CHAPTER 1

Una Cordial Invitación

Perhaps it was because my sister and I grew up in a brotherless household. Perhaps it was because my mother, in marrying my father, grieved in secret for the dreams she surrendered to fulfill her larger ambition of immigrating to America. Or maybe it was simply economically motivated: Mom and Dad presumed that our working-class, Navy family's money would go a lot further if they did not fill our heads with fantasies of satin gowns, opera-length gloves, and sparkling tiaras. All I know for sure is that, for whatever reason, my parents raised us to run for senior class office rather than try out for cheerleading, to become doctors rather than wait around hoping to marry them, and to dream of sitting in boardrooms and at editing tables rather than being twirled around in grand ballrooms. Needless to say, I was clueless about sweetheart balls, proms, debutantes, and quinceañeras until I was fourteen, when Estelita Diaz handed me my first pearly, custom-embossed, fan-shaped quinceañera invitation. I was totally confused. And captivated. But not nearly as much as I was by her fifteenth birthday party itself.

Estelita's quince began with her own special mass, which was followed by the biggest birthday party I had ever been to—blazing with mariachi, buffet tables overflowing with food, and boisterous guests, who oohed and aahed at Estelita's every move and even cried after she performed a group waltz straight out of Cinderella. And Estelita! Between the day before, when I had seen her at school, and that night, she had metamorphosed into a junior-high princess. She was resplendent in a huge white gown, with tiny glass flowers

glittering in her meticulously curled hair. And she wore two things none of us bookish girls had ever tried on in public: mascara and high heels.

After the party, when I gave my mom my bemused report of Estelita's quince, she told me, "Filipinos have parties like that too, when girls turn eighteen." At the time, I remember thinking that this was my mom's inventive way of communicating that Filipinos were just as nice to their daughters as Mexicans, but that I had better get into college before even thinking of having a party like Estelita's. But just as the youngest of my sister's friends finished throwing their quinceañeras, the oldest of our Filipina "cousins" started issuing invitations to their debuts.

At these occasions, groups of young women (who had not necessarily known each other before) were presented at association-arranged balls to appreciative audiences of family and friends but mostly strangers—other girls' guests, former debutantes, and local beauty queens, leaders, and entertainers. Like their Mexicana counterparts, the birthday girls wore bridelike gowns and performed carefully rehearsed cotillions. But unlike the festive, mariachi-filled, rec-room quinceañeras I had grown accustomed to, the debuts my family and I attended were serious black-tie events: hushed sit-down dinners, with unswerving programs steered by baritone emcees in large hotel ballrooms.

Being young, I chalked up these similarities and differences to the diverse tastes of my friend and our devotion to following ephemeral teenage fashions and trends. Seven years later, a feature article on a local African American cotillion evoked nearly forgotten memories of the Mexican and Filipino debutantes of my teen years and made me think that there might be more to these events than girls in white dresses and dance floor promenades. Now, after speaking with debutantes and quinceañeras and attending these events in three different countries over several years, I *know* that there is.

Contrary to popular misperceptions of Filipino debuts and Mexican quinceañeras as overpriced birthday parties and/or ostentatious displays of immigrants' new wealth, these events meaningfully reflect how Filipino and Mexican American immigrants and their children are positioned in the United States, as well as how they imagine who they are, where they have come from, and who they want to become. This is because before and during these events, ethnic, national, class, generational, and gender identities and relationships are played out, challenged, and negotiated in more exaggerated and perceptible ways than usual. This book closely examines these rituals to explain what Filipina debutantes and Mexicana quinceañeras reveal about the individuals, families, and communities who organize and participate in them.

"Supersized": Quinceañeras and Debuts in the United States

Debuts and quinceañeras are larger-than-life events for the Filipina and Mexicana girls (and their parents) who dream of, plan, and celebrate these events. They can cost up to a parent's yearly income to produce; require the collaboration of teams of family, friends, and professionals; and often take at least a year of preparation. Afterward, they are immortalized in immense photo albums, portraits proudly hung in the family *sala*, professional videos and/or DVDs, and cherished memories said to "last a lifetime."

Mexican quinceañeras ("quinces") and Filipino debutantes ("debuts") are usually formal, elaborately planned, and expensive coming-of-age celebrations that mark a girl's entry into society as a young lady. Traditional quinceañeras present an individual girl who is turning fifteen (called the *quinceañera*),[1] accompanied by a "court" she has chosen of seven young men (*chambelanes*) and seven young women (*damas*). Quinceañeras usually include a special mass, followed by a cotillion-like party, and are usually organized by the celebrant's family, which often includes immediate and extended relatives, along with fictive kin such as the girl's godparents, or *padrinos*. Traditional Filipino debuts present up to two dozen debutantes,[2] each accompanied by a male peer escort at the same event on the year of their eighteenth birthdays. They are often annual cotillions organized by local community organizations, although recently, debuts for only one girl, organized by the celebrant and/or her family, have become more common.

No figures exist that document how extensively, and for how long, debuts and quinces have been celebrated in the United States or abroad. But quinceañeras are widely celebrated throughout Latin America, and these events have become common enough in the United States to spawn the creation of various manuals, services, and businesses to help girls and their families prepare for them (Erevia 1980, Salcedo 1997).[3] And while debuts are generally considered "the province of the upper crust" in the Philippines, "debuts have become a part of the Filipino American experience for many families," having "gained favor with middle-class Filipino Americans who desire and can afford the lavish events" (R. Kim 2001).

Because of this image as "lavish" and because of their association with the patriarchy and elitism of the colonizers of the Philippines and Mexico, quinceañeras and debuts have been criticized as being economically impractical and sexist and as valorizing demeaning cultural values—by Filipinos, Mexicans, and nonimmigrants. Outsiders are "baffled" by working-class immigrants who invest so much for just one day (Cantú 2002: 16), and

segments of the Catholic Church have condemned the quinceañera custom as "an exercise in excess" and a premature signal of Latinas' "sexual coming-of-age" (Gorski 2008). At the same time, Filipino American historian Dawn Mabalon has written that the pressure to produce "frothy, over-the-top debutante balls" has compelled "some Filipino American families [to] beg, borrow, and steal" (2004: 19). And in 2007, a self-identified "veteran of old feminist and minority-empowering wars" reported that "supersized quinceañeras have hijacked a Latino tradition" and that "these fiestas don't contribute an iota to prepare a young girl for female adulthood in the 21st century. They are a shameful waste of money and reinforce consumerist, patriarchal values" (Prida 2007).

Rituals as *Ventanas*

But if the critics are entirely right, how does one explain Monica Reyes, the young woman who commented after the four-week curriculum required for quinceañeras at her church, "I'd rather wait [to go to parties and date]" (Gorski 2008); Krystal Tabora, whose debut kindled in her a desire to learn more about Filipino culture so she can "uphold tradition" (Downes 2005); Joyce L. Fernandez, a former debutante who characterizes debuts as "an exercise in financial planning and responsibility" (Fernandez 1998); and the former honorees I interviewed, who seem to have turned out to be responsible, successful, and proudly bicultural adults? More significantly, how does one explain the persistence and growth of debutantes and quinceañeras in the United States, along with the fact that they have traveled across oceans and borders with Filipino and Mexican immigrants in the first place? All of this suggests that there are more to these customs than frivolity, materialism, and the romanticizing of colonial cultures and old-fashioned ideas of womanhood. Chicana studies scholar Norma E. Cantú (2002) points out that the creation, perseverance, and evolution of ethnic traditions in the United States can be read as emerging out of community needs and as responses to how groups are positioned within "mobile webs of power" (Sandoval, cited in Cantú 2002: 16). And she writes that these are exceptionally observable in coming-of-age traditions because of their ritual natures.

Rituals have been defined and studied by various social scientists. Classic sociologist Émile Durkheim writes that ritual ceremonies are "dramatic performances" (1995) in which social actors depict and commemorate history, in part, "to maintain the vitality of [a group's] beliefs and to prevent their memory from being obliterated—in other words, to revitalize the most

essential elements of the collective consciousness and conscience" (1995: 379). Contemporary anthropologist Paul Connerton writes, "Images of the past and recollected knowledge of the past are conveyed and sustained by (more or less) ritual performances" (1989: 4, 38). He also writes that ritual performances allow us to pass on collective memories from one generation to the next and "to recognise and demonstrate to others that we . . . remember" (1989: 23). Connerton argues that this is crucial in maintaining and asserting group identities, since "our past history is an important source of our conception of ourselves; our self-knowledge, our conception of our own character and potentialities" (1989: 22). Finally, providing perhaps social science's most famous definition of ritual, Victor W. Turner writes that "a ritual is a . . . sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests" (1977: 183).

Turner, Connerton, and Durkheim elucidate how a rich amount of information about Filipino and Mexican Americans can be learned by studying debutantes and quinceañeras. Since rituals are "dramatic performances" of history, studying Filipino debuts and Mexican quinces can help us see how their organizers narrate their experiences in the United States and how "the hegemonic force of U.S. and Mexican [or Filipino] popular culture impels . . . communities to adapt and shift in a fluid manner" (Cantú 2002: 24). Since rituals can be significant expressions and transmissions of identity, investigating quinceañeras and debuts can also help us understand how Mexican and Filipino immigrants, individuals, and communities imagine and reimagine themselves, their "goals and interests," and how they are perceived. Since rituals charge "gestures, words, and objects" with polysemic social meanings, debutantes and quinceañeras do not just give social investigators *actions* to watch; they also provide an array of *tangible* symbols and spaces that can be examined to help unearth how actors see and explain themselves, their histories, and their environment. Finally, since debuts and quinces are not just *any* rituals but "rites of passage," which Arnold van Gennep defines as "ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position [stage in life] to another which is equally well-defined" (1960: 3), these events provide magnificent *ventanas*, or windows (in both Tagalog and Spanish), into how these groups demarcate and assign meaning to different stages of life and immigrant adaptation; how past and present structures inform immigrant life today; and what all this means for the members of these families, for their communities, and for the United States as a whole.

"Brown Brothers": Mexicans and Filipinos

Mexican and Filipino immigrants and their families compose two of the largest growing populations in the United States: immigrants and what Eileen O'Brien calls the "racial middle" (O'Brien 2008). Mexico and the Philippines have been the top two immigrant-sending regions to the United States for almost four decades. In 2010 (the most recent year for which there are available statistics), more than 11.6 million U.S. immigrants (30 percent of all immigrants) reported that they were born in Mexico, and more than 1.7 million (4.5 percent) reported that they were born in the Philippines (U.S. Census Bureau 2010a). Today there are more than 32.9 million Mexicans in the United States, and more than 3.3 million Filipinos (U.S. Census Bureau 2010c, 2010d). The pan-ethnic groups to which Mexicans and Filipinos belong (Latinos and Asians, respectively) are the two fastest-growing racial groups in the United States, and if their current growth continues, some projections forecast that they "will soon constitute about 35 percent of the US population" (Yancey 2003). Since Latinos and Asians are neither black nor white, such a massive population shift could signify a real "challenge . . . to the hegemonic white-over-black racial order" in the United States today (O'Brien 2008). Investigating Filipinos and Mexicans can help us better understand how those in the "racial middle" perpetuate and/or transform the current racial system, and investigating these groups *together* helps researchers better discern how race works with other social systems (e.g., class, immigration policies, and colonialism) to enable such outcomes.

Filipino and Mexican Americans also offer a fascinating and constructive comparison because, while they are the two biggest immigrant groups in the United States and are both situated in the racial middle, they seem to face vastly different opportunities and challenges to their success in America. And while casual observers tend to chalk up these disparities to Mexicans' and Filipinos' different "values and attitudes," they actually share various normative commitments from the centuries of historical intersection between the Philippines and Mexico.

Magkasama

The interconnected histories[4] of the Philippines and Mexico actually go as far back as 1521. In March of that year, Ferdinand Magellan "discovered" a group of unrelated islands in the western Pacific, which would later be named and claimed as Las Filipinas, for King Felipe II of Spain; five months later, the heart of the Mexica[5] empire, Tenochtitlán, was surrendered to a

Spanish armada led by Hernán Cortés, marking the creation of New Spain in the southern region of North America. Spain's overthrow of the Aztecs subsequently led to three hundred years of Spanish occupation in Mexico (1521–1821). After Magellan's expedition (and execution by indigenous Filipinos), Spain launched three journeys to the Philippines, all from the western coast of Mexico, over the course of a half century, in order to finally seal what would ultimately become a 333-year conquest of the archipelago (1565–1899).

While these centuries as stepsiblings under Madre España were experienced distinctly in each country, they also helped produce similar religious beliefs and practices, categories and structures of race, and understandings of their relationships with the West. To win the cooperation (i.e., labor) of the indigenous populations of Mexico and the Philippines, Spain attempted to destroy all precolonial written literature and history[6] and undertook the total spiritual conversion of each colony's natives. As a result, a unique[7] Roman Catholicism still flourishes in both countries. Today, the Philippines is remarkable for being the only predominantly Christian country among its East Asian and Southeast Asian neighbors, with about 80 percent of its population having been baptized Roman Catholic. Mexico, meanwhile, is home to more than 85 million Catholics (95 percent of its population), making it the second largest Catholic country in the world (*Our Sunday Visitor's Catholic Almanac* 1998). And the erasure of all or most of the pre-Spanish histories of Mexico and the Philippines has made it difficult for the "average" Mexican or Filipino today to recall an "evocative era prior to the Spanish period" to which they can "turn with pride" (Steinberg 1982: 34) and with a profound sense of what some of my research subjects described as "having no culture."

The inferiorizing of native people (especially by native people themselves) was and is compounded by the internalization and continuing operation of the race and class structures and ideologies both countries inherited from their colonizers. The racial *casta* system invented in New Spain, and later transplanted in Las Filipinas, created durable associations between lighter skin and entitlement, beauty, intelligence, and even morality (for more on the creation of the casta system, see Katzew and Deans-Smith 2009; E. Rodriguez 2006). Conversely, it linked darker skin with insignificance, repulsiveness, and a lack of intelligence and morality. Since most native Filipinos and Mexicans are darker skinned, these frameworks, combined with the loss of a precolonial sense of self, has had intensely self-denigrating effects.

In 1821, Mexico finally freed itself from the shackles of Spanish rule, and in 1898 the Philippines did the same. However, shortly after winning

their independence, both countries found themselves defending their territories from the United States. After decades of defending itself against a (mostly illegal) Anglo population occupying Mexico's unpopulated northern wastelands (an area that included what is now Texas, California, and the U.S. Southwest), Mexico found itself at war again, when the United States launched the Mexican-American War in 1846. That war ended in January 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which forced Mexico to surrender almost half of its remaining territory—modern-day California, Arizona, New Mexico, and parts of Colorado, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming.[8]

Only months after its inauguration, the Republic of the Philippines also found itself at war with the United States, its former ally against Spain, after American commissioners at the brokering the Treaty of Paris[9] readily accepted Spain's cession of the entire Philippines—in spite of knowledge that the Philippines had been fighting for national sovereignty since 1896. The Philippine-American War, a devastating three-year armed conflict that ended with the forced surrender of Filipino resistance leaders in 1902, ensued. This was followed by fifty years of American occupation that few in the islands had the vigor to oppose after back-to-back wars had crushed countless Filipino homes, families, lands, livelihoods, and dreams.

Absorption into the United States meant that despite having achieved hard-fought independence from Spain in the 1800s, many Mexicans once again became second-class citizens in places where they had been the earliest settlers, and Filipinos became "little brown brothers" to the United States, wards of the state who needed their American "liberators" to "uplift and civilize and Christianize them" (Ignacio 2004: 64). To justify appropriation of their land, livelihoods, and civil rights,[10] Americans constructed Mexicans as an inferior race. For example, Joel Poinsett, a former U.S. ambassador to Mexico, wrote to then–secretary of state Martin Van Buren that "the Mexicans [are] a more ignorant and debauched people than their ancestors had been" (Poinsett 2002: 14). Filipinos arguably fared worse: "US colonialism stunted the Philippine national economy, imposed English as the lingua franca, installed a US-style educational system, and Americanized many Filipino values and aspirations" (Espiritu 2003: 23). Moreover, images of the Filipino as steeped in superstition, ignorance, and barbarism rationalized American claims that it was "the white man's burden" to undertake such a complete political, economic, and cultural takeover of the Philippines.

Ironically, the pervasive cultural degradation and compulsory Americanization experienced by Filipinos and Mexicans during the late nineteenth

century and first half of the twentieth century helped deepen Filipino and Mexican idealization of the West and Western culture, which began under Spain. Compared to their war-ravaged country,[11] the United States seemed to represent "hope and renewal" and "economic security and individual freedom" for Mexicans (Guerin-Gonzales 1994: 11–12). In the American-occupied Philippines, Filipinos similarly came "to regard the American culture, political system, and way of life as more prestigious than their own" (Espiritu 2003: 24). Accustomed to more than three centuries of neglect, contempt, and abuse under Spain, many Filipinos developed an appreciation of, and even affection for, America's program of "Benevolent Assimilation," which, among other things, brought the Philippines well-constructed roads and infrastructure, rapid urbanization, the (re)introduction of inter-island shipping, rapid urbanization, and a common language (Steinberg 1982: 59). Given such conditions, mass migrations of Filipinos and Mexicans to the United States during the twentieth century were almost inevitable.

Lado a Lado*: Pre-1965 Mexican Americans and Filipino Americans*

The first wave of Mexican Americans were recruited by farms, U.S. railway companies, and California gold mines that needed them to help finish the work that Asian immigrants from China had started before they were barred from entering the United States by the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. Almost immediately after the Philippine-American War, Mexicans were joined by the first wave of Filipino Americans, which included some *pensionados*,[12] Filipino civil servants (usually from the *ilustrado*[13] class) who had been sponsored and sent to the United States to learn American-style governance to implement back home but were mostly young, able-bodied bachelors who ultimately found work as manual laborers in the United States (these men are now called *manongs*). So, by the turn of the twentieth century, Filipino and Mexican laborers had found themselves working *lado a lado*, or side by side, with their former siblings under Mother Spain.[14]

Because of the status of the Philippines as a U.S. protectorate, Filipinos remained the only Asians who could enter Hawaii and the U.S. mainland after the Chinese Exclusion Act, the 1908 Gentlemen's Agreement (with Japan), and the 1917 creation of the Asiatic Barred Zone (which included India, Afghanistan, and Arabia) effectively banned all other immigration from Asia. And "unlike the immigrants from Asia and Europe, Mexicans could enter and leave [the United States] without passports whenever they wished" (Takaki 1993: 312). Furthermore, between 1910 and 1930, Mexican and Filipino "immigrants seemed to offer a solution to growers' dilemma over

how to preserve the American Dream for 'Americans' (whites) and still have a large, cheap labor force to harvest their crops" (Guerin-Gonzales 1994: 23).

Between 1930 and 1965, Filipino and Mexican migration continued to ebb and flow. By 1930, both populations had become targets for growing resentment and hostility from white America. As the nation became enmeshed in the Great Depression, Mexicans were singled out by "governmental programs to deport and repatriate foreigners as a panacea for economic depression" (Guerin-Gonzales 1994: 77), and Filipino immigration was legally limited to fifty people a year by the Tydings-McDuffie Independence Act.[15] Nevertheless, between the late 1930s and mid-1960s, a second wave of Filipino Americans composed of U.S. Navy personnel[16] and their families[17] entered the United States.[18] Then the start of World War II marked the end of Mexican repatriation and the beginning of the *bracero* (guest worker) program in the United States. This brought a third wave of about five million Mexican immigrants to the United States to help fill the need for seasonal agricultural labor and temporary railroad work while many Americans were away contributing to the war effort.[19] After the war, the Philippines finally gained its independence, and the Filipino Naturalization Act made it possible for Filipino immigrants to become U.S. citizens.[20]

The different migration patterns produced through U.S. policies toward Mexico and the Philippines helped continue to shape American perceptions of both groups. By the mid-1950s, the Filipino American community was gradually transformed from a working-class bachelor society into a middle-class community of families, which "did a great deal to reduce white prejudice against Filipino Americans" (Espiritu 1995: 17). In contrast, most working-class Mexicanos found an increasingly unpredictable and inhospitable environment in the United States during the postwar years.[21] Then, the 1965 Immigration Act abolished national-origins quotas and prioritized entry based on family reunification and occupational preferences, completely transforming the U.S. racial landscape as well as the lives of Filipinos and Mexicans in the United States.

Sa Kabilang Mundo/*On the Other Side of the World: Post-1965 Mexican Americans and Filipino Americans*

Although the architects of the 1965 Immigration Act never anticipated that it would alter U.S. immigration in any major way, it did so dramatically. Its family reunion preferences and occupational categories opened the doors to a third wave of Filipino migration, which consisted primarily of the relatives of Filipino Americans and highly skilled, educated professionals who

were qualified to meet the occupational preferences of the United States. Meanwhile, the sudden elimination of the final *bracero* program, combined with the 1965 Immigration Act's new national quotas, worsened the problem of undocumented immigration from Mexico by forcing "those who would normally come as guest workers into illegal entry channels" (Ueda 1994: 46). Subsequently, undocumented immigrants from Mexico came to be viewed as primarily responsible for many, if not all, of America's social ills—high taxes, wasted welfare dollars, lost jobs, high costs for education, rising crime, and "the transformation of the very essence of the present civilization of the United States" (Lukacs 1986: 13; Vinson 1992). Meanwhile, Filipinos came to be seen as part of the Asian American "model minority," who had overcome challenges and "made it" in the United States through hard work and adherence to cultural values in line with those of the rest of American society.

By the 1970s, Mexico and the Philippines had become the top two sources of immigration into the United States. But by the 1980s, in spite of their deeply shared histories and values, Filipinos and Mexicans had come to occupy widely divergent socioeconomic positions in the United States and to be viewed by most Americans as almost polar opposites. Today, a sizable proportion of Filipinos are "college-educated professionals who ended up in the US middle class" (Espiritu and Wolf 2001: 163). On the other hand, "on average, adult [Mexican American] immigrants have only a few years of schooling, limited urban job skills, . . . [and] little or no knowledge of English . . . [and are] classified as low-wage service workers or blue-collar workers" (López and Stanton-Salazar 2001: 57, 67). As Figure 1.1 demonstrates, in 2010, the U.S. census reported that Americans of Filipino descent were generally faring about the same as, or better than, other Americans.[22] The median income for Filipino Americans was $51,668, 7.3 percent of Filipinos were living below the federal poverty line, and 37.9 percent of Filipinos had at least a bachelor's degree. Meanwhile, the census also reported that the median income of Mexicans ($23,544) was nearly 55 percent lower than that of their Filipino counterparts, more than a quarter of Mexicans were living below the federal poverty line (26.6 percent), and less than 10 percent held bachelor's degrees.

Largely because of these socioeconomic realities, Filipino and Mexican Americans are now perceived of as vastly unalike, despite histories and cultures that have crisscrossed for nearly five hundred years. For example, in May 2008, a study out of the conservative Manhattan Institute claimed that among immigrant minorities, Filipinos were "the most assimilated," while Mexicans were the least so. The report argued that Mexicans were "faring

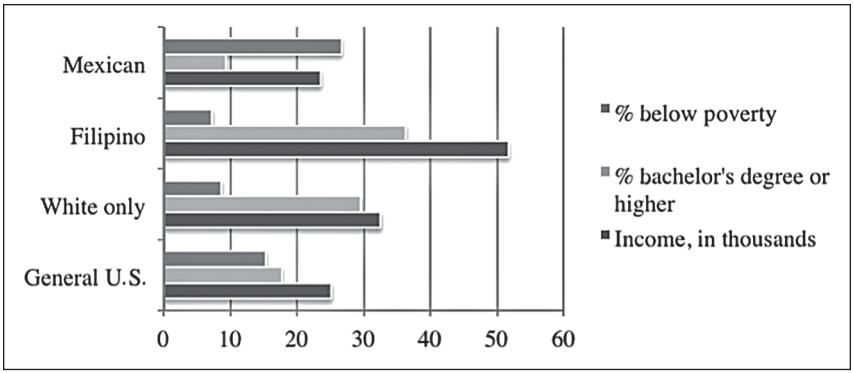

Figure 1.1 Poverty, college degree, and income statistics for selected U.S. populations. *(From U.S. Census Bureau 2010b, 2010c, 2010d.)*

poorly" at "weaving into the American fabric," while their Asian counterparts were "among some of the best and brightest, which puts them on a faster track to assimilation via economic success" (Schulte 2008). Filipinos have come to personify ideal immigrants—successful, assimilable, and inconspicuous. In contrast, Mexicans have come to epitomize the immigrant threat—a drain on public resources, resistant to cultural incorporation, and seeking to "reconquer" the United States (Chavez 2001; Huntington 2004b).

This paradox makes clear that understanding why some immigrant groups seem to be doing better than others requires a search beyond cultural explanations. These attribute the general "success" of Filipinos in the United States to "Asian values," which extol family, hard work, academic achievement, and quiet resolve in the face of hardships, and the general "failure" of many Mexican Americans to achieve the American Dream to their "inherently Hispanic" laziness, sexual promiscuity, obstinacy in the face of new circumstances, and even "contemptuous[ness] of American culture" (Huntington 2004a: 44). Comparing today's Filipino and Mexican Americans can help clarify what *structural* factors enable and constrain immigrant adaptation in the United States, as well as what the unprecedented growth of the Latino and Asian U.S. populations might mean for the country.

Comparatively examining Filipinos and Mexicans is also valuable because this simply allows for more complete and truthful histories of Filipinos, Mexicans, and Americans to be told and made available. Elaine H. Kim writes that "Americans of color share long, complex, and little-discussed relationships," which have been obscured to help preserve Europeans as the central figures in American history (2000: xi). Studying the histories and

experiences of ethnic groups together highlights how these groups' stories, fates, and futures are intertwined and dependent on *each other*, as well as white America. It helps decenter Europeans as *the* principal characters in the histories of Americans of color, defies the historical amnesia long imposed on many of them, and shatters "dualistic simplifications [such as] majority/minority, mainstream/margin, native/immigrant, white/non-white" (E. Kim 2000: xi) that often prevent scholars from being able to fully comprehend what and who we are investigating.

Careful Choreography: Methods

This project compares the experiences of Mexicans and Filipinos in the United States by thickly investigating their daughters' female coming-of-age rituals. It represents more than nine hundred debuts and quinceañeras and is based on data collected through three years of fieldwork and in-depth interviews with more than fifty subjects—including current and former female celebrants, family members, and the constellations of people who participate in debuts and quinceañeras, such as "court" members, photographers, and choreographers.

This project was carefully composed—I studied quinceañeras, debuts, and their actors through a combination of methods, in a combination of research sites. I conducted in-depth interviews with individual family members and event participants and group interviews with second-generation Mexican and Filipino American youth. All interviews were located via snowball sampling and were open-ended, tape-recorded, and transcribed. I conducted all of them personally in whatever languages my subjects were most comfortable with—English, Tagalog, Spanish, and/or a combination. I also observed rehearsals, financial transactions, and the "big days" themselves. Most of my work was conducted in Las Querubes, a major metropolitan area in Southern California, and Del Sol, a smaller city outside Las Querubes, between May 2003 and June 2004. However, some preliminary observations and interviews were conducted in the Philippines between August and November 2002[23] and in central Mexico between February and April 2003. I also interviewed and observed participants for three additional events in Bahia, a major city in Northern California, between April 2004 and July 2006.

I conducted thirty-seven "primary interviews" with individuals in California families who had already held or were planning and/or considering having a debut or quinceañera for at least one daughter (see Table 1.1). More specifically, my primary interviews were composed of individual interviews with eight daughters who had already had debuts, six daughters who had

already had quinceañeras, six daughters who were planning their debuts, and three daughters who were planning their quinceañeras, and separate interviews with some of the daughters' parents (see Table 1.2).

As well as interviewing members of the nine families in my sample who were planning their coming-out celebrations, I attended and observed selected planning meetings, costume fittings, rehearsals, and/or masses. My subjects also allowed me to examine documents and records of the production, staging, and aftermath of their celebrations, including guest lists, seating charts, transaction receipts, newspaper stories, printed programs, gifts-received lists, cards, photographs, and personal correspondence sent and re-

TABLE 1.1 PRIMARY INTERVIEW SUBJECTS

Name (Pseudonym)	Debut or Quinceañera	Former or Current Celebration
Agao, Barbra	D	C
Agao, Rose	D	C
Aquino, Lauren	D	C
Aquino, Nate	D	C
Arroyo, Berenice	Q	F
Arroyo, Cecelia	Q	F
Azua, Astrud	Q	F
Azua, Dalía	Q	F
Cordova, Erika	D	F
Currabeg, Anabel	D	F
Dizon, Eliane	D	F
Dizon, Nora	D	F
Dobrado, Cassandra	D	C
Dobrado, Sharon	D	C
Favino, Flora	Q	F
Favino, Jasmin	Q	F
Fuentes, Imelda	D	F
Fuentes, Ramona	D	F
Garcia, Adelaina	Q	F
Garcia, Lea	Q	F
Garza, Angela May	D	C
Garza, Juliet	D	C
Gomez, Lila	Q	C
Guzman, Janice	D	C
Hernandez, Olivia	D	F
Hernandez, Ramiro	D	F
Napolo, Klara	D	F
Napolo, Linet	D	F
Saldana, Maria	Q	C
Saldana, Marlena	Q	C
Santiago, Belinda	Q	C
Santiago, Katia	Q	C
Torres, Rosadina	D	C
Torres, Rose	D	C
Valdes, Catalina	Q	F
Valdes, Patrisia	Q	F
Yuson, Marabel	D	F

TABLE 1.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF PRIMARY INTERVIEWEES

	Filipino		Mexican		
	Daughters	Parents	Daughters	Parents	TOTAL
Former celebrants	8	3	6	4	21
Current planners	6	5	3	2	16
TOTAL	14	8	9	6	37

ceived. This helped me cross-check the costs, networks, and possible systems of (mutual) exchange and support that were involved in planning and participating in these events.

To gain a fuller perspective of Mexican and Filipino youth, especially males and young girls still considering a quince or debut, I also administered five group discussions about coming of age, with a total of eighty-two Filipino and Mexican second-generation individuals, ages fourteen to twenty (see Table 1.3).

Finally, to round out my images of the events, individuals, families, and communities in my study, I conducted fifteen formal "secondary interviews" with selected planning or event participants, including clergy and such service providers as dressmakers, caterers, decorators, and printers (see Table 1.4). And I conducted a number of informal interviews with selected escorts, other "court" members, other immediate and extended family members, and invited guests whom I have not officially counted[24] but whose insights also helped my analysis. Combined with my primary interviews, these and my secondary interviews, which each represent an average of sixty events, enable my work to represent more than nine hundred debuts and quinceañeras.

My multipronged, multilayered (and multilingual) research approach has been informed by Victor Turner (1977) and Stuart Hall and the Birmingham School's theories of rituals (Clarke et al. 1976), Clifford Geertz's ideas on "thick description," and feminist and postcolonial scholars' deliberate foregrounding of subaltern and women's experiences to "decolonize" and

TABLE 1.3 FOCUS GROUPS

Group	Number of Participants
High school class	28
High school class	27
Pan-ethnic Asian student organization	10
Interracial minority student organization	5
Church youth group	12
TOTAL	82

"engender" immigrant and transnational histories and their reconstructions (e.g., Gabaccia 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Hune 2000; Nakano-Glenn 1983; L. Smith 1999; Weinberg 1992). Turner suggests that studies aspiring to uncover the meanings of rituals need to obtain narratives and interpretations of the ritual from *various* participants, since ritual symbols and events can be interpreted in any number of ways, which may sometimes be indistinct from and/or incongruous with each other. Hall and the Birmingham School emphasize a *materialist* ethnography when studying (sub)cultural traditions, since subcultures "adopt and adapt material objects and possessions—and reorganize . . . them into distinctive 'styles' which express the collectivity . . . [and] become embodied in rituals of relationship and occasion and movement" (Clarke et al. 1976, cited in Maira 2002: 38–39). Clifford Geertz contends that cultural ethnographies require gathering "thick descriptions," since "behavior must be attended to, and with some exactness because it is through the flow of behavior—or more precisely, social action—that cultural forms find articulation" (1973: 18). Feminist immigration scholar Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo argues that this is especially true when studying immigrant American communities. She writes, "Direct observation yields a more accurate portrayal of people's lives than do methods of self-report" (1994: xxi). She explains that this is because varying degrees of English proficiency, distrust of outsiders, and/or modesty can often render interviews imprecise articulations of immigrant experiences. Finally, postcolonial researchers point out that most work on subaltern peoples "privileges Western ways of knowing, while denying the validity . . . of [indigenous] knowledge,

TABLE 1.4 SECONDARY INTERVIEW SUBJECTS

Name (Pseudonym)	Debut or Quinceañera	Quinceañera or Debut Service	Self-Reported Number of Events Serviced
Agbayani, Edward	D	Filmmaker	3
Arguello, Diana	D	Filmmaker	3
Biagan, Amoldo	D	Deejay/emcee	25
Castillo, Pedro	Q	Priest	30
Dizon, Vikki	D	Choreographer	15
Espalda, Josie	D	Planner	15
Favino, Flora	Q	Parish coordinator	300
Garza, Agnes	D	Planner	4
Gutierrez, Selena	Q	Seamstress	3
Maldivas, Cam	D	Planner	5
Martines, Helen	D	Planner	34
Ortega, Gabriel	Q	Photographer	200
Tiongson, Geraldo	D	Photographer	200
Tomas, Antonio	Q	Photographer	20
Valdes, Lorena	Q	Religious instructor	15
TOTAL Events Represented			872

language and culture" (L. Smith 1999: 183), and feminist researchers point out that (especially because the first waves of immigration from the non-Western countries were predominantly male) women in Asian and Latino American histories have been "rendered invisible, misrepresented, or subsumed . . . as if their experiences were simply coequal to men's lives, which they are not" (Hune 2000: 413).

Bearing these critiques in mind, I foreground and take for granted the validity and legitimacy of women and children's experiences and standpoints in this study of immigrants. And I explicitly aim for the empowerment of my subjects and their communities, and the revision of male- and Western-centered concepts and theories of gender, ethnicity, immigration, settlement, and even feminism, along with utmost methodological and academic rigor. Because I used this approach and a small and self-selected sample, my final analysis is far from definitive. But it is a careful and lucid view of the "partial truths" that my subjects shared with me. Accordingly, I hope it contributes to efforts to "move . . . subjugated voices from the margins to the center," and to "decenter dominant discourses," to highlight and "elevate . . . types of knowledge . . . previously . . . treated as inadequate or lesser" (Mann and Huffman 2005: 65).

Las Querubes and Filipino and Mexican Querubenos: My Research Site and Subjects

The principal people in this study belong to the post-1965 U.S. wave of immigrants and their families and represent the top two immigrant-sending countries to the United States and to California, where the largest share of U.S. immigrants resides and where this study took place. In California, more than 4.4 million immigrants (44.2 percent) report having been born in Mexico, and more than 800,000 (8 percent) in the Philippines (Migration Policy Institute 2009).

The city where I conducted most of my fieldwork, Las Querubes, is a sprawling urban metropolis and home to one of the largest and most multiethnic immigrant populations in the nation. Because of the city's size and diversity, it is impossible to neatly characterize Las Querubes. It includes wealthy districts, dotted with custom-designed mansions, owned by mostly white families; recently gentrified neighborhoods populated by young, middle-class artists and yuppies; working-class ethnic enclaves with constantly changing landscapes, with new skin colors, cuisines, and languages brought in by steady new streams of immigrants; and newer suburbs where many former, upwardly mobile residents of the ethnic enclaves of Las Querubes have

been drawn—all set in a vast terrain comprising balmy beaches, sweltering valleys, and cool mountains, connected by a tangle of heavily congested streets and highways. Around the time I conducted my fieldwork, nearly 40 percent of the inhabitants of Las Querubes reported having been born outside the United States. Among this substantial immigrant population, about 65 percent had been born in Latin America, more than 26 percent had been born in Asia, and just fewer than 38 percent had been naturalized as U.S. citizens.

The Mexican immigrants who reside in Las Querubes are recognized as having a rich and long history there, and the significance of their presence in Las Querubes is readily apparent. Until the mid-1800s, Las Querubes had been under Mexican rule, but by the middle of the twentieth century, eight out of ten Querubenos (Las Querubes residents) were white. Las Querubes began to undergo major ethnic diversification in the 1970s, shortly after the 1965 Immigration Act widened the doors to immigrants from non-Western regions of the world by nullifying earlier national quotas favoring European countries. As a result, between 1960 and 1990, Latinos grew from one-tenth of the Las Querubes population to one-third. By 2000 (around the time I was conducting my fieldwork), about two-thirds of the city's immigrant residents reported having been born in Latin America, and 40 percent of the city's total population reported Spanish as the language they spoke at home. At the time of my study, I doubt anyone could pass through any four blocks of the city without seeing or hearing Mexican Americans, bilingual English and Spanish-language signs and media, fast-food Mexican restaurants, and/or businesses, places of worship, and organizations that served primarily Spanish-speaking clientele. Consequently, Latino Querubenos, particularly those of Mexican descent, had become well established as a crucial part of the Las Querubes electorate and had helped elect a number of Mexican Americans into prominent leadership positions at every political level.

The Filipino immigrants of Las Querubes have had a far less visible history and presence than their Mexican counterparts. While Mexicans were among the earliest settlers of Las Querubes, it was not until after 1965 that Filipinos grew into one of its major populations. In addition to lifting the national quotas that had impeded U.S. immigration for those "in the Eastern Hemisphere" (Ueda 1994: 170–171), the 1965 Immigration Act revised the occupational and family reunion immigrant preferences of the United States. This enabled a significant wave of Filipino migration into the United States that consisted primarily of the relatives of Filipino Americans and "doctors, engineers, and accountants with professional and special technical skills training, ready to be integrated into the highly skilled US work force"

(Bonus 2000: 44). As a result of the post-1965 wave of Filipino American immigration, Filipinos are now the third-largest population in Las Querubes, after whites and Latinos. However, since many contemporary Filipino Querubenos are not as occupationally or residentially concentrated as their Mexican neighbors—working in various middle-class occupations and often settling in newer, multiethnic enclaves—their political and cultural presence and influence are far less palpable.

Socioeconomically, Filipinos and Mexicans in Las Querubes are representative of the broader Filipino and Mexican populations of the United States (see Figure 1.1). During my year in Las Querubes, I noted that Mexican Americans were often assumed to be recent and/or "illegal" immigrants and were widely perceived of as poor, unable to speak English, and "stupid." Mexicans in my study were highly aware of these stereotypes and shared that they felt that "people see us as an inferior race" and "people think you're poor." Jorge Diaz, the son of Mexican American schoolteachers who immigrated here as teenagers, eloquently told me, "The average American regards the Mexican as uneducated, unclean, and untrustworthy. At best they see them as sometimes-necessary, cheap labor and at worst as a drain on the country's resources. Either way, they're perceived as subservient, intellectually inferior, and 'alien.'"

On the contrary, Filipinos in Las Querubes seemed to be generally viewed as well assimilated and "successful," although culturally and politically inconsequential. Most Filipino Querubenos who spoke with me did not share personal experiences with racism or discrimination but did share the feeling that, in spite of their relatively positive social standing, Filipino Americans were still considered "less than" other Americans. One Filipino immigrant, Linet Napolo, told me: "When we first moved [to Del Sol], I was planting, you know, on a hill. This guy was asking me—you know, he was asking me, 'Are you renting?' You know? I mean, he never think we can *buy* a house!"

Because Las Querubes is such a microcosm of immigrant America, studying Mexican and Filipino Querubenos sheds further light on how immigrants and members of the second generation are experiencing life in the United States, what factors help and/or impede their successful adaptation, and how they are contributing and transforming what it means to be and become "American."

The Program: Book Overview

Chapter 2 further fleshes out the events of this study. It describes popular representations of Filipino American debuts and Mexican American

quinceañeras and how the broad range of real-life debuts and quinceañeras in this study both reflect and deviate from these.

In Chapter 3, I begin to explain how quinceañeras and debuts both reflect and contribute to the diverse backgrounds, desires, and social positions of Mexican Americans and Filipino Americans. I examine two of the most apparent ways debuts and quinces differ—in size and expense—to show how families use their daughters' coming-of-age events to maintain, build, and activate key social networks. More specifically, I clarify how large events for individual celebrants enable working- and middle-class Mexican and Filipino families to reinforce and activate already existing relationships with kin and other close relations, how cotillion balls for multiple debutantes help working-class Filipino families fortify existing ties and create connections with new contacts outside their close networks, and how intimate individual quinceañeras and debuts for single girls help lower-working-class Filipino and Mexican families affirm and restrict the quantity and intensity of their strong ties in order to protect their own limited resources. This enhances sociological knowledge on both networks and immigrant outcomes because existing research on networks does not really consider how rituals contribute to building and managing social ties, and while theories of immigrant adaptation explain the significance of social capital for immigrants and their children, they have yet to advance how immigrant families' social networks are built and maintained.

In Chapter 4, I thickly describe how immigrant families use debuts and quinceañeras to mark the passage of Filipino and Mexican American girls into "not just any women" but ethnicized young ladies. The process of training girls to embrace identities as *señoritas* and *dalaga*[25] ("young, unmarried ladies," in Spanish and Tagalog, respectively) through quinceañeras and debuts involves Mexicana and Filipina daughters aligning choices with those of their parents throughout the planning process, prepping through rehearsals and classes, getting physically ready, and, of course, performing on the big day. Each of these practices is ritualized and embodied and therefore powerfully reinforces the understanding that becoming a young woman is tied to better understanding one's "culture" and fashioning oneself into an apt representative of one's family and ethnic community.

Crafting and presenting chaste, dutiful, and self-sacrificing dalaga and señoritas helps immigrant parents challenge Western perceptions of their cultures as "uncivilized" and deficient because they allow organizers to assert their cultures' intrinsic refinement (by representing debuts and quinces as long-standing traditions) and their moral superiority over white Americans (by representing their daughters and, by extension, their families and

communities as "proper," while enabling them to construct and repudiate white women, and, by extension, white culture, as morally depraved, out of control, and selfish). And within Mexican and Filipino communities, quinceañeras and debuts allow first-generation immigrants to (re)establish themselves as experts on what is authentically Mexican or Filipino (augmenting parents' control over their offspring), while they enable second-generation daughters and sons to also contribute (in limited ways) to what it means to be Filipino or Mexican in the twenty-first-century United States.

The chapter's close focuses on the formation of second-generation members of immigrant families is vital because understanding the lives of the children of immigrants is key to ascertaining how they and their communities "will be inserted into the economic and social fabric of the nation-state" (Maira 2002: 19). It calls attention to how my subjects concurrently criticize, aspire to fully integrate into, and are helping transform American culture. It also enriches what we know of contemporary American immigrant family life because, while current theories advance that race and gender strongly influence immigrant and second-generation outcomes (Portes and Rumbaut 2001b), they do not adequately explain how immigrant families help *produce* race, ethnicity, and gender. And while these same theories examine how intergenerational relationships can facilitate or disrupt the "normative integration" of second-generation Americans, they do not explain whether and how such relationships can be transformed through various efforts during the adaptation process.

Furthermore, Chapter 4 adds to existing theories on the social construction of race and gender by describing the ways that ritual powerfully contributes to race and gender projects. More specifically, ritual contributes to gender studies by helping affirm the existence of multiple femininities within our society (Connell 1987; Schippers 2007), further illustrating how women's bodies and labor are used and controlled to advance ethnic communities, and specifying how gender is negotiated *through ritual*. While sociological researchers have thoroughly considered how individual gender regimes such as school (e.g., Pascoe 2007; Thorne 1993), work (e.g., Garey 1995; Gerson 1993), and marriage (e.g., Hochschild and Machung 1989) define and shape femininities and masculinities, they have only begun to explore how rituals work within and across gender regimes to produce and/or challenge how we understand and enact gender.

In Chapter 5, I show how assertive females, "playful" and unmarried adults, gay men, and others who do not conform to ethnic ideals for Mexican and Filipino men and women have been suppressed by immigrant communities but are still challenging the boundaries of Filipino and Mexican

America. This clarifies how the ongoing construction of what it means to be Filipino or Mexican American is not straightforward and trouble-free, but rather a project that is contradictory, that is debated, and that compels communities to wrestle with themselves and to constantly reevaluate who does and does not belong, even as they struggle against how they have been constructed by those outside their communities. The chapter underscores the complicated nature of constructing group identities by highlighting how forms of cultural opposition simultaneously can, and sometimes do, reinforce oppressive, essentialist ways of imagining and performing ethnicity, class, and gender.

In Chapter 6, I look closely at my subjects' ardent declarations that the most important result of their participation in debuts and quinceañeras is "the memories you carry with you for the rest of your life." Because of how my postcolonial feminist methodology required me to take such judgments and experiences seriously, I was able to theorize how the memories engendered by debuts and quinceañeras help facilitate immigrant families' social advancement. Positive memories of quinces and debuts are uniquely powerful because they evoke remembrances of identities and reputations that were bodily enacted, ritualized, shared with others, and heavily documented. Such memories can be and are employed to help those who generate them construct and project a desirable sense of who they are for themselves and others. These identities and reputations, in turn, build what I term *emotional operating capital*: affective assets that can help facilitate social advancement by providing actors with the resilience and self-assurance needed to effectively navigate barriers to acquiring, building, and activating the benefits of human, social, and cultural capital. I also put forward that memories are of particular importance to the Mexicans and Filipinos I studied because of the deliberate erasures of their precolonial histories by European imperialists.

Along with the rest of the book, Chapter 6 corroborates and advances existing research on "pleasure, aesthetics, and popular culture" that claims that involvement in such activities is complicated and political, despite being considered "idle" and anti-intellectual (e.g., Kondo 1997). It is consistent with the work of other sociologists (e.g., Bettie 2003; Bourdieu 1984; Gandara 1995) who have found that "a positive perception of oneself and one's family can engender . . . a sense of hopefulness and deservedness" that can play a part in "enabling or restricting mobility" (Bettie 2003: 154). And the concept of emotional operating capital breaks new ground in sociology by offering a new account of how immigrants and their children are able to internally find the motivation and ability to amass and activate cultural and

social capital in the United States and to deal with external obstacles to their successful assimilation.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I recap the arguments and questions raised in earlier chapters and reiterate that the processes by which my subjects and their communities are transforming what it means to be American, Filipino, and Mexican females and males are fluid, dynamic, and not necessarily straightforward or always empowering. I also elaborate on what it means for me to declare this project interdisciplinary, feminist, and postcolonial ("a feminist ethnic study") and attempt to cross the divide between what Michael Burawoy (2005) calls "professional sociology" and (traditional) "public sociology." Though I know this book is bound to be read by primarily academic audiences, it could not have been produced without generous immigrant and second-generation "publics." In light of this, I deliberately set aside part of the chapter to present recommendations that may help family and community members, as well as fellow scholars, consider how to design coming-of-age rituals that contribute to producing healthy outcomes for immigrants and their children. I do not mean to uncritically encourage such events, but I do hope to offer individuals and families who feel these events are worth organizing ideas about how to do so in ways that can avoid glamorizing and reproducing patriarchal, elitist, and/or colonial ideals of females and Mexican or Filipino culture.

As stated previously, this book is by no means the definitive work on debuts, quinceañeras, Mexicans, or Filipinos. But it is definitely an open invitation to learn more about the lives and special occasions of the people in my study and about the ways in which they are actively and constantly crafting themselves and their social worlds, as well as helping transform the face and cultures of America.