls and remittances of money and goods were his links to daily dilemmas with his family back home.

Many informants told me how such links as phone calls and remittances have become part of the routine. One informant said, "Every Saturday morning at 9 A.M., when the phone rings, I know it is my family in Manila calling." Still another informant talked about how he always had a balikbayan box that he slowly filled with canned goods, T-shirts, colognes, perfumes, and any special request from his family in the Philippines. He told me that shopping trips and the act of looking at shop windows usually yielded another item or two for the box, which he ships every other month.

For some informants, holidays are important occasions that require extensive efforts at sending gifts of money and consumer goods. Raffy, a forty-year-old man whose parents and six siblings still lived in the Philippines, noted that he still sends gifts for all occasions from Christmas to birthdays. Apart from the money he sent every month, Raffy

also sent canned corned beef, which his father loved, linens, candles, and other items that are too expensive to buy in Manila. When I asked him why he did this, at first he said that it was cheaper than going on an actual visit. After thinking about it more, Raffy said, "I know many of my American friends and especially my lover think I go overboard with my family, but they *are* my family. I think that sending packages is nothing compared to the fulfillment I get from being able to do so. My lover and I went to a Christmas Eve party two years ago. There were three other couples there, but somehow, after more than ten years here, I felt very lonely. I went home and called my parents. Burt, my lover, was very furious. He said I should cut the strings."

The strength of these ties or "strings" that bind Filipino gay men and their families are tested during times of crises such as financial, emotional, or physical misfortune. Many of my informants told me that they would first approach a family member for help during these situations. In chapter 6, I explore similar situations within the context of AIDS, illness, and death.

When I asked informants about approaching friends and lovers here in America, many of them said that even in the most intimate relationships, friends and lovers are still not as reliable as the family. Although several voiced the fact that their friends and boyfriends are important, it seemed to be the consensus that such ties are sometimes fleeting and weak. Arthur encapsulated this view when he said that it was really hard to run to friends for help in the United States.

While traditional social science literature on Filipino families stresses smooth and functional interpersonal relationships, the situation of Filipino gay immigrants reveals the formation of a multidimensional picture. For example, Roldan's breadwinner role created a kind of ambivalence. There were times when he bemoaned the fact that his family was overly dependent on him and other times when he suspected with feelings of guilt that he was only as good as his next remittance. For that matter, the all too familiar queries about being unmarried were glossed over by many informants as being an integral part of the usual family reunions during visits back to the Philippines. Indeed, family conflicts were almost always smoothed over in the life narratives. Conflicts were one of the more sensitive issues that were narrated to me after informants became very comfortable with the interview and lost their defensiveness. For example, Eric, who had been living away from his family for more than ten years, clearly har-

bored some ambivalent feelings when he confided that his family was beset with problems and drama that were more akin to soap operas. He said that one might think that "*Eight Is Enough* ang biyuti namin pero *Galang ng Palad* talaga ang drama" [as if *Eight Is Enough* (American family comedy show in the 1970s and 1980s) is our biyuti but *The Wheel of Fate* (a Tagalog soap opera) is really our drama].¹

Despite the conflicts and ambivalence informants may have had about their families, most of them viewed familial ties as enduring and persisting through the many changes that they as individuals undergo. Roldan said it best when he noted that, despite the distance and the effort to put family obligations behind, one could never escape them. While Roldan and many other informants recognize that "becoming American" and belonging in American society are popularly conceived in terms of autonomy, most Filipino gay men assert the abiding and constant image of the biological family as a source of support and identity on the one hand, and ambivalence and anxiety on the other.²

While many informants talked about the durability of the family, a significant number also emphasized the integral role of friends and lovers. Friendships, particularly those forged since childhood, were cherished and deeply regarded. Several immigrant informants talked about the network of Filipino friends they utilized when they first arrived in America. Rico told a typical story of his bakla friend, Vanessa.

Nang dumating ako dito sa States, wa ako family. So nagstay ako sa isang kaibingang kong bading si Vanessa. Si Vanessa ay friend ko noon pang malalandi kaming coeds sa (). Ay naku, marami na kaming pinagdaanan ni Vanessa. Siya ang nagturo sa akin tungkol sa pagmumugjer. Noong wala pa akong trabaho, pinahiram niya ako ng pera at ilimbot ako kung saan-saan. Tatanga-tanga pa naman ako noon. Siya ang nagturo sa akin tungkol sa mga pasikutsikur dito. Kung wala si Vanessa, siguro noong pa ako sumuko at unuwi sa atin.

[When I arrived in the states, I did not have family here. I stayed with my bading friend, Vanessa. Vanessa has been my friend since we were still whorish coeds in (a private Catholic college for boys in Manila). Oh dear, Vanessa and I have been through a lot of things. He taught me how to cross-dress. When I did not have a job, he lent me money and he took me around everywhere. I used to be so naive.

He taught me about the intricacies of life here. Had Vanessa not been here, I would have surrendered long ago and gone back home.]

Friends are the repositories of secrets that many informants will not tell their families. Romy, for example, said that only his closest friends knew a lot of his never-to-be-revealed secrets, such as the time when he was mugged. These secrets, he maintained, would never reach the ears of his mother. He said, "I only told my two good friends Edna and Biboy. These guys [one of them is a woman] have been the reason why I am still sane. You see, if I told my mother about that mugging, she would literally drag me back home—she is super-*nerbyosa* [nervous]."

Friends are differentiated from lovers or boyfriend(s) (*siyota*) and spouses (*asawa* or *jowa*) as people with whom one is emotionally but not physically or sexually intimate. Sexual intimacy is so taboo between friends that the tone of the discourse around such an occurrence borders on the catastrophic and abominable. Mel exemplified this view when he exclaimed, "Ano? Makikitag-seks ako sa aking mga amiga? Naku, baka magkabuhol-buhol ang aking mga tirintas at matabunan kami ng aming mga belo. Please lang, baka biglang lumindol at magunaw ang mundo." [What? I will have sex with my (gay) friends (in the feminine form)? Oh my, our braids might get entangled and we might be smothered by our veils. Oh please, an earthquake may occur and the world might end.]

Friends, in this instance, are gendered. Informants' gay friends, especially other Filipino friends, are feminized and therefore are not part of the pool of potential sexual partners. This is often seen by immigrant informants as an extension of the practice in the Philippines where other Filipino bakla friends are not only feminized but are seen as kin. Informants also reported the continuing use of kinship terms such as *tita* (auntie), *atche* or *ate* (older sister) for this group of friends. This practice creates a kind of incest taboo that can be articulated in different ways. For example, at the mere suggestion of having a couple of his close Filipino gay friends as his lovers, Oscar exclaimed, "Ano ako kanibal? Kakain ako ng aking ka-dugo?" [What am I, a cannibal? I will eat those of the same blood?] Another informant articulated this taboo in yet another fashion when he responded, "Ay naku, lesbyanahan! Magkakaapaan kaming magkakaafatid! Que horror!" [Oh my, lesbianism! We co-siblings will grope each other! Horrors!]

In these situations, many Filipino gay men acknowledge the diff-

culty of having what the mainstream gay community members call “fuck buddies,” or casual/occasional sexual partners who may also be friends. One Filipino informant talked about his confusion with this category, or practice, in terms of eating food that did not go together. He said, “Ano ba yang fuck buddy na yan — para kang kumakain ng karne at leche flan.” [What is this fuck buddy business — it is like eating meat with sweet custard.]³

Friends are also the source of intrigue (*intriga*) and gossip (*tsismis*). Some informants actually pointed to other Filipino gay men as being more apt to be gossip and bitchy. This perception more often than not extended to the general Filipino immigrant community where, according to informants, jealousy, bickering, and gossip prevail. However, this perception is intensified in relation to other Filipino gay men. Such perception is usually couched in terms of a competition. Lex echoed this idea when he said, “Ayaw kong makipagchicanan sa mga Pilipino, lalo na mga bakla. Que bakla, que direso, maraming intriga. Pagtitsimisnan ka o kung hindi naman e inggitan naman.” [I don’t want to socialize with other Filipinos, especially other bakla. Whether bakla or straight, there are too many intrigues. They will gossip about you or else they will be envious of you.] In the same vein, Bert, another informant said,

Mahirap makipagbarkada sa mga bading. Ang drama talaga ‘y siraan. Kaya ako, puro mga puti ang mga friends ko. Hindi ako nakiki-join sa kanila. Mahirap na. Baka masangkot ka pa sa iskan-dalo. Alin? Maglakad ka diy-an at if I know, ginagradan ka ng mga bading, parang beauty contest. Mamatahin ang suot mo, ang kilos, o pagjologles.

[It is difficult to be friends with badings. Their drama is really about dissing. That is why all of my friends are white. I don’t consort with them (Filipinos). It’s difficult, you might get involved in a scandal. What? You walk around and usually these bading(s) will judge you as if you are in a beauty contest. They will look down on your outfit, your manners, or your English-speaking ability.]

When I was interviewing Edsel, he mentioned that he got into an *intrigahan* (conflict) with his former *barkada* (peer group) of Filipino gay men. His story was as follows:

Noon, about a year ago, may mga kaibigan ako sa Jersey City. Magkakasama ang tatlo sa amin — magroommate, tapos yung dalawa,

kapitbahay. Marami kaming pinagdaanan. Pero unti-unting dumat-ing yong mga ingitan at awayan. Minsan tungkol sa renta. Minsan tungkol sa lalaki. Aba, yong si Fidel nagalit doon kay Berta e sinumbong kay Tita Imee. Si Berta e you know, TNR. Nagalit si Fidel dahil inaakit daw ni Berta ang kanyang jowa. Say naman ni Berta, sa biyuti daw niya hindi na niya kailangang magakit at ang jowa ni Fidel ang nagmamakaawa. To top it all, si Berta, nagmalaki at biglang siney niya kay Mama Fidela na nainggit lang siya at pati yong napulot niya sa tabi-tabi e nabibighani sa biyuti niya. Ay naku marami pang sinabi si Berta so gumanti ang Mama. So where is Miss Berta now? Napa go-home bigla ang biyuti niya.

[Then, about a year ago, I had these (four) friends in Jersey City. The three of us lived together as roommates, and the other two were our neighbors. We underwent many travails. But slowly, jealousy and quarrels erupted. Sometimes it was about the rent. Sometimes it was about men. Then Fidel got angry with Berta and he (Fidel) snitched to Tita Aimee (Immigration and Naturalization Service). You know, Berta was TNR (undocumented). Fidel was angry because Berta was supposedly stealing his boyfriend. Berta countered that with his biyuti he did not need to attract (other people’s boyfriends) and that Fidel’s boyfriend was the one begging (for his affections). To top it all, Berta was being arrogant and he told Mama Fidela that he (Fidel) was just jealous and that his boyfriend, whom he just picked up on some sidewalk, was enraptured by his (Berta’s) biyuti. Well, Bert said a lot of things and Mama exacted his revenge. So where is Miss Berta now? His biyuti has been sent home (to the Philippines).]

The social institution of the *barkada*, or peer group, is decidedly inflected by class. Most informants would refer to this group often in terms of people who were former schoolmates. Having hailed from the same province or speaking the same language or dialect is another marker of group cohesiveness. However, despite all these connections, there were several reports like that of Edsel’s above that point to the instability of such groups’ cohesiveness. The *barkada*, according to many informants, may be a source of support but can also be the source of conflict.

Despite all of these rather convoluted webs of intrigue several informants mentioned the importance of having Filipino gay friends. Danny said, “Filipino badings know you better. I think there are some jokes

that do not translate as well." He further said that these kinds of jokes were not as dry as American jokes. Furthermore, they were more physical and were based on the ironic juxtapositions of Tagalog and English words and situations.

The ultimate praise friends would have for each other is to consider them as kin. "Parang kapatid" [like a sibling] was often the phrase used to describe the closeness of the friendship. It is in these junctures in informants' narratives where friends acquired the kind of durability and persistence of familial influence. However, most informants agreed that despite these situations where friends play important roles in their lives, friends are, in the final analysis, not "real" family members.

While friends occupy a desexualized space for Filipino gay men, lovers and boyfriends are the exact opposite. Lovers are highly sexualized but only in the eyes of people who would recognize the sexual component in these relationships, such as other gay men. Most families who are tolerant about their gay family members usually cast the boyfriends as best friends. In most cases, lovers are seen by the families of Filipino gay men as surrogate caretakers or nurturers. However, in contrast to family and friends, lovers are seen as unstable and less permanent than friends and family. As one informant said, "With family, you always know where and who you are, but with lovers, magkawrinkle ka lang—leave ang biyuti niya" [you get wrinkles and his biyuti (the lover) leaves].

The possibility of acquiring a partner, or a jowa, away from the prying eyes of the family is one of the impetuses for moving away. Many of these men would not have thought of living and consorting with another man if they were still back in the Philippines. For most immigrant informants, moving in and sharing a household with somebody who is both a sexual partner as well as a source of emotional and sometimes financial support is one of the biggest changes in their sexual and social lives. These kinds of relationships were, according to informants, not widely practiced in the Philippines. Additionally, acquiring a lover is seen to be one way to assuage the fear of being alone in America.

Weston (1991), in her landmark study on gay/lesbian families, remarked on the inadequacy of the "looking glass" argument, or the stereotypical view that lesbians and gays are looking for mirror images or virtual likenesses of themselves. She further argued that this view fails to address the complexity in the dynamics of attraction and rela-

tionship building and maintenance among lesbians and gays. Nowhere is this truer than with my informants. Of the fifty men who participated in life-narrative interviews, twenty-eight reported having lovers. Of these men, two had Latino lovers, two had African American lovers, one had a Japanese American lover, and two had Filipino lovers, while the rest, a clear majority, reported having Caucasian lovers. Interracial gay relationships, which are the norm among my informants, provide clues to the dynamics between race and sexuality (discussed further in this chapter's subsection on Orientalism) but more importantly, shed light on the complex processes that occur in these relationships.

Such interracial relationships are seen as the logical extension of being in America and being away from the Philippines. An informant, Art, told me, "Bakit ka pa maglolonganisa at tapa, e dito frankfurter at filet mignon ang makukuha mo. Kailangan mo naman tikman ang kakatiba 'di ya?" [Why would you have *longanisa* (native sausage) and *tapa* (cured beef) when you can have frankfurter and filet mignon here?] Sex taboos are couched in food terms and at the same time are inflected by race.

The racial constitution of the "lover" or "boyfriend" is especially pronounced in terms of their desirability. Several informants informed that they would never even think of having a particular group of men as sexual partners or lovers because of their race. Most of the time, this group was that of African Americans. Racialized and racist assumptions prevailed. One informant told me how his Filipino gay friend, who was fond of "coal," or *uling* (African Americans), was robbed and nearly stabbed by one of his African American lovers. A few informants also mentioned how, even if they did find an African American man attractive, they might attract the scorn or cruel jokes of other Filipinos if they were with this putative partner. Arthur aptly reported, "Believe me, dear, hindi ka i-ismolin ng mga Pinoy kung puti ang daladala mo, pero once mag-display ka ng jowing na juram, ay for sure—pagtsitsimisan ka ng mga bading. Para bang, hanggang itim ka lang." [Believe me, dear, you won't be looked down upon by other Filipinos if you have a white man in tow, but once you display a black boyfriend, for sure the other badings will gossip about you. It's like you are only good for black men.]

Arthur points to a hierarchy of racialized desire among Filipinos with Caucasians as the most valued. In the past few years, there has been a heightened consciousness concerning this hierarchy. Many Fil-

ipino gay men have forged relationships with other racial and ethnic groups. In fact, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, many informants observed that Asian gay men's organizations were implicitly encouraging members to go into relationships with other Asians and Pacific Islanders, sometimes to the point of being perceived as "anti-white."

Mario, one of two informants who had another Filipino as a lover, said that he was lucky that he came to America with his iowa, Raymond. He said he was able to escape a lot of the pitfalls of gay life in America, including going to the bars and picking up men, which, in a way, prevented him from getting AIDS. When I asked him whether he and Raymond were in a monogamous relationship, he just smiled and said, "Well, we are pretty much faithful, but once in a blue moon, *kalangang mo namang tumikim ng ibang putaha*" [you need to taste other entrees]. One reason why he believed his relationship to be valuable was that he had escaped a lot of the heartaches that seemed to plague many of the interracial gay relationships that he knew about. For example, he said that he and his lover did not have cultural barriers, particularly around communication. He noted that there were problems in other relationships where a Filipino was not fluent in colloquial English or the partner did not understand the Filipino's unspoken messages. Then he observed some kind of inequality between Filipinos and their mostly white partners. He said that usually the white partner was more well off and more masculine. Here Mario was alluding to the popular belief that in such white-Filipino gay relationships, the white man, or *afam*, dominated the Filipino gay man in daily affairs.

I discuss the dynamics of such relationships in a later subsection in this chapter. Mario's statement is only partially true. For many Filipinos whose white lovers were more economically well off, this was seen as a major reversal to the situation in the Philippines where the bakla is seen to provide some kind of incentive (usually monetary) for the allegedly straight partner to stay with him. Consider Eric's exuberant observation when he proclaimed, "O, 'di va yan ang biyuti ng Amerika, ang bakla ang lilingawan ng mga men. Instead of na ang lalaki ang inalagaan gaya sa atin, usually, ang vading ang imaalagaan, ay talagang type ko ang mga kadamahan dito." [That's the biyuti of America. The bakla is courted by men. Instead of the man being paid like back home (in the Philippines), it is usually the bakla or bading. I

really love the drama here.] Here, Eric's words reveal one of the major reversals in the roles Filipino gay men play in the everyday drama of socializing with other men. The first point in Eric's statement is the process of gendering in the relationship. He echoes the bakla as a pseudo-female who is courted by men. Following popular discourses in the Philippines, the bakla is feminized. However, unlike these discourses, the bakla is the one pursued and desired. Most of the Filipinos in these interracial relationships reported that they perceived the mostly white men to be more masculine than they were. Whether this translated into actual domination or oppression, as many popular rhetorics in the gay community portray it, is discussed below.

Eric's statements may also help illuminate how a number of Filipino gay men who cross-dress have actually encountered and engaged with the reality of "sex work." Having sex for money is something that many of my informants reported to be an established practice in the drag-queen world. Oftentimes, many first encountered it as a pleasant surprise. One of my informants who was part of this world of Filipino gay men warned me that if any of my informants who went in drag and frequented particular bars ever told me they had never been paid or been offered money, they were in fact lying.

However, most of my informants in interracial relationships were neither involved in sex work nor cross-dressing. One such person in this kind of a relationship was Rommel, whose white lover was not only twenty years older than he was but was also a successful lawyer while Rommel worked several part-time jobs. Rommel's lover paid for most of their daily expenses. Rommel was very proud of this relationship and called it his "trust fund."

Okay, I admit that ako ang dinadatangan. Granted that is true, okay, pero navavaldade nang husto ang biyuti ko. Hindi ako nagbubuy, ako ang binibigyan. Saan ka makakakita nang ganyan sa Pilipinas — ang bakla ang nasa pedestal. Pero, hindi naman call boy ang biyuti ko — ako — call boy — ay please! Para sa akin, kasama na yan sa pagmamahal. Si Tony, ang lover ko, nagbabayad nga siya ng kung ano-ano, pero kasama naman yan sa pagmamahalan — 'di va? Ako, I take care of his needs. Ako ang nag-gogrocery at nagluluto. Kung sana, pera lang ang habol ko sa kaniya. 'Day, ang bait na guwapo pa at napakadako! O sey ng iba bakit daw ako parang girl sa relasyon na ito. O ano ngayon, pwede na rin akong girl [laughter].

[Okay, I admit that I get money (out of this relationship). Granted that this is true, okay, but my biyuti is validated. I am not the one buying, I am the one being given money. Where can you find something like this in the Philippines, where the bakla is placed on a pedestal? But my biyuti is not a call boy. Me—a call boy? Oh, please! Tony, my lover, pays for everything, but it (the money) is part of loving, isn't it? I am not in this relationship for the money, darling. He (Tony) is so kind and well hung! Other people say that I am the "girl" in this relationship (laughter), so what! I could be a girl (laughter).]

Here, Rommel makes a point about money as the nexus in what he considers love. He said that while he comes from a relatively well-off family and had a good education in the Philippines, he is still struggling to make it here in America. Tony, his partner, is helping him.

On the other side of the coin, there were a couple of Filipinos who told me that they paid for sex and that they financially supported their white boyfriends. Ronnie, who frequented a well-known hustler bar in Manhattan's East Side, said that there was an allure to having sex with men who ordinarily will not have sex with other men except in such situations. Ronnie said the financial component added to the men's machismo. When I interviewed him, Ronnie was living with a man named Kenny, an Irish American construction worker who was unemployed at that time. Ronnie admitted that while Kenny might have some sexual flings on the side, he knew that these were with women. When I asked him whether he knew that other people would take him for a fool, he replied that he had accepted the possibility that the relationship was not going to be forever and that his lover would leave him. When I asked him whether he thought he was still following the same kind of drama of the Filipino bakla in the Philippines, he reasoned:

Wala naman talagang masama diyen sa bayaran. Kung type mo ang biyuti ng kasama mo at hindi ka naman ganoon ka ganda, well mag-dating ka na. Ang advantage dito e in control ka. Alin, yan sinasabi nila true love, pinagdanan ko na. Ang gabaldeng luha na linabas ko dahil sa mga true love na yan, walang katumbas sa pera. At saka, teka, kung wala kang dating di magtiis ka. Mas madaling malungkot ka na nag-iisa kesa sa para kang Perla Bautista na nag-hinagpis sa asawa mo. Hindi na oy. [There is nothing wrong with

payng (somebody). If you like the biyuti of your partner and you are not that pretty, then you should pay. The advantage here is that you are in control. What's with that "true love" thing that people talk about? I am over that! There is no comparison between the buckets of tears I have shed for these "true loves" with the money I pay. And by the way, if you don't have the money, tough luck. It is easier to be lonely being alone than being like Perla Bautista (Filipino film actress known for melodramatic tearjerkers) languishing because of your husband. No thanks.]

Both Rommel and Ronnie talked about the ambivalence of love and money in their relationships. While it may be easy to construct a simple equation between money and control, and between race and dominance, things are not that simple. The arrangements both men had created for themselves were fraught with the complexities of feelings and actual behavior as well as the articulation of a particular kind of idiom of *pag-alaga* or nurturance. This idiom, which I observed among Filipino gays/bakla in the Philippines, extends the material power of money into the realm of love and nurturance, of pleasure and control.

The economic inequality between Filipino gay men and their mostly white lovers is superseded by the seeming awkwardness of the American discourse on class. This issue is further explained in the next section. This inequality is explained and euphemized by several Filipino informants in several ways. First, the financial situation can be explained away by the notion of *pag-alaga*. Celso, who worked as a \$30,000 administrative assistant in a Manhattan law firm, told me that his lover Shawn took care of all his expenses. This arrangement was desirable, according to Celso, because he was able to send more money to his family back in the Philippines. Celso added that he needed all the help he could get since he had only been in the United States for about six years. For some Filipinos, there was the allure of economic inequality, particularly if the Caucasian had the upper hand. The pleasure they derived when their lovers picked up the tab compensated for what other people perceived as shameful. Like Ronnie, several other Filipinos actually found pleasure in being on the receiving end. As one of them facetiously gushed, "Ganito pala ang America, ang biyuti ng bakla [So this is America, the biyuti of the bakla is] appreciated, adored, and . . . compensated!"

In sum, for Filipino gay men, lovers are sexualized individuals who

are racialized, classed, and gendered in various situations. The racial component in these relationships complicates and troubles the supposedly level playing field in situations involving lovers in popular gay lore. These relationships are further elucidated by the following section, which deals with the intersection of sexual attraction and emotion with race, class, gender, and religion.

DE BUENA FAMILIA: THE BANALITY OF CLASS

In this section, I examine how class is transported and translated in the American setting within the context of everyday life. Among Filipino gay men, issues of class can be seen as interruptions into everyday life in seemingly egalitarian America.

For many of my Philippine-born informants, class was perhaps one of the more important markers of difference among Filipinos, overriding the so-called regional or ethnolinguistic affiliations. There was consensus among the informants that unlike in the Philippines where one's "place" in society was stable, in America status was mutable. This mutability was very evident in specific situations. For example, many immigrant informants said that in coming here to America they experienced an increase in their buying power. Consider one such conversation between Eric, an informant (B), and me (A):

A: Ano ang class background mo sa Pilipinas? [What was your class background in the Philippines?]

B: Middle class.

A: Bakit middle class? Ano ba ang middle class sa atin? [Why middle class? What is middle class back home?]

B: Well, hindi naman kami squatter. Maganda naman ang nirentalan naming apartment sa Manila. Hindi kami nagugurum. Nakapageral kami ng lahat. Nakapagcollege. [We were not squatters. We had a nice rental apartment in Manila. We all were able to go to school. We all attended college.]

B: E ngayon, pagkarating mo dito sa Amerika, ano na ang class mo? [Here in America, what is your class?]

A: Well, mahirap sabihin. Ang mga kapitabuhay ko dito sa Queens mga mukhang trabahador. Ako, living from paycheck to paycheck. Marami akong nabibili na hindi ko kaya noong nasa Pilipinas ako. Siguro medyo mababa ng kaunti sa middle class. [Well, it is hard to say. My neighbors in Queens look like laborers. Me, I live from

paycheck to paycheck. I can buy a lot more things than when I was in the Philippines. Maybe a little lower than middle class.]

Here the informant reinforced the conflation of an upper-class status with increased consumption and buying power, but this was coupled with the contrary signs such as working-class neighbors and the struggle to survive financially. The translation of the term "middle class" for Eric had to do with a sense of comfort, but this sense of comfort experienced while growing up in the Philippines was not replicated here in America. The difficulty of finding one's class location in the United States is very evident.

For many Filipino immigrant men, perceived class status or class origins in the Philippines functioned as a semantic anchor in which to view social situations here. Class or elements of it, according to some informants, sometimes travel well. Language and nonverbal behavior were part of these elements. These formed part of specific scripts that spell the difference between those who have "good breeding" and those who do not. One informant said, "You can come here [to America], dress up like an East Side preppy, pero [but] once you open your mouth or start gesturing, say goodbye to the *kiyeme* [artfulness or dissimulation]." Class was also used as a vantage or lens through which other Filipinos were evaluated or "sized up." Rene, an informant, said:

Naku, dito sa Amerika, napapasama ka sa mga Pinoy na hindi mo makakasalinhaha sa Pilipinas. Yun bang, mga baduy na if I know e taga Cainta o Bukawe. Alam mo na mga public school graduates. As you know, equal daw tayong lahat sa America. Eisingi!"

[Oh, here in America, you are thrown into the company of Filipinos whom you would not hang out with back in the Philippines. The ones who are tacky or from Cainta or Bukawe (allegedly tacky areas in the Philippines). You know, public school graduates. As you know, we are supposedly equal in America. Not!]

Rene's statement about class in America is very instructive. On the one hand, it paints a picture of America where Filipinos from different classes are thrown together. On the other hand, while there is a conscious recognition that despite the popular belief that America is a great equalizer, this is only true to a point. Rene's statement suggests the kind of incongruous scenes that Filipinos find themselves in with other Filipinos who "are not of their kind."

Class, as many informants have experienced in America, is inflected in many ways in which race is the most important node of articulation. Following the *mestizo* complex in the Philippines, informants were explicit about the connections of upper-class status with whiteness and lower-class status with dark complexions. More often than not, this hierarchy was confounded by everyday situations. Gerry told me that he once chose a blond, blue-eyed man over a dark Middle Easterner. He later found out that the blond was unemployed while the Middle Easterner was a doctor. "Nagititili ako" [I started screaming], he said.

Many believed that despite the inconsistency, America has leveled off some of these distinctions. As one informant said, "There are some Filipinos I would normally not have contact with back home in the Philippines, but here in America we are thrown together in the bars, in the streets, [and] some neighborhoods, you know." David's narrative is particularly instructive. A Filipino of aristocratic background, he found America to be very funny because he was able to maintain relationships with people who were not from his class. Coming from a landed family in the Philippines, he said that he tried to create some distance from people he perceived were not his equals. But this was not true in America. His white lover of several years was a telephone lineman with only a high school degree. He said there were times when the class disparity showed. For example, conflicts occurred in situations when their tastes for particular leisure activities were divided into, in his mind, the classy and the tasteless, such as a concert and bowling. David said, "Oh dear, if my friends in school [in Manila] ever heard that my boyfriend is a phone lineman, they would just scream! But then, they have not seen him. Sometimes I think like an American and put class aside, and yet there are times when my boyfriend acts like a total ass, when his working-class background shows. Ashamed *bigla ang biyuti ko.*" [My biyuti is suddenly ashamed.]

David further reported that his first ten years of living in America were spent as an illegal alien. Despite having money and a good education, he started in menial jobs, such as being a janitor or a busboy, owing to lack of legal papers. He said, "I guess living during those years and doing those kinds of jobs were exciting in a way . . . a different way of experiencing America," he said. Indeed, David's own class-conscious ways have been tempered to a large extent by the immigration experience. In David's case, immigration status became a transformative catalyst in class position and attitudes. He is not alone.

Many Filipinos, including those who came to America from upper-class families, were aware of the difficulties of settling in especially if one did not have the right legal papers. Some arrived ready to "do anything in order to stay, including doing menial work." The experience of this "different America" was seen by many as a rite of passage! Armand, who confessed to being an undocumented worker, reported that many of the so-called successful Filipinos he has met here were people who immigrated either as part of family reunification or by marriage. He told me of one interesting and quite disturbing experience meeting Marta, one of his family's former maids in the Philippines, who was now married to an American and living on Long Island.

Day, nakakahiya. Si Marta simundo ako sa aking dampa sa Queens. Then, dinala niya ako sa isang mansiyon sa Long Island. Medyo strombotic at gaudy ang decoration pero, darling, ang laki! To top it all pa, si Marta, may I senyorito pa ang call sa akin. Kahit na sinabi ko na, "Marta, dito sa Amerika, wag mo na akong tawagin nyan." Well, kahit na malaki ang agwat ng aming class, di pa rin maalis ang aming relationship sa Pilipinas. Alam mo ba, hindi sa pangasinab ha . . . kahit na may mansiyon na siya, feeling ko pareho pa rin ang aming katayuan.

[Girlfriend, it was so embarrassing. Marta (the former maid) picked me up in my little hovel in Queens. Then she took me to a mansion in Long Island. The decoration was kind of ostentatious and gaudy, but darling, it was huge. To top it all, Marta still called me *señorito* (master), even after I told her, "Marta, in America, don't call me that." Well, even if we have class differences, one cannot erase our relationship in the Philippines. Not to sound snobbish, but you know what, even with her mansion, our relationship has not really changed.]

These stories of the dissonance and almost carnivalesque types of situations where class origins are turned upside down are a major part of many informants' narratives. More than anything, these stories show both the continuities and discontinuities of class as it is transvaluated in the context of diasporic living. Class remains a strong force in delineating similarities and difference, affinities and distance in many Filipino gay men's lives. Class, despite its relative illegibility in

American popular mainstream and gay discourses, has a powerful presence in these men's everyday lives.

PRAYERS AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

In 1993, I was invited by Gerardo to his apartment in Queens for a rosary session as part of block rosary activities in his home.⁴ The Virgin Mary, or more specifically Our Lady of Perpetual Help, was to be delivered to his home, and several of his friends, most of whom were gay, would be there. When I got to Gerardo's apartment, the guests, including the one who was supposed to bring the statue, were still not there. Gerardo was fuming when he said, "Filipino time again. When will these people ever learn they are not in the Philippines anymore? You can't keep people waiting here, especially in New York. Time is precious." Then, when the rosary devotion started, Tonette, who was leading, started rushing through the prayers. Gerardo screamed, "Hoy, bakit ka nagmamadali? Ano ka Alam? Wala kang respeto!" [Hey, why are you in such a rush? What are you, an American? You have no respect.]

Religion, for many of my informants, stands in sharp opposition to secular America. For many of them, religious devotion is the mark of being Filipino. For most of my informants, going to mass in America allowed them to reexperience something from childhood. The comfort of this familiar activity stands in contrast to the fact that many of them have to attend mass alone and not in the company of the family. Many Filipino gay men found comfort in the familiarity of the surroundings and the people in the church. In one Catholic Church in Greenwich Village, which had a large Filipino congregation, Jose, an informant, was delighted to be invited to a social where all the refreshments were Filipino delicacies. He said that the mass and the social afterward brought to mind many pleasurable memories. The church, therefore, is a space for nostalgia, a place for remembering as well as a way of settling in. Feeling at home despite the realization that the Village was not part of the Philippines was important to Jose and to many informants. Like Alden's "Philippine corner," these moments and spaces are, in the words of one informant, "lifesavers." Sunday mass is then a moment when "home" is both mnemonically evoked and physically manifested by the rituals and structure of the church.

For most Filipinos, religion is usually circumscribed to Sunday within a routine week. However, several informants told me how reli-

gion pervaded their daily lives. Roldan's routine included the mass as a regular part of the weekly itinerary and was altered only during extreme situations such as illness.

A few informants reported the practices of morning and evening prayers. Religion, for these men, was a way to safeguard against the possible danger and unknown hazards of living in New York City. One informant in particular said, "Dito, you never know kung ano ang mangyayari—baka na-mug ka o mahulog sa subway, mabuti na yon na parang may proteksiyon ka." [Here (in New York) you never know what will happen—you might get mugged or fall in the subway. It is better to have some protection.] For many others, a simple sign of the cross in front of their small altars was usually their daily encounter with religion.

As the religious ritual described in the next chapter shows, many Filipino informants admitted to having to make changes or accommodation in their religious beliefs. They believed they were now less susceptible to the kinds of narrow-minded moralizing that allegedly existed in the Philippines. A few informants reported having changed their religious beliefs into some form of informal atheism or agnosticism. The change was perceived to be in tandem with the realities afforded by their experiences in America. In addition, many of these men believed that the increasing secularization of their lives was reflected in their daily routines. Unlike Roldan's routine, they spent their Sundays trying to recover from Saturday nights out in bars or leisurely preparing for the onslaught of the working week.

In addition, their break from the Catholic Church was seen to parallel their own physical and sometimes emotional distancing from their families. Teddy, an informant who was born and raised in a heavily Filipino neighborhood in the San Francisco Bay Area, reported, "My weekends are less hectic than the ones of my childhood. During those times, it seemed like my weekends were orchestrated from morning 'til night by my parents . . . visiting relatives or going to church. Now I don't feel like I have to do anything. I am on my own. My weekends belong [now] to me."

Bert, an immigrant Filipino man in his thirties, recalled that the weekends of his childhood really meant family outings and activities. The church and Sunday mass were the high points of the weekend for many of these men when they were growing up. Mass was usually followed by lunch or dinner and other gatherings orchestrated by family members.

The changes in some of these men's religious beliefs were also based on particular negative experiences with the church and church authorities. Some recalled instances of religious training and rituals with either humor, nostalgia, or utter disgust. The "chore" or routine of Sunday mass was associated with some kind of stifling family influence many of these men have tried to escape. In addition, these men also recalled the kinds of oppressive and downright cruel experiences with religious personnel and practices. Weekends for many of these men are now more relaxed and are devoted to leisure activities. Some informants boasted that while many of their friends in the Philippines attended mass on Sundays, they, being Americanized, were fast asleep in their beds until noon.

A couple of informants complained about instances of discrepancies, ironies, and hypocrisies that enabled bakla Catholic devotees to participate actively in the church, which did not formally acknowledge their existence. The church denied homosexual behavior but not the body of the bakla or gay man. These two men reiterated the rhetoric of many gay and lesbian activists who railed against the church as being homophobic.

Some would say that they have lost the kind of "superstitious" or even "idolatrous" style of Catholic worship prevalent in the Philippines. Thus, the church and religion were seen as anachronous objects that needed to be discarded. As one informant aptly said, "When I entered America, I left a lot of things behind, including my religious beliefs." However, this shift to a more secular view by those who professed to agnostic or atheistic beliefs was tempered by specific situations where informants reported a kind of renewal or revivification of dormant beliefs in crucial moments such as crises and tragedies. In chapter 6, I describe one such situation involving the AIDS pandemic. Religious beliefs were also revived at other times of hardship, including financial problems and other kinds of death. For example, Dodie, who said proudly that he did not go to church on Sundays, admitted that he frequented church more often when his mother died in the Philippines and when he was about to be interviewed for his green card.

Another example was Raul, whose mother died a few months before I interviewed him. He talked about "coming back" to the church. He said, "It used to be, *wa ko type magsimba o magdasal pero after my mother died, I decided mabuni pa na magdasal uli kasi nanakaalis ng*

lungkot." [I used to dislike going to mass or praying, but after my mother died I decided it would be good to pray since it takes away the loneliness.] In both cases, life crises became a catalyst for these men to recall their initial distancing from the church and to return to practicing religion.

In sum, religion and religious practices are seen as distinctive markers of "Filipinoness." The dominant idea among many of my informants was that if you needed to look for any bakla, you could find them either in a drag beauty contest or in a church. Like the rosary ritual and as Gerardo's words would attest, religion is a central symbolic anchor for many Filipino gay men and an indelible part of their everyday lives.

Queer Habits and Queer Routes to Modernity

The two stories of Alden and Roldan and the stories of the other Filipino gay men affirm the view that immigrants, particularly those from the Third World, "always perceive themselves onstage, their lives resembling a mediocre fiction with occasional romantic outbursts and gray dalliness" (Boym 1998: 502). In other words, citizenship for queers of color and diasporic queers is neither a birthright nor is it about the romance of dissidence and resistance, but is about struggling to create scripts that will enable them to survive. Such queers are compelled to perform various kinds of negotiations, such as those made by Roldan, whose stunning self-reflexive statement about becoming bakla as part of immigration reflects the multiple routes available to queers in the diaspora as well as the Philippines.

In this chapter, informants constantly recognized the range of scripts and processes of scripting available to them in instances of quotidian articulations of class, family, religion, and race relationships, practices, and identities. The drama of everyday life for Filipino gay men involves complex maneuverings in relation to class, religion, family, and racial/ethnic differences. For example, Filipino gay men contest hegemonic practices such as racist and racialized Orientalist beliefs and behaviors by acknowledging the disjunction between images and ideas and the range of possible action in everyday life. A Filipino drag queen is not the unwitting dupe in a play of racist images but an active participant in the reformulation and deployment of such images in everyday life.

Moreover, Filipino gay men's sense of belonging, or cultural citizen-

ship, is performed within competing scripts of self-formation. Becoming American, seen as a kind of autonomy from pressures of family, strict religious rules, and overt class and racial difference, is negotiated with persisting ties to the church, the biological family, and the social hierarchies that were part of growing up in the Philippines.

Filipino gay men also experience the displacement of diasporic life from the difficulties of living away from familiar systems of support to encountering new kinds of social ties such as "fuck buddies." However, these men also experience a kind of pleasure and a process of settling in from their sense of marvel at the kinds of things that are available to them. Far from being either completely forlorn and displaced or extremely assimilated and content, Filipino gay men encounter and engage varied and complicated conjunctions of Filipino and American social, cultural, and political practices and categories in multiple ways.

Indeed, everyday performance is suffused with the complexities of problems and issues and the range of possible dramaturgical styles of engagement. In other words, unlike a scripted ritual or a stage show, Filipino gay men's acts go beyond the strictures of textual genres and perform strategies in confronting differences such as class or race. The illuminating fact about everyday life, as the initial quote at the beginning of the chapter suggests, is that quotidian struggles are not complete theatrical works with beginnings and endings. Rather, as we have seen with the Philippine and American corners in Alden's studio apartment and with Roldan's routines, the drama of everyday life is about the continuities and discontinuities of negotiations and crossings between gay and bakla traditions, Filipino and American norms, and varied cultural practices and identities.

The space of the everyday as in Alden's apartment portrays an ironic kind of movement inherent in settling in. His narrative also portrays the possibility of performance in the global/local stage. That is, the story of his apartment narrates in spatial terms the constant engagements with experiences of emplacement and displacement. While physical distance from his family and the Philippines has allowed Alden to create his intimate, seemingly private local space, the routine intrusions and almost habitual hauntings of familial images, voices, and sentiments of both family and organized religion unravel the "locality" of his Village studio and showcase its transnational connections.

The Philippine corner and the American wall reconstruct national landscapes, but also are spatialized translations of desire and propriety. The grammars of desire and propriety are expressed in the kinds of situational and diachronic movement between guilt and pleasure, and between land of settlement and the homeland. It is perhaps no wonder that Alden, who has not been home, realizes a kind of homecoming when certain sentiments arise after sexual encounters or after missing his usual weekly overseas phone call to his family. The ambivalence and troubled relationship between "being at home" and "homecoming" beset queer immigrants like Alden.

Diasporic people today are confronted with the challenge of creating multistranded relationships with the homeland and their new land of settlement. No longer is assimilation the only fate for the present-day immigrant. Immigrants are compelled and propelled by new developments in technology and by increasing mobility of capital to devise a flexible performative repertoire that increases their survival and success in an increasingly unequal yet global world. Familial ties for both Alden and Roldan, as well as for many of my informants, mark the continuity and discontinuity of the immigrant experience. Phone calls, monetary remittances, and regular trips back to the homeland rescue the queer immigrant from this assimilative fate.

Roldan's mental and physical reflections in front of his mirror on a workday reveal how the routine regimes of race and gender permeate if not infect daily assessment of situations involving confrontations, disputes, and obedience. Roldan's astute observation of the forms of racialization in America and its articulation with gender points to the power of his daily experiences and their impact on identity. Because of this situation, bakla as an identity becomes a possibility in the metropolis. While bakla is seen as rooted to the homeland, it becomes a tool to negotiate Roldan's cultural discomfort with mainstream gay public life. At the same time, Roldan's move is not a retreat from modernity; rather, it unwittingly destabilizes a monolithic gay identity. Roldan's recuperation of bakla, of alienation to both transgender and gay identity politics, are the result of the kinds of daily barrage of images, ideas, and bodies in the global city.

The intimate spaces and routines of the everyday may be seen by many as a kind of "retreat from wordliness" on the part of an individual or as a kind of warm refuge of authenticity bounded from the harsh

realities of the public sphere (Boym 1998: 500), but as many of my informants have unwittingly performed, for immigrants and elites the everyday is an incomplete if not imperfect colonization of the wildness and trauma of displacement (ibid.: 499–500). The everyday is an important arena open to manipulation and intrusions by the state. Rodan's fear of being caught by the INS or other authorities extends to his practice of cross-dressing and his cultural discomfort with gay mainstream practices. His routines are tracked by his own fear of being found out as an illegal alien while at the same time he consciously accepts his place in the queer cultural world in New York City. He realizes that the script, or more appropriately the drama of dissimulation, is crucial for his legal, cultural, and physical survival. His marginal status in relation to what is considered authentic forms of citizenship and belonging compels him to refigure his routines and recreate his *biyuti* in America.

Filipino gay men's actions and reactions to diasporic life refuse to cohere into one totalizing narrative. Despite the kind of gay lifestyle ascribed to men in the gay community, Filipino gay men's quotidian experiences reject the kind of homogenizing tendency of what is seen as a gay ghetto or "circuit" way of life. Filipino gay men are in fact continually positioning and repositioning their performances and themselves through varying modes of drama and *biyuti* depending on the kinds of exclusions and affinities they face in daily life. In the next chapter, I take these insights from Filipino gay men's everyday life and use them in a detailed discussion of a "staged" public performance.

Diasporic queers in particular refuse the assimilative framework not because they carry with them much of the baggage of tradition but that — to use the idioms of *biyuti* and drama — their sense of selfhood and belonging are framed in the process of cultural translation and transformation. Indeed, the concepts of *biyuti* and drama partake of this negotiated space between tradition and modernity. Their deployment by Filipino immigrant men living in New York City points to the kinds of negotiation that create an "imperfect aesthetics of survival" (Boym 1998: 524) as well as a counter-narrative to the prevailing view of the immigrant route as a movement away from tradition in the homeland and toward an assimilated modern life in the land of settlement. Moreover, these idioms constitute what can be considered as an alternative form of modernity (Gaonkar 1999). The *bakla* is neither a

Judic nor anachronous figure, but a subject in constant mediation, whose modernity is not always dependent on Western mainstream queer culture. Therefore, the everyday struggles of queer subjects such as Filipino gay men form a strategic path leading not to a teleologically determined home but rather to other more exciting possibilities.